

ARI

news

Main Story

SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN ART

Special Feature

SINGAPORE HISTORICAL GIS & BIOGRAPHICAL DATABASE

Outreach Event

14TH SINGAPORE GRADUATE FORUM ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES



PROFESSOR TIM BUNNELL

DIRECTOR

In my first 'Word from the Director', I wish to share some thoughts on the blend of institutional continuity and change I believe is necessary to extend ARI's vibrancy as a globally networked node of scholarship in Asia in the years ahead.

Care and continuity have been two great strengths of the leadership of ARI under recent ARI Director Jonathan Rigg (2015-2018) and Acting Director Brenda Yeoh (January – June 2019). On the one hand, this seems to suggest that ARI's further success is simply a matter of 'more of the same'. On the other hand, what worked well at ARI in even the very recent past may require careful updating in the context of wider challenges and opportunities—whether those be internal to NUS, at the level of national priorities, or relating to international research trends, funding landscapes and academic labour markets. In the September 2018 issue of this newsletter, Jonathan Rigg made specific mention of the cumulative significance of changes to 'the little things' and 'the importance of tactics over strategy'. In general, I am similarly disposed, and have a growing list of little tactical tweaks that I wish to make. However, in what follows I focus on just one key process of institutional renewal that I have inherited, followed by two strategic orientations that I am keen to extend.

The most foundational process of change that I am responsible for continuing concerns the renewal of research clusters and associated leadership. Research clusters are the core intellectual building blocks of ARI, each forged, fashioned and maintained by a senior scholar. A schedule is already in place whereby cluster leaders create and nurture thematically focused clusters for a period of six years, after which time reviews will determine whether existing clusters continue to flourish under new leadership or 'wind down' to make room for new clusters introducing different themes and foci. This process of cluster renewal that I have inherited is vital to allowing ARI to remain at various cutting edges of Asia-centred scholarship.

The first of my own priority orientations is for ARI to be more-than-Asian in its outlook, ambition and

scholarly reach. This is not at all a matter of wanting to dilute regionally-grounded empirical commitments. Rather, my motivation for stressing this orientation is that the phenomena, trends and transitions that we study in the region are too rich and potentially transformative of wider ways of thinking to be limited to audiences of Asianists. Asia is also too diverse and too bound up with multiple elsewheres to be framed as a bounded unit of analysis. Area studies traditions will of course continue to find a home at ARI—indeed, reinvigoration of the area-based study groups is already on my wish list of institutional tweaks—but I believe it is also important that we continue to use Asia-focused research to engage much wider scholarly worlds. That may be done in a variety of ways: through trans-regional collaboration and comparativism, through contributions to discipline-based theoretical debate, or through more straightforward recognition that many of the issues we grapple with in and from Asia are planetary in scope.

Second, I am keen to promote further engagement with audiences beyond the academy in ways that are appropriate for ARI's scholarly remit and vision. ARI is neither a think tank nor a policy centre and we are not usually the first port of call for media commentary on regional current affairs. Rather, we have an alternative, and I would say, a distinctively ARI way of being more-than-academic. ARI is the place for deep analysis of Asian-centred trends, problems and challenges—past, present and yet to come—using the critical lenses of the humanities and social science. Increasingly, ARI is also an institute for conducting generative research that traverses hard disciplinary boundaries between the social and physical sciences. What distinguishes ARI's brand of worldliness, above all, is that we often work to timeframes which have the potential to yield influential and lasting research that is historically-

informed and future-facing, not primarily reactive to day-to-day shifts in the region.

Of course, much of what is already done at ARI is both more-than-regional and more-than-academic in the ways I have sketched. So I am very much emphasising certain existing big picture orientations rather than charting new paths for the Institute.

Returning from my two strategic orientations back to the little things—in fact, to micro-scale time and space—I note one small but important initiative that has gained momentum this year. Since February, ARI's weekly tempo has included a mid-week break-time in the meeting room. 'Recess Time' as Brenda Yeoh named it, recalling her favourite time of the day in school (which I can confirm is also my two sons' favourite time of the day at their local primary school!), has proven to be very popular. The recently invented ARI tradition of getting together at Recess Time (Wednesdays at 3.30pm) can already be

counted alongside the much more established 'ITB' (In The Beginning) sessions (usually held at noon on Thursdays) as key time-spaces for ARI socialisation and community building. I encourage everyone to try to keep these times free of other commitments when in Singapore.

Last, but certainly not least, I am joined at ARI by Associate Professor Maitrii Aung-Thwin, as Deputy Director. Maitrii is jointly appointed in the Department of History and CAS, but also has a long association with ARI, having first joined NUS as an ARI postdoctoral fellow. I am delighted to have been able to bring Maitrii back to ARI and look forward to working together with him. We both look forward to interacting with you, not only socially in ITB sessions and at Recess Time, but also in cross-disciplinary conversations that make ARI such a great place to grow individually and as part of a unique community of scholars of Asia.

21 – 22 Nov 2019

FAMILY POLICIES IN ASIA

5 - 6 Dec 2019

THE SOUTHERN TIER: NEW GULF THALASSOCRACIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

9 – 10 Jan 2020

TRANSNATIONAL RELATIONS, AGEING AND CARE (TRACE): ASIAN CONNECTIONS AND BEYOND

16 – 17 Jan 2020

NEW RACISM AND MIGRATION: BEYOND COLOUR AND THE 'WEST'

6 – 7 Feb 2020

WATER AND THE CITY

17 – 18 Feb 2020

WHEN SPECIES TRAVEL: ON THE RISE AND CONSEQUENCE OF INVASIVE ECOLOGIES IN ASIA AND THE WEST PACIFIC

20 – 21 Feb 2020

GENDER, MIGRATION AND DIGITAL NETWORKS IN ASIA

27 – 28 Feb 2020

SOUNDS, BODIES AND POWER: POLITICS AND POETICS OF RELIGIOUS SOUNDS

5 – 6 Mar 2020

MIGRATION METHODOLOGIES: CHALLENGES, INNOVATIONS AND CONCEPTUAL IMPLICATIONS FOR ASIAN MIGRATIONS

9 – 10 Mar 2020

BUILDING CITY KNOWLEDGE FROM NEIGHBOURHOODS

29 – 30 July 2020

EMERGING DIMENSIONS OF MARRIAGE IN ASIA

Details of events are available at: <https://ari.nus.edu.sg/upcoming-events/>

CROSS-CULTURAL REVERBERATIONS AS FORMS OF SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN ART

Dr Minna Valjakka

Novel forms of artistic experimentation worldwide meet with parallel forms of cultural production in the fields of urbanisation, civil society formation, environmentalism, critical pedagogy, and activism. At the same time, a wealth of literature demonstrates a prominent involvement with what Claire Bishop (2006) calls the 'social turn' in contemporary art.

In Asia, too, artists, curators, and scholars increasingly aim towards locally grounded research of art and its engagement with socio-political issues. Artistic experiments, exhibitions, workshops, and studies all serve to illuminate the great variety of aspirations and strategies beyond the usual art institutional settings. These enticing forms of socially engaged art vary from the enhancement of civil society formation through art projects to transnational exchange through public screens and from community-based mixed-media interventions to internationally supported art festivals. Amid this recent wave of interest in arts and its possible societal impact, notions of participation, collaboration, empowerment, community building, and reinvigoration have become catchphrases commonly employed in cultural policies, art studies and redevelopment plans, and beyond.

Reflecting the current situation from the art historical perspective encourages a re-evaluation of the analytical frameworks that delineate the present discourses on socially engaged art. In the aftermath of the Second World War, pioneering artists and art collectives addressing socio-political issues with innovative methods outside of art institutional settings took a ground-breaking position in various locations in Asia. While the possibility for these experimental art practices were obviously bound (and occasionally hindered) by local socio-cultural and political circumstances, modernisms in art can in many ways be understood as shaped by collectivism.

Starting already in the 1950s-1960s, art collectives across the region challenged the established forms of art, and in so doing, developed modes of collectivism which already prioritised aspects of alternative aesthetics and discourse with and for broader audiences. In the 1970s-1980s, along with the burgeoning notions of democracy, these aspirations for collective and interdisciplinary approaches in arts were further nurtured to raise awareness of timely issues in the contemporary socio-political atmosphere. In the 21st century, a range of new multidisciplinary (art) collectives has emerged to investigate innovative approaches for the conventional notions of 'art', its aesthetic autonomy, forms of agency, and institutionalisation. Simultaneously, societal transformation by, through, and with arts has become a shared objective among city officials, NPOs, international development foundations, art institutions, and artists alike.

Acknowledgement of these historical trajectories benefits more nuanced comprehension of the increasing richness of artistic practices and their changing societal positionality. Grounded on mostly invisible but transnational alliances and restoring



Guerrilla Art Hunt organised by the Post-Museum in July 2017 featured artworks by various Singapore artists placed around the Sungei Road market. ©Minna Valjakka

the interrelations between urban conditions and rural communities, this re-established significance of collectivism in arts benefits from more mixed-media approaches that continue to provide fertile discursive sites for exploring and questioning the dominating value structures in and beyond arts. Yet the on-going instrumentalisation of arts brings forward unseen challenges for maintaining artistic autonomy.

While having a physical space to gather is still an important (and challenging) part for maintaining sustainability for many of these collectives working in increasingly privatised and gentrified environments, some of them prefer not maintaining a tangible space of their own and rather rely on pop-up events and methods (e.g., Post-Museum). Today, the forms of collaborations in art are not necessarily based on physical and simultaneous togetherness. Rather, collectiveness can be established and maintained across the national borders as more of a rhizomatic formation, a kind of 'mental togetherness' which might occasionally manifest itself through personal interaction at a specific event but which can also be maintained through digital platforms and social media (e.g., MicroGalleries).

While each (art) collective today has its own methods and strategies aligned with its core socio-political and cultural interests—and while paying close attention to local needs—they all advocate transformative effects of socially engaged art practices. The notion of collectivism is thus expanded from art and artists to a more inclusive approach that reaches towards people from dispersed social and professional backgrounds. Secondly, the collectivism is emphasised through anonymity of the agency: the spaces, projects, and pop-up manifestations are often made and maintained as a group, not as a personal endeavour.

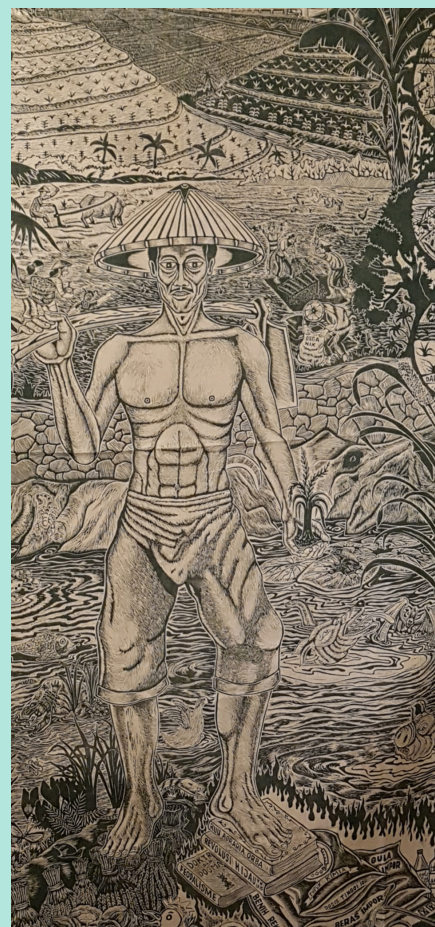


Yarn bombing crew's pop-up installation to celebrate Halloween in Central, Hong Kong in October 2017. © Minna Valjakka

One of the pioneering art collectives still active today is the Taring Padi in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (est. in 1998). Its passion and expertise in collective woodcut printmaking has sparked many other enthusiasts to take upon similar practices in East and Southeast Asia. For instance, the Pangrok Sulap art collective, mainly based in Runau, Malaysia (est. in 2010), and the A3BC group, gathering at the Irregular Rhythm Asylum in Shinjuku, Tokyo (opened in 2004), address timely socio-political issues through intricately carved images printed on canvas and paper. Yet, woodcut prints are only one method for them to engage with broader society, and their activities are continuously guided by their core values of sharing, caring, and mutual learning. The paramount significance in their endeavours is given for creating a communal experience, so much so that these and other (art) collectives have often deconstructed the notions of aesthetic autonomy and singular authorship of an art work as an object. Instead, the emphasis is

shifted to re-establishing solidarity and cross-cultural collaborations which may also extend beyond the local community.

At stake in these communal yet cross-cultural experiences are precisely the kinds of interaction and connectivity that shifts the focus on (trans)national networks. This may, in turn, continue to enhance the societal impact of art in disparate locations across Asia. Inspiring experiments and their results encourage further actors, while knowledge distribution through alternative methods reaches new audiences and provides new tools for locally embedded empowerment. In this context, the significance of (art) collectives and their transformative practices in Asian art may be understood as a precondition for the enactment of an artful societal change.



A detail of Taring Padi's woodcut print displayed for an A3BC gathering at IRA in Tokyo in May 2019. © Minna Valjakka

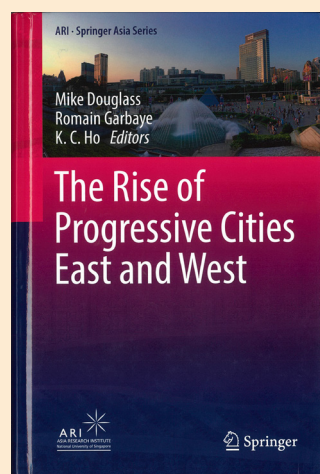
Dr Rini Astuti has been appointed Editorial Board Member for *Jurnal Studi Pemuda*, published by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University.

Prof Tim Bunnell joined the Editorial Board of the *European Journal of East Asian Studies* in June 2019.

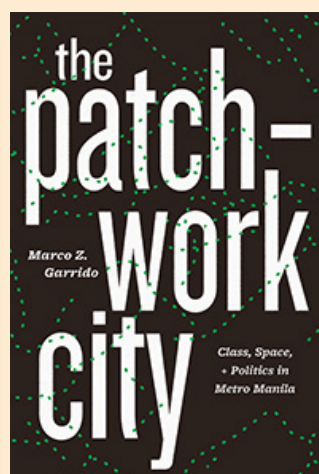
Dr Eric Kerr gave a plenary lecture titled 'Trolling and Informational Justice' at the workshop for inclusion of Ethics as part of the core curriculum at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan, 20 August 2019.

Assoc Prof Elaine Ho received the American Sociological Association's (ASA) Best Book in Global and Transnational Sociology by an International Scholar Award in August 2019 for her monograph, *Citizens in Motion: Emigration, Immigration and Re-migration across China's Borders* (Stanford University Press, 2019). She also gave the keynote speech 'Citizens in Motion: Emigration, Immigration and Re-migration across China's Borders' at the *Chinese Social & Cultural Geography Advanced Workshop* organised by the Chinese Geographical Society, Henan University, Kaifeng, China, 21-25 June 2019, and was appointed member of the Organising Committee of the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) Conference 2020, for the period February 2019 - February 2020.

Prof Brenda Yeoh was one of the NUS Recipients of the Long Service Medal conferred during the National Day Awards 2019. She also gave 2 invited keynote speeches: 'Transnational Migrations and Plural Diversities in Postcolonial Times', *Diversity and Singapore Ethnic Chinese Communities International Conference*, Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre, Singapore, 13-14 April 2019; and 'Transnational Migrations, Plural Diversities and the Spaces of Encounter in Singapore', *Asian Migration 2019 Annual Conference of the Center for Global Asia*, NYU Shanghai, China, 26-28 August 2019.



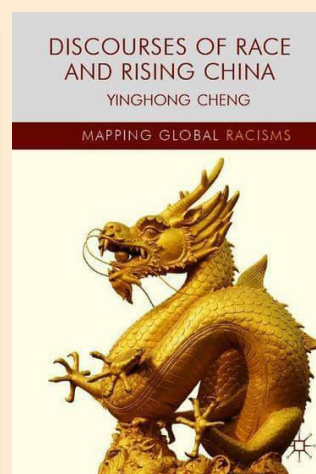
Mike Douglass, Romain Garbaye & K. C. Ho (Eds)
The Rise of Progressive Cities East and West
ARI-Springer Asia Series Vol. 6
Singapore, Springer, 2019



Marco Z. Garrido
The Patchwork City: Class, Space, and Politics in Metro Manila
Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press, 2019



Teresita Cruz-Del Rosario and Jonathan Rigg (Guest Eds)
Special Issue: *Precarious Work, Precarious Lives: The Nature and Experience of Precarity in Asia*
Journal of Contemporary Asia
49(4), 2019



Yinghong Cheng
Discourses of Race and Rising China: Mapping Global Racisms
Switzerland, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019

SHGIS AND SBDB – TWO ONGOING DATABASE AND MAPPING PROJECTS RELATED TO SINGAPOREAN CULTURAL HISTORY

Prof Kenneth Dean, Ms Xue Yiran, Drs Hue Guan Thye and Yan Yingwei

In collaboration with the Department of Chinese Studies, NUS, the members of this research team have developed the Singapore Historical GIS project (shgis.nus.edu.sg) and the Singapore Biographical Database (sbdb.nus.edu.sg), the latter developed in collaboration with the National Library Board, the NUS Library, and the Singapore Chinese Clan Association.

The Singapore Historical GIS (SHGIS, <http://shgis.nus.edu.sg/>) aims to bring Singaporean and Southeast Asian data and analysis into dialogue with the digital humanities. The SHGIS project incorporates Chinese and English archival sources and large amounts of data on Singaporean Chinese culture gathered in our fieldwork over the past few years into a searchable WebGIS. SHGIS is envisioned as a long-term continuously developing research tool and an accumulating, searchable digital archive. By developing WebGIS platforms, we seek to bring the data to the public as well as to scholarly audiences. We also seek to provide means for the public to send in data to be incorporated in our SHGIS (crowd-sourcing).

The Singapore Historical GIS (shgis.nus.edu.sg) was developed from 2016-2019 by a team of researchers based in the Chinese Studies Department of the National University of Singapore, in collaboration with scholars based in ARI. Funding for the project came from a MOE Tier 2 grant, later supplemented by three NHB grants to gather data from tombstones and burial records. Much of the original fieldwork for this project was completed by Kenneth Dean and Hue

Guan Thye, Senior Research Fellow in the Chinese Studies Department. The two scholars gathered data on nearly 500 temples in Singapore. They published *Chinese Epigraphy of Singapore, 1819-1911*, 2 vols. (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), which included photographs, transcriptions and translations of 1200 inscriptions from 68 temples and a few monuments each with an inscription dating to before 1911 (but also including later inscriptions). These authors are currently working on a follow-up volume to be titled *Chinese Epigraphy of Singapore, 1911-2019*. This will include dated inscriptions from over 350 temples now housed in 62 'United Temples' around Singapore. Rick Kim and Yan Yingwei developed the WebGIS features of the SHGIS. Several journal articles and book chapters have been published based on the data gathered and included in the SHGIS.

The SHGIS displays multiple layers of cultural-historical data, including the current locations of over 800 Chinese temples, 250 Chinese associations (including regional native-place associations, clan associations, and trade associations), 500 Christian churches, 100 mosques, and 20 Indian temples across Singapore island. Other layers allow one to follow the expansion of the Housing & Development Board (HDB) blocks that house over 80% of Singaporeans from the first flats built by the Singapore Improvement Trust (SIT) in the late 1950s to the most recent HDB blocks still under construction in 2019. The SHGIS also includes over 50 historical map layers, from 1822 to 2019, geo-referenced by the NUS Geography Department, and other maps, including Street Maps from the 1950s onwards, and aerial photography of Singapore from 1954, geo-referenced by the Singapore Land Authority. Viewers can build their own maps by first deleting all the point layers, and then re-building a map by adding layers, while also adding in different base maps or historical maps. For example, one can place onto any of these maps the former locations

¹Although the data collected so far has focused on Chinese institutions, we plan to gather data on each of the ethnic communities of Singapore and to include this data in the SHGIS and SBDB.

of over 200 villages (kampongs), 180 cemeteries, and over 500 Chinese schools, all of which no longer exist as they were displaced by the development of the HDB, government education policies, or land redevelopment of the island.

As the majority of the religious buildings and associations of Singapore have only 30-year leases from the Singapore government, most have had to move multiple times to make way for urban development. The movements of over 250 Chinese temples over the past 50 years can be followed on the SHGIS. The performance of rituals at different temples over the course of each year is mapped on the SHGIS as well.

The SHGIS is continually expanding, and each year approximately 70-80 student reports and photo essays are added to the map, which now contains over 25,000 images of temples, deities, and cultural artifacts. In the future, we will add more data on the churches, mosques and Indian temples of Singapore.

The Singapore Biographical Database (SBDB) was launched in February 2019 at the Singapore National Library. Currently the SBDB enables users to link 200 key Singaporeans to 600 of their friends, relatives, business partners, and colleagues. We seek to divide the social network into eight time periods or generations, and to show the sites frequented by key groups of individuals in each period. This will enable us to trace social networks through their connections with a changing spatial built environment.

One goal of the SHGIS project is to develop eight time-space maps, one for each of the eight generations (25 years each) into which we divide the 200-year history of Singapore since the founding of the open port by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819 to 2019. On each map we will display the location of major Chinese temples, associations, and the churches, mosques and Indian temples of each respective period. These maps will enable users to trace the growth and expansion of the settlements on the island, and the spread of temples and associations.

Figure 1 illustrates a WebGIS application showing the static maps; more maps (e.g., the distribution of Chinese schools in Singapore) can be found in the SHGIS website (<http://shgis.nus.edu.sg/>). Three feature layers about the Chinese temples and clan associations in Singapore are turned on as an example. A pop-up box is enabled to show the detailed attributes of one of the temples. The base map is a web map service of the Singapore 2010 map. The pop-up box provides a hyperlink for directing to a PDF report that introduces detailed information about the temple and a hyperlink for directing to an album that shows the temple photographs (Figure 2).

The SHGIS and SBDB have been designed to be expandable to China and other parts of Southeast Asia. This can be explored in the website under Linked Projects on Putian, Fujian, China, Chinese epigraphy across Southeast Asia, and Chinese temples and associations in Malaysia.

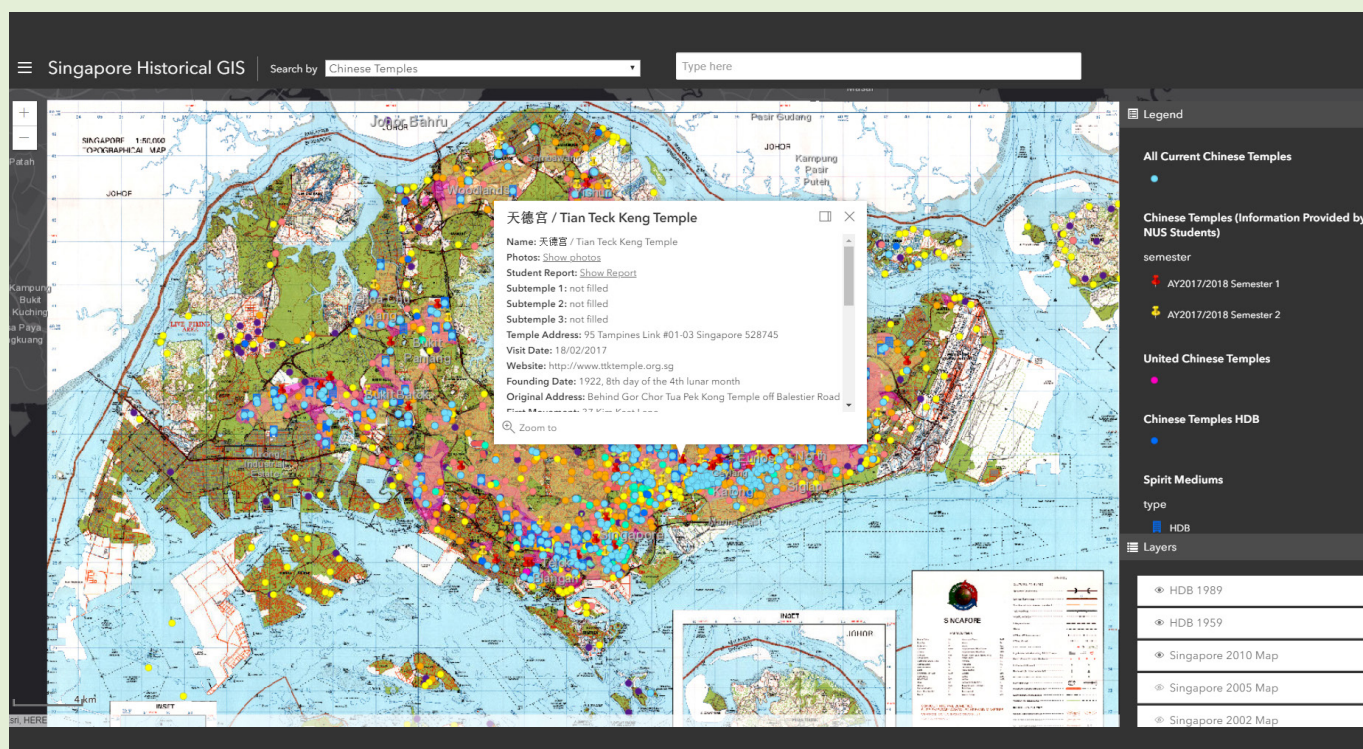


Figure 1. WebGIS application showing static maps

(A) THE HISTORY OF CHEK SIAN TNG



Established in the early 20th century, Chek Sian Tng (积善堂) is a religious site with rich history and affiliations. This temple is a convent for priestesses and follows the precepts of the Xian Tian Jiao (先天教), a religious sect from China, which combines key teachings from Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Its main deity is Zhun Ti Pu Sa (准提菩萨). Priestesses there are given a choice to commit to an ascetic life which strictly adheres to a vegetarian diet. Interestingly, they need not shave their head and are allowed to retain their family names, unlike typical Buddhist nuns. As people in the olden days are more superstitious about astrological readings, some of the priestesses lived their lives in Chek Sian Tng since young after they were abandoned by their families due to their incompatible astrological profiles with other family members. Even though this temple is for priestesses,

there is no gender restriction for its devotees, that is, both female and male devotees are allowed to enter and pray.

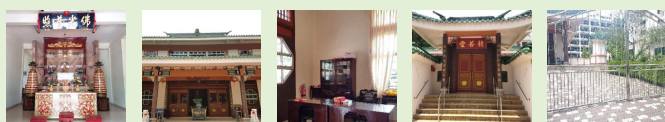
In terms of its locational history, this temple was first situated at 10 Kramat Road before having to relocate to 10 Ang Mo Kio Street 44 as the land was to be acquired by the government for the construction of the Central Expressway (CTE). After bidding for the 60-year leasehold site at Ang Mo Kio, an inauguration ceremony was held before Chek Sian Tng officially began operation in 1984. During its stay at Kramat Road, the temple was in close proximity to its two affiliated temples, namely, Sian Teck Tng (善德堂) and Tong Sian Tng (同善堂).

All these three temples have a common founder, Master Beh Soon Ching, a Teochew priest with ancestral roots based in Chaoyang, Guangdong. Back then, Master Beh used to work in a sugar cane plantation before seeking a spiritual journey as a priest in Ji Le Xiang Temple in Penang. At the early age of 24, Master Beh came to Singapore as an evangelist and first founded Tong Sian Tng in 1892.

Tong Sian Tng, located in Devonshire Road, is a monastery for priests and follows the teachings of the Qing Lian Jiao (青莲教), a secretive folk religious sect which originated from the Qing Dynasty.

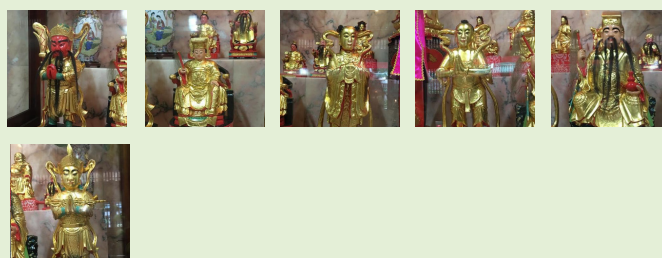
(B) TEMPLE PHOTO

01. Architecture (from Front View To Inner Hall)



Published by, [SHGIS - Singapore Historical GIS](#)

03. Secondary Deities



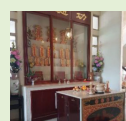
Published by, [SHGIS - Singapore Historical GIS](#)

02. Main Deity



Published by, [SHGIS - Singapore Historical GIS](#)

04. Ancestral Tablets



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Figure 2. (A) Detailed report in PDF format and (B) photographs about the Chek Sian Tng Temple

ARI AT ICAS 11 LEIDEN JULY 2019!

Dr Chand Somaiah

ARI maintained a strong presence at this year's International Convention of Asian Scholars 11. 15 current ARI Staff, 22 former ARI Staff, 15 former ARI Visiting Senior Fellows and 10 former ARI Asian Graduate Student Fellows were present. Including the 16 NUS Colleagues who attended, and 30 'friends of ARI' through conferences and social media, this brought the total to 108 ARI-linked (some more directly than others) individuals who travelled to Leiden from Singapore and other parts of the world to attend the conference from the 15th to the 19th of July 2019. This was out of a total of 2,179 speakers. Not a bad representation and showing for our Institution and island city-state!

Current ARI folks were involved in panels including those on History; Knowledge & Philosophy; Media, Communication and Digitalisation; Society and Identity; Migration and Diasporas; Religion and Beliefs; Arts and Culture; and Development and Urbanisation. Dr Stefan Huebner convened and presented on a panel titled 'Dividing the Sea: Marine Resources and Fluid Borders in Modern East Asia'. Dr Carola Lorea convened three panels: 'The Ethnography of Tantra: Detextualising and Decolonising Tantric Traditions I'; 'The Ethnography of Tantra: Detextualising and Decolonising Tantric Traditions II'; 'The Ethnography of Tantra: Detextualising and Decolonising Tantric Traditions III' and four roundtables: 'The Bay of Bengal, Perspectives Across the Disciplines I - Cosmopolitan Connections'; 'The Bay of Bengal, Perspectives Across the Disciplines II - Contested Heritages'; 'The Bay of Bengal, Perspectives Across the Disciplines III - Displaced Livelihoods'; and 'The Bay of Bengal, Perspectives Across the



Opening Ceremony. Photo credit: Chand Somaiah



Photo Credit: Sylvia Ang

Disciplines IV - Environment and Littoral Ecologies'. Dr Minna Valjakka convened a panel titled 'Planetary Interconnectedness with Nature: Transcultural Aesthetics, Ecologies and Landscapes' and Assoc Prof Ho Kong Chong co-convened and presented on a panel titled 'Neighbourhoods and Cities in Asia IV: Neighbourhood Activism and the City'.

The streets of Leiden were iridescently flecked with high-visibility scarlet lanyards which the conference participants were advised to wear. Banners from the City of Leiden welcoming conference attendees were prominently displayed on the main high street. A welcome tent with friendly guides in bright red or cobalt suits greeted everyone who entered the historic university town via train or bus, handing out maps, directions and best routes to the seven conference venues. While the conference programme was packed, ARI colleagues past and present created the time to reconnect with old friends and new, over a meal or canal ride or two.

Acknowledgements to Valerie Yeo for sharing the ARI participant numbers.

VOLUNTEERING MATTERS: GIVING BEYOND GIVING

Mr Marcel Bandur



At The Coffee Roaster after the Barista Training

In today's fast-paced world, there is intense competition for our time. Time has become a scarce commodity. Our responsibilities and pleasure-seeking activities are tightly packed within the 24-hour daily allowance. To volunteer one's time is an expression of great empathy and social enlightenment. As much as charities rely on monetary donations, the volunteers translate the resources into meaningful service.

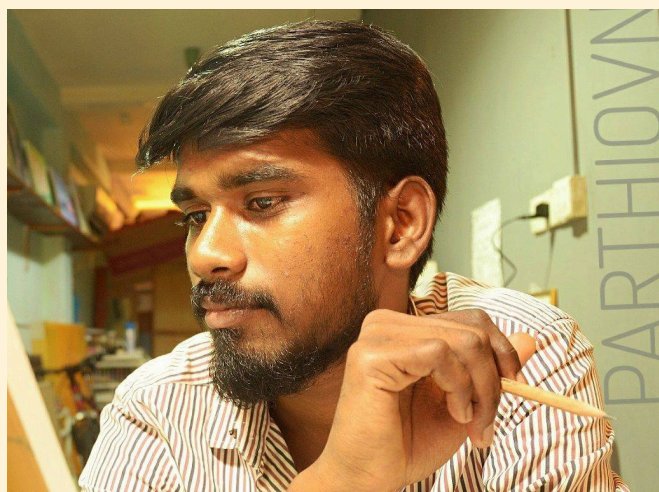
To me, volunteering represents a social duty, a service to the society that is expected of me. The sole fact that I'm writing (and you are reading) this already signifies our fortune of being literate. Having the time to read without worrying about food, shelter and safety already places us in the upper brackets globally. Winning this lottery of life, however, comes with the responsibility to extend our fortune to those, who were not as lucky. Last Judgement in Christianity, Karma in Hinduism and Buddhism, Zakat in Islam, all incorporate this notion.

On the streets of Singapore, I would see hard-working construction workers, wearing heavy protective clothing despite the sweltering heat. Among them, there are certainly those, who have the same potential as me. Given the right opportunities, they would also work in air-conditioned offices and probably be better RAs with better publications. Only they didn't win the lottery of life.

During my volunteering, I have met migrant workers with many talents, who have clearly fallen victims to their unfavourable socio-economic situation. When a young Indian migrant worker, named Parthiban, injured his left hand, he lost his job, income and means of providing for his family. His father was also a construction worker, so he was never allowed to think

of himself as anything more; they didn't know better. Parthiban's favourite hobby was to draw. He would draw at night on the upper bunk bed with only a light from his phone, being bitten by mosquitoes and bed bugs, as 12 other men slept in the same room. All Parthiban lacked was the right opportunities; a bridge of sorts to connect him with the right people. Two years later, Parthiban is now an art teacher at an international school in Chennai.

Volunteers should represent the bridge between beneficiaries and opportunities. Here are two examples: 1) Dhaka has a booming café culture and a shortage of skilled coffee baristas. Training the migrant workers in brewing gourmet coffee gives them significant advantage once they return home; 2) Recognising entrepreneurial talent makes targeted fundraising more impactful. S\$12,000 in raised funds was enough for a worker to set up a fish farm and buy two auto-rickshaws in Bangladesh. Spotting talent and turning it to opportunities can only be accomplished by volunteers who engage meaningfully with the beneficiaries.



Parthiban

Volunteering has helped me more than I could ever imagine. There was a time I used to be affected by anxiety. However, working with the migrant workers put things into perspective. They face complex life situations, yet their physical and mental resilience is truly inspiring. With long-term injuries, financial struggles and family issues, they still somehow keep a smile on their faces. They are the everyday heroes from whom we can learn lessons about being humble, grateful and, above all, positive about life.



Prof Tim Bunnell joined as Director of ARI and Cluster Leader of the Inter-Asia Engagements Cluster on 1 July 2019, with joint appointment with the Department of Geography. He was Cluster Leader of ARI's Asian Urbanisms Cluster from 2010-2012. His research interests concern human geographies of urban and regional change in Southeast Asia, focusing mostly on cities in Malaysia and Indonesia. He has a longstanding interest in the place of urbanising Asia in global urban studies. At ARI he will develop his recent research on the spatiality of urban futures in Southeast Asia.



Dr Benny Tong commenced a 2-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Changing Family in Asia Cluster on 3 June 2019. His research interests include ageing lifestyles, popular media cultures in East and Southeast Asia, and the anthropology of leisure. At ARI, he will investigate the role played by leisure engagements, particularly in the form of 'lifelong learning' activities, in the construction of elderly lifestyles and well-being in Singapore.



Dr Yang Yang commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Inter-Asia Engagements Cluster on 1 July 2019. Her research focuses on transnational religious networks, the politics of everyday, and contestations and negotiations over ethno-religious identity in northwestern China. At ARI she will examine how the Hui diaspora in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, contributes to the grassroots connections between China and Malaysia, focusing on how Malaysia has become the Hui's new Muslim role model as their preferred destination for halal tourism and style references for Muslim fashion.



Dr Matthew Thomas Reeder commenced a 2-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Inter-Asia Engagements Cluster on 30 July 2019. His PhD dissertation was on ethnic identification in early modern Siam. He has worked and conducted research in Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and France. At ARI he will transform his dissertation into a monograph and conduct research on nineteenth-century testimonies taken by Siam's court officials from criminals, war captives, paupers, mystics, and travellers.



Prof Naoko Shimazu has commenced a joint appointment in the Inter-Asia Engagements Cluster, for a period of 3 years from 1 July 2019. She is Professor of Humanities (History) and Associate Dean of Faculty at Yale-NUS College. She is a global historian of Asia, with research interests in the cultural history of global diplomacy, social and cultural history of modern societies at war, and new approaches to the study of empire. Her current major work centres on the cultural history of global diplomacy.



Assoc Prof Maitrii Aung-Thwin joined as Deputy Director of ARI on 1 July 2019. He is Associate Professor of Myanmar/Southeast Asian history and Convener of the NUS Comparative Asian Studies PhD Programme. His current research is concerned with nation-building, identity, public history, infrastructure, and Buddhist networks in South and Southeast Asia. He served on the Association of Asian Studies Board of Directors (USA) and is currently a trustee of the Burma Studies Foundation (USA), and editor of the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.



Dr Cheng Yi'En commenced a 1-year appointment as Research Fellow in the Asian Migration Cluster on 1 July 2019. His research interests lie in the intersection across education, youth, and mobilities in Asian cities, with a current focus on how higher education restructuring is changing young people's aspirations and identities and their relationships to mobility and immobility. At ARI, he will be carrying out research on how the Belt and Road Initiative is impacting higher education and mobilities in the context of the ASEAN region.



Dr Nan Ouyang commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster on 27 June 2019. She is broadly interested in sacred space in East Asia, modern Chinese religion, and Chinese historical geography. At ARI, her research will include Buddhism on Mount Jiuhua during the Mao era (1949–1976), with the use of diverse materials including local archives.



Natalie Lang commenced a 2-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster on 2 July 2019 and will work very closely with the Religion and Globalisation Cluster. Combining these research areas, her current research project deals with Hindu religion in Singapore. Natalie conducted her doctoral research on Hindu religion in La Réunion at the University of Göttingen, and she currently works on a book manuscript based on her doctoral thesis.



Dr Eve Warburton commenced a 2-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Identities Cluster on 23 July 2019. She is broadly interested in the politics and political economies of Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on Indonesia. At ARI, she will be working on several projects associated with identity politics in Indonesia and the wider Southeast Asian region.



Dr Lei Wang Echo commenced a 2-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster on 22 July 2019. Her research explores how cross-sector collaborations impact the institutional features and performance of Third Sector Organisations (TSOs) in social services delivery. At ARI, she will be investigating the emergence of social enterprise in Asia by looking into their institutional effectiveness and social roles across a number of Asian cities, and understand how external factors may affect their characteristics, development models and patterns, and social impacts.



Dr Michelle Tsai commenced a 2-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Identities Cluster on 11 July 2019. Her work examines globalisation and transnational businesses, the political economy of Chinese capitalism, the media and consumer culture, as well as identity politics and cross-Strait relations. Her current research is concerned with the cultural logic of Chinese capitalism and identity politics.



Dr Sana Jaffrey commenced a 1-year appointment as Postdoctoral Fellow in the Asian Urbanisms Cluster on 12 September 2019. Her research focuses on violent conflict and challenges of state-building in developing democracies. Her ongoing book project investigates the puzzling rise of vigilante violence in Asia, increasingly fueled by disinformation on social media platforms. It draws on original quantitative data and extensive fieldwork in Indonesia to show how legacies of state-building interact with democratic politics to produce sub-national patterns of order and disorder.



Workshop on Rethinking Asian Diplomacy: New Methodological and Thematic Interventions
1 August 2019 | Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore

INTER-ASIA ENGAGEMENTS

Prof Naoko Shimazu

On 1 August 2019, the Inter-Asia Engagements (IAE) Cluster hosted a one-day workshop *Rethinking Asian Diplomacy: New Methodological and Thematic Interventions*, convened by Naoko Shimazu with Elaine Ho (Asian Migration Cluster) and Deepak Nair (NUS Political Science Department). Fourteen papers were presented under four different panels on diaspora diplomacy, diplomatic agents, sociological approaches to diplomacy, and ceremonies and rituals. This 'scoping' event was designed to accomplish several goals: first, to bring together existing expertise within NUS, in order to consolidate a group of like-minded scholars affiliated to other institutes and departments (ARI, MEI, Departments of Political Science and History); second, to connect the NUS scholars with others within Singapore (NTU); and thirdly,

to connect with scholars outside of Singapore, especially in the region with large (Thailand, Indonesia, Japan, Australia), and the UK.

What was noteworthy was the stimulating discussions which arose from the workshop's thoroughly interdisciplinary set up—a balanced gathering of social scientists (from geography, political science/international relations, anthropology, and media and communications studies) and the humanities scholars (history and art history), with no one field dominating the group. Organisers adopted a brainstorming format, with an express objective of coming up with a future agenda for research and collaboration. At the end of the workshop, a strong consensus emerged that a new network should be created to facilitate continued collaboration. Hence, the Asia Diplomacy Network (ADN) was born! The new network aims to foster innovative methodologies and themes with empirical interests on Asia, thus stimulating research that connects Asian contexts with global conceptual developments in the study of diplomacy.

ASIAN MIGRATION CLUSTER: GENERATIONS OF CLUSTER MEMBERS CAME TOGETHER IN LEIDEN

Drs Shiori Shakuto, Sylvia Ang, Chand Somaiah & Prof Brenda Yeoh

At first sight, scholars who presented their research in numerous panels on migration in Asia at ICAS, Leiden, seemed to have come from different institutions: Singapore, UK, Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia, Japan and Australia. On closer inspection, however, one will find that many of them were former postdoctoral fellows at the Asian Migration Cluster, ARI! Indeed, ICAS Leiden featured many Asian Migration panels convened by current and former Asian Migration Cluster members: Emotion and Transnational Migration in Asia and

Europe I and II (Convenor: Kumiko Kawashima); Mobility in Times of Uncertainty I and II (Convenors: Lan Anh Hoang and Juan Zhang); Migration, Diaspora and Citizenship I (Chair: Chand Somaiah); and Student and Skilled Mobilities across Asia and Beyond I and II (Convenors: Anju Mary Paul and Jeehun Kim).

Kumiko Kawashima (ARI 2012-14, currently at Macquarie University) and Melody Chia-Wen Lu (ARI 2009-2012, currently at Macau University) organised a reunion dinner for the ARI Asian Migration Cluster in Leiden. The Dutch summertime ensured the night of reunion never ended, literally. Generations of former postdoctoral fellows who went on to become faculty



Asian Migration Cluster reunion dinner at ICAS

members at institutions across the globe caught up on the latest research projects and reminisced about their time at ARI.

The reunion at ICAS was a powerful reminder that ARI's intellectual influence goes beyond the two years of postdoctoral fellowships. Many of them continue to collaborate with each other after leaving ARI, working on comparative projects and co-organising workshops. Others mentor the younger generation of ARI postdoctoral fellows by encouraging their participation in panels such as those at Leiden. It is testimony to the intellectually formative period fellows spend at ARI and the value of global networks that fellows build during their two years.

CHANGING FAMILY IN ASIA Dr Gu Xiaorong

In the first half of the year, the Changing Family Cluster bade farewell to three colleagues who had taken up new positions with institutions in Singapore and beyond. Dr Lee Yeonjin is currently Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work and Social Administration and the School of Public Health in The University of Hong Kong. Dr Ko Pei-Chun is a lecturer with the Centre for University Core at Singapore University of Social Sciences, and Dr Lavanya Balachandran recently joined College of Alice & Peter Tan at NUS as a lecturer. We thank them for their great contributions to the intellectual foci of the Cluster and cherish our friendships with them. We wish them smooth journeys ahead!

We also welcomed two new Postdoctoral Fellows, Dr Chung Wei-Yun and Dr Benny Tong, as well as Visiting Senior Research Fellow Dr Xu Hongwei. Dr Chung's work focuses on gender, family life, work-life arrangements and care policies. Dr Tong researches leisure engagements and ageing issues in Japan and Singapore with a trans-Asian perspective. Dr Xu publishes extensively on social and environmental determinants of population health and ageing, child development, and residential segregation, with diverse methodological approaches in the quantitative tradition.

A Special Issue on Marriage and Migration

The Cluster is happy to announce the publication of a special issue, *Migration and Marriage in Asian Contexts*, with the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (online 02 Apr 2019). The special issue is a development of a conference convened in 2016 at ARI by Dr Mu Zheng and Prof Wei-Jun Jean Yeung, the two guest editors. With ten articles applying multiple research methods to examine marriage and migration in multiple contexts in Asia and beyond, this issue explores a variety of related issues, including how migration influences Asian migrants' marriage timing and assortative mating patterns, how heterogeneous

migration experiences shape Asian migrants' social integration process and subjective well-being, and how migration, legally and spatially, has introduced instabilities in Asian migrants' marital lives. As a whole, this collection makes substantive empirical and theoretical contributions to the fields of migration, race/ethnicity, family, and gender studies. Contributions of this special issue include: (1) contextualising the migration and marriage experience in many Asian societies previously not examined; (2) diversifying the academic discourses in migration and marriage beyond the impact of marriage migration; and (3) widening methodological repertoires in the field of migration and marriage which has thus far relied largely on qualitative methods as papers in this issue also use large national data and mixed methods to investigate the issues.

In addition, cluster members participated in many international conferences to present their work. The Cluster is busy preparing for several other publications such as a special issue on the value of children and stepfamilies and getting organised for an upcoming conference, *Family Policies in Asia*, in November.

14TH SINGAPORE GRADUATE FORUM ON SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

Dr Michiel Baas



At the end of July, ARI hosted its flagship event, the 14th Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies. This event provides a platform for graduate students from around the world working on Southeast Asia to communicate and interact, as they mature into the next generation of academic leaders. All sessions are organised thematically around the themes broadly reflecting the core research strengths of ARI. The five-day Forum coincided with the Asian Graduate Student Fellowship Programme 2019, which brought 30 graduate students to ARI for a six-week period of research, mentoring and participation in an academic writing workshop.

Prof Mark Hobart (University of London, UK) provided the first keynote of the Forum in which he discussed 'How South East Asians Argue: Exploring Cultural Differences in Style of Reasoning and Rhetoric'. Prof Hobart was kind enough to also make an important contribution to the first two days of Skills Based Sessions which preceded the actual Forum. In his talk he discussed 'Everything You Didn't Want to Know about Research (And Were Afraid to Ask)'. These two days of Skills Based sessions were added to the programme a few years ago to help prepare early career researchers for the academic career that lies ahead of them. Besides sessions on various research techniques, Prof Neil Coe spoke on how to get published in top journals and our colleagues from the Central Library provided an important seminar on 'Getting Started with Research Impact Measurement'. The final two days saw keynotes by Jeroen

de Kloet from the University of Amsterdam and Elaine Lynn-Ee Ho from NUS. Recognising the growing importance of China in geopolitical, social and cultural terms for the Southeast Asia region, De Kloet was specifically asked to speak on his research on China and its relevance for the region. His work on creativity resonated well with students across disciplines. The final keynote by Elaine Ho zoomed in on her pathbreaking work on multi-directional migration and (Chinese) diaspora formation.

This Forum also marked my fifth and final year chairing this incredible programme. During these years we benefitted from funding through the Luce Foundation as well as unwavering support from the Institute and in particular its two directors, Prasenjit Duara and Jonathan Rigg. Programmes of this size also strongly rely on ARI's Support Staff and special mention should be made for Tay Minghua who makes much of the Forum possible, and Selvi Krishnan who is in charge of all practical matters relating to the six-week fellowship programme. A final word of thanks should go to the Selection Committee and especially to two of its longest-standing members, Titima Suthiwan and Michelle Miller. Carola Lorea will now take over as chair and I have no doubt that she will do an excellent job and amazing new things with the Programme.