

ASIA IN FOCUS 2

A NORDIC JOURNAL ON ASIA BY EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS



Asia in Focus
A Nordic journal on Asia by early career researchers

Issue 2, 2015

The *Asia in Focus* journal is published online twice a year by NIAS - Nordic Institute of Asian Studies. NIAS is a Nordic research and service institute focusing on Asia's modern transformations. *Asia in Focus* was initiated by NIAS to provide Master students and Ph.D. students affiliated to a Nordic institution a widely accessible and transnational forum to publish their findings. The focal point of the journal is the modern Asian societies viewed from the standpoints of social science and humanities. The geographical focus is the Asian countries from Central Asia to Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand.

Editorial Committee:

Nicol Foulkes Savinetti (Managing Editor), NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
André Asplund, European Institute of Japanese Studies
Inga-Lill Blomkvist, NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
Nis Grünberg, Copenhagen Business School and Sino-Danish Center
Rakel Haslund-Gjerrild, University of Copenhagen
Kitt Plinia Nielsen, University of Copenhagen
Emmanuel Raju, University of Copenhagen
Siddharth Sareen, University of Copenhagen
Michael Alexander Ulfstjerne, University of Copenhagen,

While the editorial committee is responsible for the final selection of content for *Asia in Focus*, the responsibility for the opinions expressed and the accuracy of the facts published in articles rest solely with the authors.

Publisher: NIAS - Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

Layout: *Inga-Lill Blomkvist*

Front page: Design: *Rakel Haslund-Gjerrild*, Images: *Arve Hansen, John Hennessey, Kees Krul, Sara Ellegaard Nielsen & Camilla Jane Standhart*

Copyright: Authors & NIAS. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the written permission from the authors.

Journal website: WWW.ASIAINFOCUS.DK

Contact: ASIAINFOCUS@NIAS.KU.DK

NIAS - Nordic Institute of Asian Studies / Øster Farimagsgade 5, DK-1353 Copenhagen K, Denmark
WWW.NIAS.KU.DK

Contents

Letter from the Editor <i>Nicol Foulkes Savinetti</i>	1
Introduction <i>Ravinder Kaur</i>	3
Motorbike Madness? Development and Two-Wheeled Mobility in Hanoi <i>Arve Hansen</i>	5
Creating a Colonial Consciousness? Reflections on Audience Reception at the Tokyo Colonization Exposition of 1912 <i>John Hennessey</i>	15
Preserving Bang Krachao's Green Space through Agriculture <i>Kees Krul</i>	25
Agenda or Accident? Unraveling the 2014 Mass Exodus of Cambodian Migrant Workers from Thailand <i>Erich Molz</i>	35
Myanmar Activists in the Making. Navigating in a Changing Political Landscape <i>Sara Ellegaard Nielsen & Camilla Jane Standhart</i>	45

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader

When *Asia in Focus* was first established, it was a time of increasing awareness of and engagement with Asia, both inside and outside of academia. At that time, I was a guest researcher at NIAS and in close proximity to the great minds who came up with the initial concept (Rakel Haslund-Gjerrild and Inga-Lill Blomkvist). I thus had the pleasure of being part of this start-up from the very beginning. I am so excited about the initiative for several reasons, some of which I would like to share.

My own academic path led me from the study of Europe, to the study of the Nordic region, and in the later years to the study of Asia, but the history, diversity and the cultural wealth of the region has fascinated me since childhood. It is a pleasure to be able to read and engage with such a diverse group of captivating writings about social, political and cultural phenomena in Asia. I am now curious to see how the intra-action between the three regions will pan out, and I regard myself as somewhat privileged to be able to view this interconnectedness through the work of early career scholars, as well as through the comments and feedback from more established academics.

Perhaps the part I appreciate most about the journal is that it targets early career scholars. By providing not only a forum for publishing, but also a learning environment for authors, the journal is a valuable source of education. Our editors take great care to give guiding feedback which thus far has been highly valued by authors who have submitted papers.

Working on the journal has also been a learning process for us in the Editorial Team. In the first issue, we were focused on building up the team and establishing the 'brand' so to speak. During the course of the second issue, we focused on streamlining the editorial process. We introduced blind reviewing, and we have greatly expanded our network of external reviewers. We have also paid closer attention to smaller details in order to achieve a more polished final product.

Asia in Focus is based on voluntary work and two issues per year is as much as we can manage. In the future however, we would like to extend an invitation to external editors to edit a special issue based on a particular theme. This could be papers from a conference, a project, or a group of scholars interested in the same issue. We want to maintain some level of flexibility and allow for creative thinking outside of the academic box, so get in touch if you have an idea.

To conclude, I would like to relay how happy we have been for the very positive response to the journal from the academic community in the Nordic region and abroad. It is tough to be visible in the information society of today and especially so in academia. While we appreciate being able to use NIAS' networks, we ask that you help us spread the word even further so that the knowledge we are sharing reaches climes near and far and, importantly, both inside and outside of academia.

Kind regards

Nicol Foulkes Savinetti
Managing Editor

Introduction

Asia is at the heart of an increasingly interconnected world. The most populous and the largest of continents, it has long been the busy global crossroad where centuries of migratory flows of people, ideas, commodities and fashions have enriched diverse cultures, syncretic traditions and booming economic trade. As connections between Asia and the world grow at an unprecedented speed and scale, it becomes ever more urgent to make sense of the complexity and diversity that underpins its spectacular political-economic emergence in the early twenty-first century. The current moment, sometimes euphorically called 'the Asian century', has been amply written and analyzed in breathless, sweeping popular accounts. Yet what is required to understand this transformative moment, in Asia as well as far beyond its borders, is critical engagement that allows us to ground the contemporary within the *longue durée* of history.

Asia in Focus is precisely such a timely scholarly project that draws our attention to the event and the ordinary that constitute everyday life in Asia. What marks out this journal from a number of other scholarly journals is that it offers exclusive and generous space to early career researchers to present their work. In its second volume, the journal brings together a rich collection of essays that showcase the exciting research that the early career scholars are engaged in. John Hennessey's essay 'Creating a Colonial Consciousness' delves into the theme of industrial expositions at the turn of the last century that became powerful forms of mass mediation. The expositions were deployed to signal technological advancements, and to mobilize and accumulate political and financial capital that followed these. Though Hennessey takes the 1912 Tokyo exposition to explore the audience reactions, the theme echoes the contemporary mediations of commodified nations, or 'emerging markets', in the global publicity through spectacular displays and campaigns a century later.

A second theme in the volume is that of urban transformations. Here Kees Krul's 'Preserving Bangkok's Green Space through Agriculture' and Arve Hansen's 'Motorbike Madness' presents accounts of everyday negotiations around environmentalism, pollution, economic growth and chaotic traffic in two bustling urban locations of Bangkok and Hanoi. The last two articles draw our attention to the political mobilizations and violent contentions that have come to surface in the recent past. Sara Ellegaard Nielsen and Camilla Jane Standhart in their article 'Myanmar activists in the Making' describe the emergence of youth activist movements in Myanmar at a moment when the military Junta makes way for a democratically elected government. Erich Molz's 'Accident or Agenda' picks up a different thread of the same problematic, namely, the state strategies improvised by the military junta in Thailand to consolidate its internal power and external reputation. Molz shows how the Cambodian migrant workers employed in shadow economies became pawns in this game as the military state's anti-human trafficking crackdown was more geared to weaken the rival police force.

What the articles collectively offer are empirically rich and grounded accounts of transformations that continue to reshape Asia today. More than anything, this new critical scholarship seeks to disclose the nuts and bolts, the apparatus of everyday life, the contentions and contradictions that constitute a part of the world that still remains the bustling global crossroad.

Ravinder Kaur, PhD

Associate Professor of South Asian Studies

Director of the Centre of Global South Asian Studies

Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies, University of Copenhagen

Motorbike Madness?

Development and Two-Wheeled Mobility in Hanoi

Arve Hansen

Four million motorbikes navigate the narrow streets of Hanoi, having close to completely replaced the bicycle as a means of transport. This paper approaches the ‘motorbike revolution’ in Vietnam in general and Hanoi in particular at the intersection between political economy and everyday practices. It discusses how regional economic integration following the market reforms known as *doi moi* has facilitated the surge in motorbike ownership, as well as how this has materialised through everyday mobility practices in Hanoi. The paper argues that, given a context of lacking transport alternatives, the motorbike must be understood through its unique use value. Furthermore, the motorbike can be considered the main reason that the streets of Hanoi are not in a perpetual state of gridlock. Thus, the paper argues that while the high number of motorbikes brings along many challenges, the situation would deteriorate significantly if the millions of motorbikes are to be replaced by their emerging competitor, the private automobile.

Keywords: Motorbikes, Hanoi, mobility, consumption, *doi moi*, development, Vietnam,

There is nothing quite like the buzzing and honking of four million motorbikes. This is why a visit to Hanoi can be so overwhelming for first-timers, and why visitors have often described the particularities of Hanoi’s streetscapes as ‘motorbike madness’ (something that is revealed by a quick google search). Not long ago the scene looked very different. It used to be bicycles that dominated the streets of the Vietnamese capital. Photographs and descriptions of Hanoi from as late as the early 1990s describe a level of tranquillity in the streets that is almost unimaginable today. How did it change into the inferno of honking and traffic jams of contemporary Hanoi?

The story of the motorbike in Vietnam is a fascinating one, and one that tells us a great deal about Vietnam’s development process. From being a luxury product as late as the 1990s, the motorbike is now found in practically every Vietnamese household. It is also the essence of Vietnamese urban life and has together with its non-motorised predecessor shaped urban geography. In Hanoi everything can be done on a motorbike. It is used for shopping, as a taxi (*xe om*, literally translates as

‘hugging vehicle’), for resting or sleeping (particularly by the *xe om* drivers), for going on dates or hanging out with friends, for walking the dog, for carrying obscene amounts of goods, and for bringing children to and from school. It is what keeps Hanoi going, the blood running through Hanoi’s veins, keeping the city alive. According to World Bank (2011) estimates, it is also the main reason why mobility is in fact still reasonably good in Hanoi with short commuting times in comparison to other large Asian cities.

This paper explores the ‘motorbike revolution’ in Vietnam from a consumption perspective, approaching motorbikes both from the macro-level changes in political economy following economic reforms, and from the streets of Hanoi. First and foremost, the paper sets out to explain how the motorised two-wheeler attained its dominant position, and how this has depended on social and economic changes following economic reforms. Furthermore, the paper considers the changing symbolic value of motorbikes, as well as their unique use value in the context of Hanoi’s physical and commercial infrastructure.

Development, consumption, mobility

The theoretical starting point for this paper is a broad approach to consumption as a distinct way to understand human relations to material goods. Goods can be used to communicate identity, class and belonging, but they also have their own material stories to tell and their own material agency (see e.g. Sahakian and Wilhite, 2014), and they play a crucial role in the performance of everyday practices.

Consumption, or ‘the acquisition and use of things’ (Wilhite, 2008, p. 3), has been subject to significant scholarly attention in recent decades. The field has seen an eclectic range of approaches to understanding consumption, ranging from the rational consumer of mainstream economics and the post-modernist emphasis on cultural expressivism and signs, to the present revival of practice theory (see Warde 2014 for further discussion).

The academic inquiry of consumption has traditionally seen a production – consumption divide, with one branch of research emphasising production, provision and the material, and the other focusing on the consumer, culture and the symbolic (see e.g. Slater, 1997 or Fine, 2002 for detailed discussions). This paper is influenced by practice approaches’ understanding of consumption as embedded in the social life of people and goods, as well as Ben Fine’s (2002) insistence that production and ‘systems of provision’ must be included in order to fully understand consumption. In a context of rapid development, this paper argues, consumption is best understood in relation to economic development processes as well as how these processes materialise in everyday life.

Focusing on the consumption of means of transport, another theoretical starting point of this paper is mobilities research. With what has been labelled the ‘mobilities turn’ of the social sciences (Sheller and Urry, 2006), the processes and meanings of movement of goods and people have received much recent scholarly attention (see Cresswell, 2010, 2012, 2014 for thorough overviews). Cars and the ‘system of automobility’

(Urry, 2004) have been at the centre of attention in the mobilities literature (see Butler and Han-nam, 2014 for an overview), while motorbikes to a significant extent have been ignored (Pinch and Reimer, 2012). An aim of this paper is to take mobility research out of the car-dominated mobility systems of mature capitalist countries to the many particularities of the streetscapes of a rapidly developing country. In contemporary Hanoi, motorbikes are the dominant means of transport rather than ‘alternative mobilities’ in an overall system of automobility. As is discussed below, what I term a system of ‘moto-mobility’ has materialised in Vietnam’s capital, with urban and commercial geography having developed in a dialectical relationship with two-wheelers.

Motorbike ethnography

The paper draws on fieldwork in Hanoi over a period of seven months in 2012 and 2013. The findings are based on observation as well as semi-structured interviews with car owners and motorbike owners ranging from the age of 21 to 70, all belonging broadly speaking to the new Vietnamese ‘middle class’ (see Gainsborough 2010), in addition to interviews with representatives of motorbike manufacturers. Furthermore, the research has been based on ‘mobile methods’ (see e.g. Büscher, Urry and Witchger, 2011). I used a motorbike for practically all fieldwork purposes: to get around, drive to interviews, explore the city and observe traffic, go to restaurants and cafes, shop, and visit friends. This has played a significant role in shaping my understanding of the city, and in grasping the importance of the motorbike in the everyday life of Hanoi and its inhabitants (see Gillen, 2015 for a discussion on using motorbikes for fieldwork in Vietnam).

The motorbike revolution

Not long ago, the motorbike was a luxury good in Vietnam, and particularly so in the North of the country that had been subject to a longer period of socialist planning than the South. Before the market reforms known as *doi moi* ('renovation') were initiated in 1986 (see Masina, 2006; Hansen, 2015a), even a bicycle was a treasured good. The few available motorbikes in Hanoi mostly came from the Soviet Union, such as the famous Babetta and Minsk brands (still iconic for aficionados, but now either obsolete or banned from the streets of Hanoi). After reunification in 1975, a few Hanoians were able to get their hands on Japanese and European motorbikes (such as the popular Italian scooters) from the South, but it was *doi moi* that set the stage for the motorbike revolution.

When the Vietnamese government launched an import substitution policy for motorcycle manufacturing in the mid-1990s, the Japanese giants Honda, Yamaha and Suzuki, as well as San-yang from Taiwan started establishing businesses in the country in order to get around import quotas. Honda dominated the market in this period, although most of the models were still imported from the company's production in Thailand (Fujita 2013a).

These changes made motorbikes much more accessible, something that was visible in the streets of Vietnam's capital where local authorities were unable to keep up with the provision of public transport to fulfil the transport needs of an increasingly mobile and rapidly growing urban population. The motorbike was then the perfect substitute for the bicycle: similar to it in many ways, almost as easy to operate but a whole lot faster. It allowed Hanoians to carry out the same practices and access the same places as the bicycle, at the same time covering larger distances without having to break sweat. As Truitt (2008, p. 5) puts it, 'Unlike bicycles, motorbikes promise effortless mobility or, rather, mobility that relies on fossil fuel rather than human exertion'.

Still, however, owning a motorbike was not for everyone; the total of motorbikes nationwide reached about 6 million by 1999 (MONRE, 2007). The turn of the millennium was when sales started really taking off, and annual sales increased from 0.5 million in 1999 to 1.7 million in 2000 (Hansen, in press). The most important reason behind this year-to-year increase was China. With a good appetite for motorbikes already established but prices still too high for the average consumer, the stage was set for what Fujita (2013a) terms the 'China shock'. This consisted of cheap Chinese copies of Japanese motorbike models making their way across the border, often circumventing import laws by being imported as so-called knockdown kits and assembled in Vietnam by local entrepreneurs. The quality of these motorbikes was – and still is – comparatively low, but prices were much lower than for the Japanese competitors. This was an important step towards 'democratizing' motorbike ownership, but importantly also had the effect of forcing other firms to change strategy. Honda started producing models in Vietnam specialized for the Vietnamese market and were in this way able to compete with the Chinese copies. Fujita (2013a) reports that Honda experienced a shocking drop from 67 percent market share in 1998 to 12 percent in 2001, but that the Japanese giant still was able to reclaim the market after this and again become the dominant player. Chinese models have in turn been relegated to the Vietnamese countryside where they still make up a significant proportion of the market share (Fujita, 2013b).

Combined with rising incomes, this formal and informal integration into regional production networks contributed towards normalising motorbike ownership. By 2011 there was more than one motorbike by household nationwide in Vietnam (GSO 2012), and 2.4 motorbikes per household in Hanoi (EPS, 2014). Along with the rapid increase in ownership, the social meanings attached to motorbikes have also changed.

Between distinction and mundane mobilities

The social and economic transformations of *doi moi* involved a crucial legitimisation of private consumption and display of wealth (Vann, 2012). In this context, motorbikes became a powerful status object and a symbol of the new Vietnam (Truitt, 2008). With two-wheeled mobility ‘democratised’, the status once attached to owning a two-wheeler started to diminish and the role of motorbikes as vehicles for social distinction took a new turn. While the ultimate competitor in form of the private automobile started entering the stage, the combination of high tax levels and an urban geography badly suited for automobilicity (Hansen, in press) paved the way for an old favourite in the shape of the Italian scooter.

The size of the market for ‘luxury’ motorbikes in Vietnam is considered to be extraordinary compared to other countries with a high prevalence of motorbikes; at a certain income level, cars have replaced motorbikes to a much larger extent than in Vietnam. This made the famous Italian manufacturer Piaggio decide to use Vietnam as its base for producing its different Piaggio and Vespa models (Interview, representative of Piaggio Vietnam, November 2013). At several times the price of its competitors, Piaggio did not aim to compete on price. In addition, with Japanese models generally considered as reliable and of very high quality, durability or technology would not necessarily have led to success in a competitive market. Instead, in the words of Wunker (2011, np.), Piaggio ‘competed asymmetrically’ and developed a market for premium scooters. As expressed by a representative of Piaggio Vietnam, the typical buyer of their product is looking for something ‘very stylish’, something ‘to define themselves, or express themselves’ (Interview, November 2013). While Honda Vietnam have followed up and developed their own premium brands, nothing on two wheels so far seems able to compete with the status of an Italian motorbike.

However, while symbolic value and status

may be central aspects of consumption, it is important to remember that most consumption takes place as part of everyday practices, as ‘ordinary consumption’ in the words of Gronow and Warde (2001). Transport is first and foremost a means of getting from A to B, and the explicit *use value* of the motorbike as well as the lack of alternative means of transportation are probably the best explanations for its popularity.

In his celebration of the motorbike in Vietnam, Vietnamese novelist Nguyen Truong Quy (2014) speaks of the symbolism of the motorbike and how it can be associated with freedom. His most important point, however, is how this contrasts with the role of the motorbike for most Vietnamese. As he asks, “Among the crowds of motorbike riders, often frantic, often flaunting [sic] the laws of traffic and the code of civilized conduct, dragged into a chronic fatigue day after day, month after month, on their ordinary commuter’s motorbike: how many of these people think of the two wheels beneath them as a source of inspiration?” (Quy 2014, p. 35).

This is a crucial point. Arguably, the main reason for Hanoians to drive a motorbike is that they do not feel they have a choice. This was also reflected by informants in Hanoi. As argued by a young, female motorbike owner: ‘It’s my only choice, right. I cannot walk around Hanoi, I cannot drive a car, I don’t have one and I can’t, so yeah, motorbike is like the only choice’ (Interview, November 2013). This can be seen as a form of consumer lock-in. Although it is certainly possible to survive in Hanoi without a motorised vehicle, it makes participating in the dynamics and flows of contemporary society much harder. Through the combination of overall processes of economic development, urban transport provision and everyday practices of mobility, the motorbike has become an essential commodity in contemporary Hanoi.

Development, consumption and mobility in Hanoi

Symbolic value and use value are of course not mutually exclusive categories. The motorbike can be used mainly for transport *while* displaying class, status or urban cool. The young motorbike owner who felt locked in to the system of moto-mobility herself drove what could be considered a premium scooter. The point here is that status or symbolic value alone cannot explain the motorbike revolution.

The role of the motorbikes in Hanoi today would be impossible without the market reforms of *doi moi*. The reforms opened up the Vietnamese economy to global and regional trade networks. This allowed motorbikes to enter the streets and simultaneously legitimised private consumption. As this paper has shown, however, the economic processes that allowed for the motorbike revolution were more complicated than simply a case for increased economic openness would suggest. Indeed, Vietnam protected its borders against imports, and the rather unplanned development of the China shock was vital for making motorbikes available to large parts of the population.

Still, economic determinism cannot give us the full picture as other regions of the world have never come close to the levels of motorbike ownership seen in Vietnam. Moto-mobility as the dominant means of transport is an Asian phenomenon, evident from figures showing how 84 per cent of the world motorbike demand is expected to come from the Asia/Pacific region in 2016 (Freedonia, 2013). It is quite obvious that other Asian countries, such as Japan, Taiwan, China, and Thailand, have been vital to the specific developments in Vietnam, both through trade and production and as examples of motorbike-driven societies.

Crucially, '[t]he effect of production on consumption is mediated through the nexus of practices' (Warde, 2005, p. 141). The important role of bicycles at earlier 'stages of development' has played an important role for the subsequent

popularity of motorbikes. The earlier prevalence of vélomobility firmly established two-wheeled practices, shaping and being shaped by urban infrastructure. In Hanoi, this development continued and was strengthened by motorbikes (Hansen, 2015b). Urry (2004, p. 27) has famously conceptualised automobility as a 'self-organizing autopoietic, non-linear system'. I argue the same can be said about 'the system of moto-mobility' that is in place in Hanoi. Once motorbikes started replacing bicycles, motorbikes and the two-wheeled geography and infrastructure of mobility and consumption in Hanoi have developed dialectically, reinforcing each other (Hansen, 2015b). While I argue the use value of motorbikes within this system, including a significant degree of lock-in, is the most important factor in explaining the popularity of two-wheeled mobility, motorbikes are simultaneously subject to often complex processes of distinction and changing symbolic value. This in turn has changed with increasing affluence. In a context where motorbikes represented a scarce commodity, just being on two wheels could be enough to gain social status. When owning a motorbike is close to completely normalised, distinction requires new versions of motorbikes, something that contemporary capitalism has proved extremely efficient at providing.

Economic reforms, regional economic integration, two-wheeled practices and the system of moto-mobility have thus shaped Hanoi into a city of motorbikes. The motorised two-wheeler is integral to close to all aspects of everyday life in the Vietnamese capital. But systems can be broken, and Hanoi has in recent years experienced a surge in car ownership. While still far fewer in numbers than motorbikes, the number of cars is increasing much faster, indeed as much as 222 percent between 2005 and 2011 according to the World Bank (EPS, 2014). While very expensive to acquire and use, and less convenient for driving in the narrow streets, cars provide safer, cleaner, more comfortable and even healthier mobility in the polluted Hanoi air. They also now repre-

sent perhaps the main aspirational good for the middle class. This in turn is visible in new developments in the traditional fringes of the capital, where so-called New Urban Areas are constructed with an embedded expectation of a future system of automobility (Hansen, 2015b). Thus, while the two-wheeled icon of Vietnam continues to dominate the streets of Hanoi, it remains to be seen how long this will last.

Concluding remarks: A future on two or four wheels?

The remarkable increase in motorbike ownership in Vietnam today can be understood from a consumption perspective accounting for changes in the provision of goods as well as its relationship to everyday practices. This paper has argued that formal (Japan, Taiwan) and informal (China) economic integration has played a crucial role in the motorbike revolution, in particular the 'China shock' made motorbikes gradually become available to 'everyone'. In addition, Vietnam was previously dominated by bicycles, and the motorbike has effectively replaced its non-motorised predecessor as a similar but faster and more convenient technology. There can still be a significant amount of status attached to some models of motorbikes, but the motorbike is now facing tough competition from private cars. It is still, as Truitt (2008) has argued, in traffic that you see the new middle class in Vietnam. For Truitt this refers to the owners of motorbikes, and you can arguably still spot the middle class by the type of motorbikes they drive. Increasingly, however, the middle class is now to be found within the confines of a private automobile (although, interestingly, very few car owners seem to get rid of their motorbikes, see Hansen, 2015b).

The millions of motorbikes certainly bring a certain feeling of chaos to the streets of Hanoi. The system of moto-mobility does have its logic, however, and actually works fairly well. If you are a motorist, that is. Large parts of Hanoi today

are a nightmare for pedestrians. The motorbike must take part of the blame for this, and it also plays a central role in giving Vietnam among the highest number of traffic casualties in the world (Short and Pinet-Peralta 2010). Nevertheless, the biggest threat to mobility in Hanoi today is the surge in private car ownership (Hansen, in press). Meanwhile, motorbike companies are worrying about stagnating sales, and there is much talk of a saturated motorbike market (e.g. Thanh Nien News 2014). The private car is finally the new king in town, also in Hanoi, although it fits badly into Hanoi's 'moto-mobile' geography (Hansen, 2015; Hansen, in press). The motorbike is here to stay for now, but the chaos of Hanoi traffic may just get worse as the two-wheeler has to compete for scarce road space with its four-wheeled big brother. Unfortunately for the aspirations of many Hanoians today, if the four million motorbikes are to be replaced by cars, an image of the future of Hanoi could quite possibly be seen in the almost completely gridlocked streets of Manila, Jakarta and Bangkok.

ARVE HANSEN is a PhD candidate in Human Geography and a Research Fellow at the Centre for Development and the Environment at the University of Oslo. His primary areas of interest are consumption, development and mobility, and the interplay of these, particularly in Vietnam. Email arve.hansen@sum.uio.no

References

- Butler, G. & Hannam, K. (2014). Performing Expatriate Mobilities in Kuala Lumpur. *Mobilities*, 9, 1-20.
- Büscher, M., Urry, J. & Witchger, K. (2011). Introduction: Mobile Methods. In: Büscher, M., Urry, J. & Witchger, K. (eds.). *Mobile Methods*. London: Routledge, p. 1-19.
- Cresswell, T. (2010). Mobilities I: Catching up. *Progress in Human Geography*, 35, 550-558.
- Cresswell, T. (2012). Mobilities II: Still. *Progress in Human Geography*, 36, 645-653.
- Cresswell, T. (2014). Mobilities III: Moving on. *Progress in Human Geography*, 38, 712-721.
- EPS - Economic and Policy Services Pty Ltd (2014). Motorization and urban transport in East Asia: Motorcycle, Motor Scooter & Motorbike Ownership & Use in Hanoi. Technical Report No. 1: Context and Scoping. Hanoi: World Bank.
- Fine, B. (2002). *The world of consumption: the material and cultural revisited*. London: Routledge.
- Freedonia (2013). World Motorcycles: Industry Study with Forecasts for 2016 & 2021. Cleveland: The Freedonia Group. Retrieved from <http://www.freedoniagroup.com/brochure/29xx/2972sm-we.pdf>
- Fujita, M. (2013a). Does China's Economic Rise Help or Hinder the Development of its Neighbours? *Evidence Report*, Institute of Development Studies: UK. Retrieved from <http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/bitstream/handle/123456789/3275/ER45%20Final%20Online.pdf;jsession-id=E651A834F8BA5E7543176B6EAB90D7E3?sequence=1>
- Fujita, M. (2013b). The Rise of Local Assemblers in the Vietnamese Motorcycle Industry: The Dynamics and Diversity of Industrial Organization. In: Sakata, S. (ed.). *Vietnam's economic entities in transition*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 146-166.
- Gainsborough, M. (2010). *Vietnam: rethinking the state*. London: Zed Books.
- Gillen, J. (2015). Streets of fire: motorbike mobilities in Vietnam. *Area*, doi: 10.1111/area.12225
- Gronow, J. & Warde, A. (2001). *Ordinary consumption*. London: Routledge.
- GSO – General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2012). *Household Living Standard Survey 2012*. Hanoi: Socialist Republic of Vietnam.
- Hansen, A. (2015a). The best of both worlds? The power and pitfalls of Vietnam's development model. In: Hansen, A. & Wethal, U. (eds.). *Emerging Economies and Challenges to Sustainability: Theories, Strategies, Local Realities*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 92-105.
- Hansen, A. (2015b). Transport in transition: Doi moi and the consumption of cars and motorbikes in Hanoi. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, doi: 10.1177/1469540515602301.

- Hansen, A. (in press). Driving development? The problems and promises of the car in Vietnam. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*.
- Masina, P. (2006). *Vietnam's Development Strategies*, New York: Routledge.
- MONRE (2007). *National State of Environment 2007*. Hanoi: MONRE (Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment)
- Nguyen Truong Quy (2014). Riding for Inspiration. In: Nguyen Truong Quy. *The Wandering Motorcycle*. Essay collection. Original title: *Xe máy tiểu ngạo*. Translated by Jacob O. Gold, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Ann Arbor.
- Pinch, P. & Reimer, S. (2012). Moto-mobilities: Geographies of the Motorcycle and Motorcyclists. *Mobilities*, 7, 439 - 57.
- Sahakian, M. & Wilhite H. (2014). Making practice theory more practicable: Towards more sustainable forms of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14, 25-44.
- Sheller, M. & Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and Planning A*, 38, 207-226.
- Short, J. R. & Pinet-Peralta, L. M. (2010). No Accident: Traffic and Pedestrians in the Modern City. *Mobilities*, 5, 41-59.
- Slater, D. (1997). *Consumer culture and modernity*. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.
- Thanh Nien News (2014a). Vietnam motorbike market slump to continue. Retrieved from <http://www.thanhniennews.com/business/vietnam-motorbike-market-slump-to-continue-23874.html>
- Truitt, A. (2008). On the back of a motorbike: Middle-class mobility in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. *American Ethnologist*, 35, 3-19.
- Urry, J. (2004). The 'System' of Automobility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21, 25-39.
- Vann, EF. (2012). Afterword: Consumption and middle-class subjectivity in Vietnam. In: Nguyen-Marshall V., Drummond, LBW & Belanger, D. (eds.), *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam*. Dordrecht: Springer, p. 157-170.
- Warde, A. (2014). After taste: Culture, consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 14, 279-303.
- Warde A. (2005). Consumption and Theories of Practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5, 131-153.
- Wilhite, H. (2008). *Consumption and the transformation of everyday life: a view from South India*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- World Bank (2011). *Vietnam Urbanization Review*, Hanoi: World Bank. Available at <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/2826/669160ESW0P1130Review000Full-0report.pdf?sequence=1>

Wunker, S. (2011) *How the Vespa became Vietnamese*. Forbes. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/stephenwunker/2011/11/08/how-the-vespa-became-vietnamese/>

Creating a Colonial Consciousness? Reflections on Audience Reception at the Tokyo Colonization Exposition of 1912

John Hennessey

It is well-recognized in historical scholarship that in both Japan and the West, expositions were an important site for the dissemination of colonial propaganda in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the question of how colonial themes were perceived and understood by visitors to these events remains largely unanswered in this literature. Through an examination of the Colonization Exposition [*Takushoku hakurankai*] that was held in Tokyo in 1912, this essay reflects on the question of audience reception, or how media texts both influence and are interpreted by their consumers. Using a previously unexamined contemporary magazine article that describes visitor reactions, it argues that the messages that the organizers of this exposition intended to send were interpreted in diverse ways by the viewing public, ranging from acceptance to rejection. The discussion centers on notions of dignified public education, human exhibits and the methodological difficulties involved in determining media reception from historical documents.

Keywords: *Takushoku hakurankai*, expositions, Japanese colonialism, reception, popular imperialism, historical methodology

‘... in large cities in the West a convention of products is held once every few years, which is announced to the world, and specialty products, useful machines, antiques and rare items from every nation are gathered to show to people from around the world. This is called an exposition [hakurankai]...’

Fukuzawa, 1866, p. 97-99; “Yukichi Fukuzawa Goes to the Expo,” 2010

It was in this manner that Fukuzawa Yukichi described the phenomenon of the international exposition in his 1866 bestseller *Things Western* [*Seiyō jijō*], which spread basic information about the West to a wide audience in Japan. Fukuzawa himself was among the first Japanese to visit such an exposition, the second London International Exposition of 1862, a visit which made quite an impression on him (National Diet Library, 2011). Expositions were indeed a central institution in the West for trading knowledge and projecting power during this period. As many scholars have recognized, international expositions were closely linked with colonialism and represent-

ed a significant venue for disseminating discourses of empire (for example, MacKenzie, 1984; Oh, 2008; Hotta-Lister & Nish, 2013; Matsuda, 2003; Yamaji, 2008).

Japanese leaders were quick to see the importance of expositions and committed significant resources to participating in world’s fairs from early on. They also quickly adapted the genre to domestic ends, holding industrial trade fairs on an increasingly grand scale in Japan. As Noriko Aso has argued, expositions became part of a Meiji “exhibitionary complex” aimed at public education in the regime’s program of industrialization and “civilization” (Aso, 2014, p. 16). Consistent with

trends in the West and Japanese leaders' desire to demonstrate their country's power and influence, colonialism became a central theme in Japan's emerging exhibitionary complex shortly after Japan began its overseas expansion. From as early as 1903, expositions in Japan were used to educate the Japanese public and instill feelings of pride about their country's budding empire.

This essay focuses on a particularly salient example of this colonial exhibitionary trend: the Colonization Exposition [*Takushoku hakurankai*] that took place in Tokyo's Ueno Park in October and November 1912. Although Japan's first official "colony", Taiwan, had been presented to a broad Japanese public at a 1903 industrial fair in Osaka (Matsuda, 2003), the Colonization Exposition arguably represented the first large-scale attempt to systematically introduce the Japanese metropolitan public to their country's colonial empire through an exposition, and included exhibits from Japan's then numerous colonized territories (Yamaji, 2004, p. 25-26). In terms of its size and timing, this exposition is of particular historical interest as it took place after Japan had acquired most of its colonial empire, but shortly before the First World War began to shake the foundations of the nineteenth-century world order and before Japan began to make its rhetorical turn from Western colonial discourse to pan-Asian "co-prosperity".

Audience Reception: A Methodological Challenge

Surprisingly, given the abundant literature on colonial propaganda at expositions in the West and Japanese expositions in general, the Tokyo Colonization Exposition has only received detailed attention in one study by Matsuda Kyōko (Matsuda, 2013). Matsuda provides a compelling critical analysis of the presentation and contents of this exposition, but like most other research on colonial expositions, her text leaves the question of how colonial messages might have been

received by spectators largely unanswered. In a 2004 article, Yamaji Katsuhiko briefly considers the presentation of various colonized peoples from around the Japanese Empire at this exposition in comparison with "human exhibits" at other Japanese fairs in subsequent decades. He unproblematically assumes that the exoticized images of colonized peoples presented at the different fairs "permeated the heads of the [Japanese] general public" (Yamaji, 2004, p. 30).

While crucial to understanding the role of expositions in propagating imperial mindsets, the question of *audience reception*, or how exposure to various media affects people's attitudes and ways of thinking, is difficult to answer in a satisfying way. Media studies scholars and some discourse analysts have strongly contested the notion that ideological media wield direct control over public opinion, arguing that audience members are more than merely passive recipients of information (Fairclough, 1995; Staiger, 2005; Schröder, 2007). They convincingly argue that audience members react to the information they receive individually and have the possibility to interpret the text in various ways ranging from acceptance to indifference to resistance. Interpretations that differ from the author's intentions can also be the result of conscious or unconscious misreadings. As a result, in the words of media discourse analyst Kim Christian Schröder, analyses of the "encoding" or production of texts and of the texts themselves should be supplemented with research on how texts are "decoded" or consumed in order to arrive at a "holistic" understanding of the socially-situated meaning of the texts (Schröder 2007, p. 84). In other words, the production, content and consumption of a media text must *all* be considered in order to arrive at a complete understanding of the meaning and effect of the text, but most scholarship only focuses on the first two of these dimensions, omitting the crucial component of audience reception.

This tendency is especially strong in the field of history, where scholars are often faced

with overwhelming methodological difficulties in accurately assessing audience reception. Media studies scholars rely heavily on interviews and questionnaires in their study of present-day textual production and consumption, whereas historians' data is often limited to the text itself since its authors and audiences are typically either dead or interacted with the text so long ago that they are unreliable as sources. Historians often have no choice but to use indirect evidence to make educated guesses about audience reception, an approach that can lead to widely varying interpretations. A case in point is a heated debate between Jon M. MacKenzie and Bernard Porter over the imperial awareness of the population of 19th and 20th century Great Britain. Studying imperial propaganda and popular culture products in a wide variety of media forms, MacKenzie argues that the sheer volume of imperially-themed mass cultural products in pre-World War II Britain is evidence of a widespread interest in and enthusiasm for the British Empire (MacKenzie 1986, p. 12). Porter, on the other hand, contends that this is an unfounded assumption since there is little evidence that such products were consumed as their authors intended (or indeed at all) and that only the upper crust of British society could have had any detailed knowledge of or interest in the Empire (Porter 2004). Needless to say, these two interpretations of available source material have wide-ranging implications for any assessment of collective responsibility for the wrongs of British imperialism.

Recognizing the methodological limitations inherent in all studies of historical audience reception, this short essay nonetheless aims to supplement existing research on the production and content of the 1912 Tokyo Colonization Exposition with fortuitously surviving source material that can to some extent further our knowledge of how its exhibits were perceived by visitors. Arguing that responses were not uniform, I reflect on how Japanese visitors to the Colonization Exposition may have ignored, subverted, or

subconsciously accepted the exhibits' depiction of Japanese colonialism. Guiding my study is a previously unexamined contemporary account of visitor behavior at the exhibition that appeared in a magazine article from the colonial publication *Chōsen oyobi manshū* [*Korea and Manchuria*]. This Seoul-based, Japanese-language magazine was unusual for its anti-establishment, pro-democratic character, quickly becoming "the platform of radical settler politics" (Uchida, 2011, p. 130). The article, written by an anonymous author, not only gives extensive treatment of the exposition's Korea exhibits, but also presents a rare account of visitor reactions and a critical appraisal of the venue that provide tantalizing clues about audience reception (Tokumei-shi ["Mr. Anonymous"], 1912), while simultaneously providing a useful background for considering the methodological limitations of historical media reception studies.

The Goals and Content of the Exposition

Before considering audience reception, however, it is first important to briefly present the exposition's organization, goals, and presentation. The president of the exposition committee was Kabayama Sukenori, former governor general of Taiwan (Takushoku Hakurankai Zanmu Toriatsukaijo, 1913, p. 2). Other members included the civil governor of Taiwan and high administrators from Korea, Karafuto, Hokkaidō, and the Kwantung Leased Territory, as well as bureaucrats from the Colonial Office [*Takushokukyoku*] (Matsuda, 2013, p. 126). The exposition leadership also included Tokyo Imperial University anthropologist Tsuboi Shōgorō, who had previously arranged colonial human exhibits at the 1903 Osaka expo (Matsuda, 2003, chap. 5; Yamaji, 2004). The Colonization Exposition was technically privately organized, but through these figures it had strong ties to the state and the official colonial establishment (Matsuda, 2013, p. 126).

The *Official Report* explicitly reveals the event's propagandistic nature in its presentation of

the exposition's aims. After asserting the importance of a colonial empire to a country's future, the report laid out the twin goals of the expo: to generate interest for colonial products among metropolitan consumers and, more importantly, to create a sort of "colonial mindset" [*shokumin shisō*] among the populace, so that the great work of the empire would find support among the people at large (Takushoku Hakurankai Zanmu Toriatsukaijo, 1913, pp. 1, 4-5). The authors complained of widespread ignorance of and apathy towards colonial matters among the Japanese populace that they hoped to counteract through educational venues like the exposition (Takushoku Hakurankai Zanmu Toriatsukaijo, 1913, p.

4).

The exhibits at the Colonization Exposition consisted primarily of maps, models, colonial products and photos of development projects. A central theme was the vastness of Japan's empire, which was emphasized by frequent references to the range of climates that the empire boasted, from the chilling tundra of Karafuto to the Taiwanese tropics. Another leitmotiv was the diversity of the "races" under Japanese tutelage, presented through models and human zoos. Aspects of the Japanese "civilizing mission" like modern hospitals were also on display, as were traditional Korean crafts and samples of colonial raw materials (Tokumei-shi, 1912).



Figure 1: A contemporary illustration of the Colonization Exposition and its exhibits.
 Source: Takushoku hakurankai. (1912, November 5). *Fūzoku gahō*, 430. Tokyo: Tōyōdō, 13-14. Image courtesy of Waseda University Library.

Subverting Imperial Dignity

The exposition genre has typically been characterized by a conflict of interests between governments' desire for dignified public education and pressures to turn expos into commercial spectacles. In the case of Japan at world's fairs in the West, this struggle usually took the form of Japanese officials trying to stamp out "unauthorized" representations of their country that were not considered sufficiently serious (Lockyer, 2000, p. 13-26). Japanese leaders evidently felt that citizens should appreciate the gravity of the Empire, an imperium that was (mostly) won through the sacrifices of soldiers during the Sino- and Russo-Japanese Wars and should be seen as a source of power, wealth and pride. How well did the organizers of the Colonization Exposition succeed in creating a dignified atmosphere of public education that would inculcate an imperial consciousness in the viewing public?

Seen from a quantitative perspective, the exposition was a resounding success. Lasting only two months, it attracted some 800,000 visitors, far exceeding the organizers' expectations. Emergency measures were taken to accommodate the crowds that swamped the exposition gates shortly after the fair opened (Matsuda 2013, pp. 134-135). Upon closer inspection, however, it is unclear whether visitors had the kind of educational experience the organizers intended. The *Chōsen oyobi manshū* article repeatedly emphasizes the extreme congestion within the exposition hall. Visitors had no control over the speed at which they progressed past the exhibits. The author colorfully compares the experience to being inside a dragon dance costume slowly snaking around the hall (Tokumei-shi, 1912, p. 50-52). In this claustrophobic environment, it must have been difficult to properly view and understand the exhibits, and any aura of imperial dignity the organizers hoped to create was undoubtedly compromised.

It is also unclear whether it was actually the colonial exhibits that attracted the crowds, raising the question of whether the exposition's high

attendance figures can be taken as a measure of popular enthusiasm for imperialism. Like nearly all expositions of the period, the Colonization Exposition had both "serious" exhibits and largely unrelated entertainment such as sideshows and food vendors. This blended character has caused many difficulties for scholars trying to gauge popular interest in imperialism (see for example Porter, 2004). To what extent were imperial themes actually conveyed at these expositions, when they apparently competed with popular entertainment? Again, the *Chōsen oyobi manshū* article offers some clues. According to the author, the many school groups that attended the exposition were primarily interested in educational exhibits such as calligraphy and Korean-style clothes sewn by students at Korean girls' schools (Tokumei-shi, 1912, p. 52-53). Perhaps the organizers of the exposition had already discovered the still-popular technique of attracting visitors to events to see their own or their children's work on display, but on the other hand, such exhibits may well have drawn attention away from others with more overtly imperial themes. It is difficult to say whether the commercial attractions at colonial expositions such as this one primarily distracted attention from the official exhibits or lured in visitors who would otherwise never have been exposed to the colonial displays.

In any case, the article's reportage strongly suggests that many visitors did not see the exposition in the dignified light the organizers intended. For one thing, it treats the exposition more like a carnival than an educational venue, at one point comparing it to a "Luna Park" amusement park (ibid, p. 51). Moreover, rather than simply reporting their content, the article consistently appraises the presentation and aesthetic quality of the various exhibits as if the Colonization Exhibition were a kind of art exhibition. The article's very genre thereby subverts the dignified, public education character of the exposition intended by its organizers. Its judgments are not always flattering either – exhibits are often (but not al-

ways) presented as unskillful [*setsuretsu*], shabby [*iyashii*] or as displaying “superficial knowledge” [*sengakushiki*] (ibid).

The article also provides an anecdotal indication of the diverse backgrounds of the exposition’s Japanese spectators and the resulting possibility for alternative interpretations or misreadings of exhibits. Although by 1912 Japanese leaders had made much progress towards creating a unified and homogenous nation-state, regional identities remained strong and both differences between city-dwellers and Japanese from the countryside as well as class differences were apparent to all. Folksy behavior by “country bumpkins” was frequently lampooned by journalists (Fujitani, 1996, p. 222), including the author of the *Chōsen oyobi manshū* article. The author recounts how he or she overheard a conversation between a “country gentleman” [*denshin*] and his wife as they peered at an exhibit that happened to be in a black display case. The fairgoer was explaining to his wife that the display case had been painted black because of the mourning period of the Meiji Emperor (who had died several months earlier). The author of the article “couldn’t help but burst out laughing” at this misunderstanding (Tokumei-shi, 1912, p. 52). From the point of view of audience reception, this comical example shows that meaning could be read into different aspects of the exposition in ways never intended by its planners. In this particular case, it seems that the “country gentleman” and his wife read imperial dignity into the color of a display case, whereas the anonymous Seoul journalist undermined this aura through his or her disparagement of exhibit quality and mockery of the ruralites’ misplaced respect.

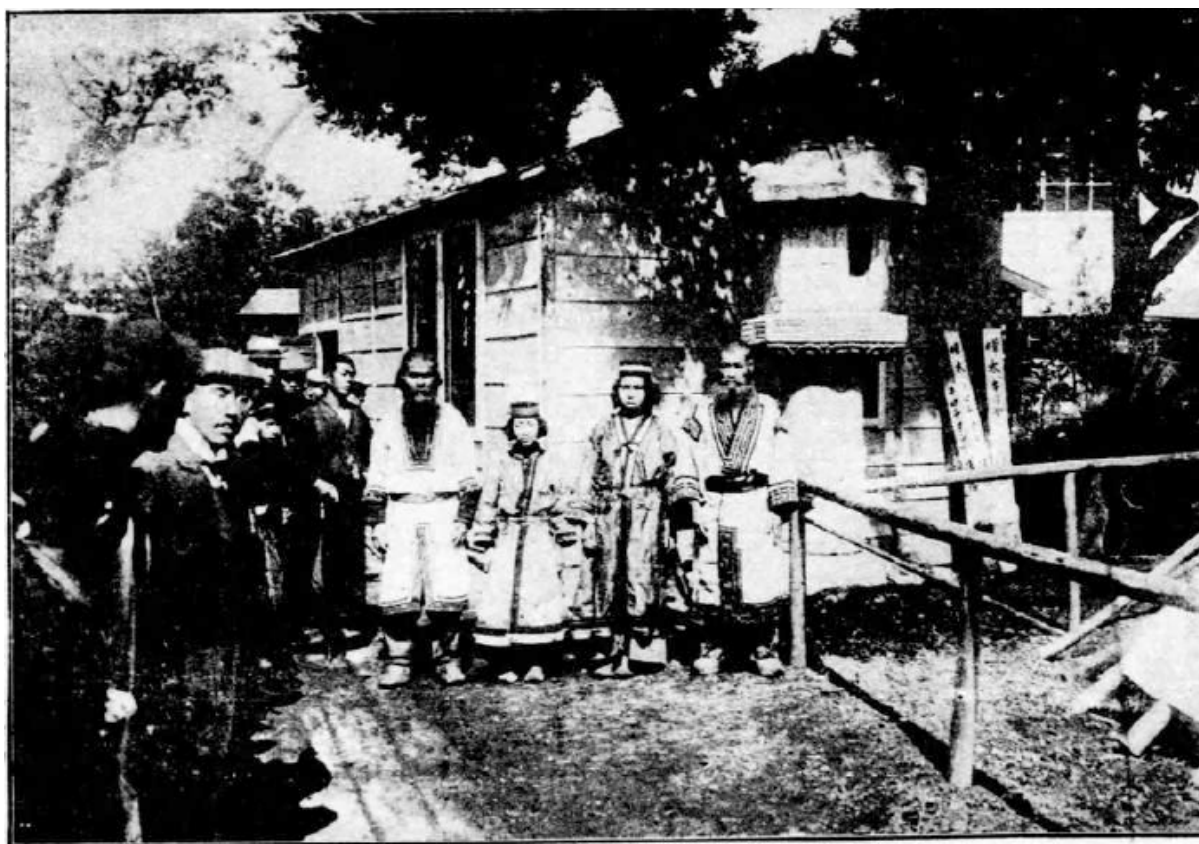
Contested Human Exhibits

Starting in the mid-nineteenth century, a new method of displaying national power became a constant fixture at expositions: human exhibits of “inferior” ethnic groups, usually from the exhibiting country’s colonies. This colonial twist

to the exposition genre was enormously popular; droves of residents of the imperial metropole eagerly lined up to catch a glimpse of “exotic” peoples who were displayed much like zoo animals. Human exhibitions were initially justified by their “scientific” and “educational” value and were often organized by anthropologists or other scholars but increasingly became overtly commercialized spectacles (Matsuda, 2013, p. 142). The very practice of individuals from the colonizing country “speaking for” or representing the culture or lifestyle colonized for their own ends is itself deeply problematic, but forcing individuals from “exotic” colonized groups to live for several months in the constant gaze of gaping crowds in a pre-determined “traditional” setting was an especially flagrant kind of epistemic violence.

Within the fairgrounds of the Colonization Exposition, human exhibits were in many ways the centerpiece of the show. In the central courtyard of the main exhibition hall, a “native village” [*dojin buraku*] of “traditional” dwellings was set up as the background for a multi-ethnic exhibit of Japan’s different colonized subjects. The village featured Taiwanese of Chinese stock, Taiwanese aborigines, Ainu, and Oroka and Nivk people from Karafuto. Most of these people came in families and were intended to be observed living their “traditional” daily life, but there were also some craftsmen that could demonstrate “traditional” craft production to visitors (Matsuda, 2013, p. 135).

Their popularity notwithstanding, it is difficult to make any general statements about attitudes towards human exhibits in turn-of-the-century Japan. Although they were the focus of the 1912 exposition’s advertising campaigns and occupied a central place on the fairgrounds (Matsuda, 2013, p. 138-39), the *Chōsen oyobi manshū* article only mentions them in passing, devoting far more attention to specific categories of craft exhibits (Tokumei-shi, 1912, p. 51). Unfortunately, I have been unable to find evidence of debates over the human zoo at the Colonization



リモロキチ工大 マカヲ妻 耶六男長 子ルテ娘 助六澤坪 ヌイア 太樺

Figure 2: Ainu from Karafuto on display at the Colonization Exposition. Source: Meiji Kinenkai. (1912). *Takushoku hakurankai kinen shashinchō*. Tokyo: Meiji Kinenkai. In National Diet Library, Digital Library from the Meiji Era. Retrieved from <http://kindai.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/904743>.

Exposition, but such exhibits had been highly controversial and drawn vociferous protests in Osaka only nine years previously. At that time, a number of Japanese proponents of colonial assimilation argued that the residents of Japan's new overseas territories were already "Japanese" and it was therefore demeaning and unpatriotic to put them on display (Ziomek, 2014, p. 508). At the Osaka exposition and on several other occasions, the inclusion of Okinawans drew the greatest criticism, because these were widely considered to be fully assimilated "Japanese", but there were even certain groups of Japanese who felt that Koreans and Taiwanese were too "civilized" or "Japanese" to be subject to such indignities (Matsuda, 2013,

p. 123-24). Only two years before the opening of the Colonization Exposition, at the Japan-British Exhibition held in London in 1910, journalist Hasegawa Nyozekan "viewed the showing of the Ainu and aborigines of Taiwan, with visitors looking at these people as if they were rare animals in a zoo, as matters of humanitarian and moral concern" (Hotta-Lister, 1999, p. 145-146). The colonial processes of othering and exoticization employed at the Colonization Exposition were therefore not uncontested, even if they became a key feature of Japanese expositions for a time. Although the *Chōsen oyobi manshū* article provides no evidence on this point, it seems unlikely that opposition to human exhibits would

have disappeared only a few years later in 1912, again demonstrating the importance of recognizing the interpretive agency of individual audience members. In short, more evidence is necessary to gauge popular sentiments about the 1912 human exhibits, but judging from contemporaneous protests to similar human zoos, public opinion was almost certainly divided about the desirability of displaying Japanese colonial subjects in this way, at least when it came to certain geographical or ethnic groups.

Conclusion

As this essay has demonstrated, one cannot unproblematically assume that Japanese visitors to the Colonization Exposition left with exactly the “colonial consciousness” the organizers hoped to impart. In general, an analysis of official primary sources for expositions such as exhibition catalogues needs to be supplemented by sources such as the magazine article treated above in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of the events’ impact. Sources like this cannot provide an accurate account of popular sentiments, but nevertheless give some indication of the diversity of possible interpretations of the exhibits, ranging from wholesale acceptance to condemnation.

There is a tendency in English-language literature to overestimate the extent of Japanese pre-war indoctrination. As Takashi Fujitani (1996, p. 200-201) has presciently warned, “On the one hand, we must avoid a Durkheimian tendency to assume that [...] invented traditions and beliefs are necessarily and unproblematically accepted. On the other hand, we must guard against a desire to deny the impact and hold over the Japanese people of a whole host of symbols, beliefs, and practices” promoted by the Meiji state including colonial pageantry. This essay has suggested that the themes of colonial grandeur and dignity promoted by the organizers of the Colonization Exposition were undermined in various ways or subject to heterodox interpretations by some visitors.

The crush of visitors, the presence of food vendors hawking their wares and other factors created a carnival atmosphere quite unlike that of a staid public museum. The low quality of certain exhibits seems to have drawn some visitor criticism, and the questionable morality of the human zoo almost certainly also did so. Nevertheless, even for sceptics, the Colonization Exposition still might have served the perhaps unintended function of naturalizing the Empire. The very lack of solemnity surrounding the exposition’s imperial themes, which served as a background to student projects or sideshows, may well have subtly contributed to gradual naturalizing the idea of Japan as a colonial empire, of which Korean schools and Taiwanese exports were just as much a part as their metropolitan counterparts. In any case, this short essay has demonstrated that the early 20th century Japanese public’s views of imperialism were both diverse and complex and deserve further investigation.

JOHN HENNESSEY is a Doctoral student in History at Linnaeus University where he is affiliated with the Centre for Concurrences in Colonial and Postcolonial Studies and the Swedish National Graduate School of History. His primary areas of interest include 19th and 20th century imperialism, Japanese history, discourse analysis, nationalism and propaganda. Email: john.hennessey@lnu.se

References

- Aso, N. (2014). *Public Properties: Museums in Imperial Japan*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold. Top of Form
Bottom of Form
- Fujitani, T. (1996). *Splendid Monarchy: Power and Pageantry in Modern Japan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Fukuzawa Y. (1866). *Seiyō Jijō*. Tokyo: Shōkodō, 1866, 97-99.
- Hotta-Lister, A. (1999). *The Japan-British Exhibition of 1910: Gateway to the Island Empire of the East*. Richmond, UK: Japan Library.
- Hotta-Lister, A., & Nish, I. H. (Eds.). (2013). *Commerce and Culture at the 1910 Japan-British Exhibition: Centenary Perspectives*. Leiden: Global Oriental.
- Lockyer, A. (2000). *Japan at the Exhibition: 1867-1970*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Stanford University, Palo Alto.
- MacKenzie, J. M. (1984). *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- MacKenzie, J. M. (1986). Introduction. In J. M. MacKenzie (Ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1-16.
- Matsuda, K. (2003). *Teikoku no shisen: Hakurankai to ibunka hyōshō*. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan.
- Matsuda, K. (2013). Ningen no “tenji” to shokuminchi hyōshō: 1912-nen takushoku hakurankai wo chūshin ni. In Nanzan daigaku jinruigaku hakubutsukan (Ed.), *Hakubutsukan shiryō no saisei*. Tokyo: Iwata Shoin, 120-49.
- Meiji Kinenkai. (1912). *Takushoku hakurankai kinen shashinchō*. Tokyo: Meiji Kinenkai.
- National Diet Library of Japan Reference and Special Collections Department. (2011) Expositions, where the Modern Technology of the Times was Exhibited: Second London International Exposition of 1862, First International Exposition Seen by Japanese. *National Diet Library of Japan Website*. Retrieved from <http://www.ndl.go.jp/exposition/e/s1/1862-1.html>.
- Oh S.-M. (2008). *Consuming the Modern: The Everyday in Colonial Seoul 1915-1937*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Columbia University, New York.
- Porter, B. (2004). *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schröder, K. C. (2007). Media Discourse Analysis: Researching Cultural Meanings from Inception to Reception. *Textual Cultures*, 2(2), 77-99.

- Staiger, J. (2005). *Media Reception Studies*. New York: New York University Press.
- Takushoku hakurankai. (1912, November 5). *Fūzoku gahō*, 439. Tokyo: Tōyōdō, 12-18.
- Takushoku Hakurankai Zanmu Toriatsukaijo. (1913). *Takushoku hakurankai jimu hōkoku*. Tokyo: Takushoku Hakurankai Zanmu Toriatsukaijo.
- Tokumei-shi. (1912, December). Takuhaku no Chōsen-kan Bekken. *Chōsen oyobi manshū*, 614, 50-54.
- Uchida, J. (2011). *Brokers of Empire: Japanese Settler Colonialism in Korea, 1876-1945*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Yamaji, K. (2004, October). Takushoku hakurankai to “Teikoku hantōnai no shojinshu”. *Kwansei Gakuin Sociology Department Studies*, 97, 25-40.
- Yamaji, K. (2008). *Kindai Nihon no shokuminchi hakurankai*. Tokyo: Fūkyōsha.
- Yukichi Fukuzawa Goes to the Expo. (2010). *Keio Views*, 3. Retrieved from http://www.keio.ac.jp/en/keio_in_depth/keio_view/2010/03.html.
- Ziomek, K. L. (2014, May). The 1903 Human Pavilion: Colonial Realities and Subaltern Subjectivities in Twentieth-Century Japan. *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 73(2), 493-516.

Preserving Bang Krachao's Green Space through Agriculture

Kees Krul

Urban sprawl brings about considerable changes in the peripheral areas of the city. Rich in many vegetation types, mangrove forests, and agricultural plots, Bang Krachao is one of the largest remaining green areas in the proximity of Bangkok. This area is currently under threat as Bangkok's urban sprawl has not gone without effect in Bang Krachao: green areas are diminishing due to an increased developmental interest in the area together with a growing number of residents. This essay examines the role of the agricultural sector in persevering the remaining green spaces by employing a SWOT-analysis. Findings show that despite a number of weaknesses and threats, there are several important opportunities the sector can capitalize on. Corresponding initiatives are suggested that help to preserve the remaining green spaces and at the same time enhance Bang Krachao's agriculture sector. Without new initiatives to reverse urban sprawl, it is likely that the 'green lung of Bangkok' will be filled with more concrete and asphalt.

Keywords: Urban Agriculture, Bangkok, Urbanization, Green Spaces, Bang Krachao, SWOT

The world's population is on the rise: while the Earth currently holds 7.3 billion people, it is expected that this number will increase to 9.5 billion by 2050 (UNDESA, 2013). The world is getting more urbanized, both absolutely and relatively; the urban population recently exceeded the rural population for the first time in history. As an outcome the world's landscape is increasingly occupied with more and larger cities, inducing deep changes in the spatial realm. Accordingly, the combined challenges of accommodating the high pressures of economic and population growth and urbanization pose serious challenges to urban planners. Failure often results in considerable social and environmental costs, such as air and water pollution, traffic congestion, and the loss of green spaces. As this essay will demonstrate, agriculture in high-density environments make a contribution to making cities more sustainable and preserving green spaces.

This essay uses Bang Krachao, one of the largest green areas in the direct proximity of Bangkok, as a case study. The study is based on primary data collected through interviews with experts, local officers and scholars, semi-structured inter-

views and a group interview conducted with farmers in Bang Krachao, as well as site observations. A SWOT-analysis is employed to examine the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of Bang Krachao's agricultural sector. The SWOT - an abbreviation for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Strengths - is widely used as a tool for planning purposes (Helms & Nixon, 2010). Weihrich (1999) modified the SWOT into the format of a matrix, matching the internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) with its external factors (opportunities and threats) to generate strategies. In accordance with the results of the analysis, corresponding initiatives are suggested with the aim to (i) enhance Bang Krachao's agricultural sector, and (ii) help to preserve the remaining green areas against the backdrop of Bangkok's urbanization.

Bangkok's green lung

Ever since Bangkok became a capital city, the city and surrounding areas have evolved as Thailand's center of urban growth. Industrial growth accelerated during the post-war period and accor-

dingly Bangkok attracted a large wave of rural and foreign migrants. The pressure in the inner city increased and resulted in soaring land prices, exacerbating pollution and heavy traffic congestion, which motivated a geographical drift into Bangkok's periphery (Thaitakoo & McGrath, 2009).

Bang Krachao, administered in the Phra Pradeang district, is a peripheral area of Bangkok and has become one of the last-standing large-scale green areas in Bangkok today (Figure 1).

Rich in many vegetation types, gardens, mangrove forests and agricultural fields, the area comprises approximately 2000 hectares and is home to some 40,000 inhabitants. The 'green lung of Bangkok', as the area is often referred to, plays a key role in the city's ecological and climate control systems. Bang Krachao's many trees for instance, provide a flow of fresh air into the dense city. Culturally, Bang Krachao is rich in its cultural heritage, traditional lifestyles, and combined



Figure 1. An aerial view of Bangkok and Bang Krachao, which is sometimes referred to as a 'pig stomach' or 'green lung' (used by permission, © 2015 Esri, DigitalGlobe, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, GeoEye, USDA FSA, USGS, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community)

with its high variety of wildlife and biodiversity, the area makes for a unique and highly valuable part of the city (Figure 2).

Agriculture in Bang Krachao remains an important source of income in the area, and is widely practiced by some 800 households over an area of about 400 hectares (Sommeechai, 2012). It is mostly practiced by small-scale farmers who work on plots no larger than one hectare. The agriculture of Bang Krachao includes fruit orchards,

decorative plants, or a mixed pattern of agricultural practices with fish and frog ponds, for example. The three most commonly cultivated fruits are mango, coconut and banana, while a large number of ornamental plants are also grown on the peninsula.



Figure 2. Traditional architecture in Bang Krachao (Source: the author)

The urban threat

Bangkok's continuous urban sprawl and infrastructural improvements have not gone without effect in Bang Krachao. Statistics show that urban settlements are increasingly emerging in the area: while the percentage of green areas was 85 percent in 1990, it had declined to 73 percent in 2001. Simultaneously, the percentage land area classified as urban or construction areas have increased from 11 to 24 percent during the same period (Plake, 2011). The number of residents is also rising, witnessed by an increase from 33,475 inhabitants in 1991 to 39,450 inhabitants in 2009 (ibid). While more residential areas are being constructed (Figure 3), the arrival of new residents, automobiles, and industrial sites in Bangkok and Bang Krachao have caused more waste

and pollution which degrades the quality of land, air and water. Bangkok's main river for instance, the Chao Praya river, circumnavigates around Bang Krachao and determines much of the water quality in the area. Farmers argue that large industrial ships and industrial sites along the river have increasingly polluted the river. Pollution of this kind is especially alarming for food production, as it can contaminate cultivated food (Birley & Lock, 1999).

Bangkok's urban planning system remains largely ineffective in controlling urban sprawl as an outcome of decentralization, government downsizing and an overlap in planning authorities (Ratanawaraha, 2010). Planning authorities lack the staff and budget to effectively reinforce and monitor new developments in Bang Krachao (ibid). Other commenters have argued that



Figure 3 Bang Krachao has become a popular retreat for wealthy Bangkokians during the weekends (Source: the author)

national development plans have traditionally focused on maximum economic benefits while ignoring the importance of green spaces ((Kul-risombat & Siri, 2009) . Even though there are specific construction regulations in Bang Krachao that aim to restrict new developments from taking place, respondents argue that these are not always enforced by the local officials in charge. Another argument is that Bang Krachao is relatively unknown among the residents and tourists of Bangkok (Lambregts et al., 2011). This means that the loss of Bang Krachao's green spaces goes largely unnoticed and there is little public support for the preservation of the area.

A look at Bang Krachao's agricultural sector

Bang Krachao's agricultural sector is characterized by a motivated and committed group of farmers. This study finds an exceptionally high job appreciation from the farmers, with some claiming that farming is "the best job in the world". They also demonstrate a shared concern about urban sprawl in the area, and have staged their own initiatives to strengthen the sector and preserve the remaining green spaces. A related strength is the products of the farmers, which have been recognized for their high quality and excellent taste. Although Bang Krachao's environmental conditions

make it challenging to grow certain crops, farmers claim that it is exactly these conditions which contribute to the distinct taste of their fruits. It also should be noted here that most farmers exclusively use organic fertilizers, instead of chemicals, which makes products from Bang Krachao largely chemical-free and organic. Another related strength is the high market potential, as farmers indicate that there is plenty of demand for their products (Figure 4). Besides Bang Krachao's own popular 'floating market', the proximity to Bangkok also offers a huge market potential.

Several weaknesses of Bang Krachao's agricultural sector can be identified as well. Perhaps the most striking weakness is that there is no re-

newed interest in the farming occupation from the young generation. Farmers claim that the youth find agriculture too physically demanding or simply too dirty, and instead prefer the modern city life on offer just across the Chao Praya river. This raises demographic issues as well, as most farmers are already over 50 years old. One coconut farmer argued that he was no longer able to meet all the physical requirements of his occupation, such as climbing the ladder to collect fruits. Farmers are furthermore found to be ill-organized and communicate poorly much amongst themselves, while NGO's, governmental and extension services remain largely absent. Another weakness is that most farmers do not possess land, but lease



Figure 4 Farmers preparing products for retail (Source: the author)

it from a landholder. As land prices have gone up over the years, it has become more lucrative to sell the land for development purposes instead of using it for farming purposes. Land insecurity is a further issue because farmers often have no formal long-term agreements, and are therefore disincentivized to make the necessary long-term investments on their land. Site observations as illustrated in Figure 5 show many speculative plots in Bang Krachao that have been abandoned and are awaiting to be sold to developers.

Continuous urban sprawl in and around Bang Krachao has resulted in the environmental degradation of land, water and air, further weak-

ening the agricultural sector. This is in addition to problems that arise from changing climatic conditions that affect Bang Krachao, for instance dying plants as a result of high temperatures and overexposure to sunlight. Despite the many weaknesses found in Bang Krachao's agricultural sector, the next section shows that there are also many opportunities that can help to improve the sector and preserve Bang Krachao's green space.

Opportunities for Bang Krachao's agriculture

Global environmental concerns are growing, and



Figure 5 Abandoned and speculative plots (Source: the author)

such concerns are reflected in city planning. Urban agriculture can constitute an important contribution in making cities more green, sustainable, and resilient to changing climatic conditions. Bang Krachao for instance, helps to mitigate Bangkok's urban heat island effect (Lambregts et al., 2011). In both the national plans of Thailand and city plans of Bangkok, environmental issues have become a priority in recent years (NESDP, 2011). It is unfortunate that given Bangkok's weak urban planning system, these intentions continue to remain largely notional (Boonprasirt, 1997). Nevertheless it underlines a concern by political actors at different levels, which can become an important opportunity for Bang Krachao.

Opportunities are also present in the agricultural sector. Sustainable and organic agriculture have been promoted in recent years, together with initiatives that aim to increase productivity yields (Rattanasuteerakul, 2010). The '1 rai 100,000 baht' initiative for example, aims to create a revenue of 100,000 baht per 1 rai (about 3,000 USD per 16 hectares). King Bhumibol's philosophy of a 'sufficiency economy', which has already been promoted by an agricultural learning center in Bang Krachao, is another initiative that stimulates agriculture (Kasem and Thapa, 2012). 'One Tambon One Product' (OTOP), a programme that supports the local products of each Thai sub-district, has also been implemented in each of Bang Krachao's six sub-districts. These examples show that the agricultural sector in the Thai context is dynamic and open to new initiatives.

The uniqueness of the area can also be considered an opportunity. The area is often referred as 'the green lung of Bangkok', 'the best urban oasis of Asia', or as a 'green paradise' (see Marshall, 2006). The area has received royal attention from Thailand's king in 1977, and by the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, who, in 2006, gave a royal recommendation for the conservation and development of the area (Sommechia, 2012). These events have confirmed Bang Krachao's

unique and green character and in turn led to a stricter planning and building code and enhanced the awareness and appreciation of the area.

Initiatives

The current situation of the agriculture in Bang Krachao can be summarized as critical but simultaneously full of strengths and opportunities. Following the findings from the SWOT analysis above, I suggest two strategies that aim to enhance the sector and preserve Bang Krachao's green spaces at the same time.

Diversification of agricultural activities recognizes the different roles and functions that agriculture can offer. The proximity to Bangkok, which in the analysis is interpreted as both a threat and opportunity, plays a key role: over ten million Bangkokians and a large number of tourists make a vast group of potential visitors to the area. Bang Krachao's agricultural sector can diversify from merely food production to other functions such as tourism, recreation and education. A sleeping-on-the-farm initiative, farmer's markets, or educational seminars are common examples among urban agriculture initiatives, which have also been suggested for Bang Krachao (Lambregts et al., 2011; Plake, 2011). Bang Krachao's floating market, which sells local products, as well as various homestay programs have already tapped into some of these opportunities. Income diversification can make the agricultural sector more resilient especially in periods when the sector is hit by natural adversity or market fluctuations. Orientating services towards the general public will also result in more awareness of Bang Krachao and could spark a renewed interest in agriculture, something that is needed to preserve the green areas.

A second initiative is to create a special label for Bang Krachao's agricultural products. Like other similar labels for food, the producers receive benefits such as improved income, economic stability, diversification of income, and

access to new markets (Nelson & Pound, 2009). The farmers can capitalize on the organic nature and high quality of their products, and distribute these throughout Bangkok. Moreover, the label will act as an enticement for people to visit the area and its farms, while also gaining public support for preservation. With a diversification of agricultural activities and a Bang Krachao label, the sector can in turn become more vital by offering prospects for younger generations.

Agriculture in Bang Krachao: A critical but promising future

Given that Bangkok's urbanization continues to enter into Bang Krachao's green realm, without new initiatives it is likely that the 'green lung of Bangkok' will be filled with more concrete and asphalt. This is something that ultimately will ameliorate Bang Krachao's function as a major green space and thus its unique character. This study has indicated that although urbanization poses the greatest threat to Bang Krachao's green domain, the proximity to the city is paradoxically the area's source of potential opportunity. Through the injection of new initiatives, Bangkok's many citizens and tourists need to become more engaged with Bang Krachao's agricultural sector. A healthy interaction stimulated through visits or the selling of local products can prompt the much needed public awareness to preserve the area, whilst concurrently enhancing the agricultural sector. A revived and more resilient agricultural sector will then bring some fresh air into Bangkok's green lung.

KEES KRUL recently graduated with a Master Asian Studies from the Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies at Lund University. His primary areas of interest are food security and agriculture and he is currently in Beijing studying Chinese. Email krul.kees@gmail.com

References

- Birley, M. & Lock, K. (1999). *The health impacts of peri-urban natural resource development*. Liverpool: International Center for Health Impact Assessment. Retrieved from <http://birleyhia.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/periurbanhia.pdf>
- Boonprasirt, S. (1997). *Case report: Bangkok's initiatives for sustainable development*. Retrieved from <http://www.gef.or.jp/20club/E/bangkok.htm>
- Helms, M.M. & Nixon, J. (2010). Exploring SWOT analysis - where are we now? A review of academic research from the last decade. *Strategic Management Journal*, 3, 215-251.
- Kasem, S. & Thapa, G.B. (2012). Sustainable development policies and achievements in the context of the agriculture sector in Thailand. *Sustainable Development*, 20(2), 98-114.
- Kulrisombat, N. & Siri, Y. (2009). *Vulnerable agricultural fringe: the challenge for sustainability of Bangkok* [Powerpoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www2.ir3s.u-tokyo.ac.jp/scrws2009/004%20Niramon%20Kulrisombat.pdf>
- Lambregts, B; Leopairojna, S.K. & Panthasen, T. (2010). *Dealing with high pressures: how to prevent Bangkok's last green lung from turning red?* Bangkok: The Division of Urban and Environmental Planning, Faculty of Architecture, Kasetart University.
- Marshall, A. (2006, May 15). Best Urban Oasis. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1194117,00.html>
- National Economic and Social Development Plan (NESDP) (2011). *Summary of the Eleventh National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012- 2016)*. Retrieved from http://www.nesdb.go.th/Portals/0/news/plan/p11/Plan11_eng.pdf
- Nelson, V. & Pound, B. (2009). *The last ten years: A comprehensive review of the literature on the impact of Fairtrade*. Retrieved from http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/2009/about_us/2010_03_NRI_Full_Literature_Review.pdf
- Plake, L. (2011). "Stadttschungel: ein entwicklungskonzept für Bangkoks letzte grüne Lunge". [Urban jungle: a concept for the development of Bangkok's last green lung]. Kassel: University of Kassel.
- Ratanawaraha, A. (2010). *Regulatory and governance issues in controlling urban development in the Bangkok Metropolitan Region* [Powerpoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www.prime-pco.com/scrws2010/pdf/10apiwat.pdf>
- Rattanasuteerakul, K. (2010). "Towards organic vegetable farming in Thailand". *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, 34.
- Sommeechai, M. & Wachrinrat, C. (2012). *Effects of stand structural characteristics on the microclimate of an urban green space in Phra Pradaeng district, Samut Prakan province, Thailand*. Retrieved from http://t-fern.forest.ku.ac.th/iDocument/inter_page3.pdf

- Thaitakoo, D. & McGrath, B. (2009). *The landscape of Bangkok's agricultural fringe and city region sustainability: an ecological and cultural co-evolution* [Powerpoint slides]. Retrieved from <http://www2.ir3s.u-tokyo.ac.jp/scrws2009/003%20Danai%20Taitakoo.pdf>
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) (2013). *World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, Volume 1: Comprehensive Tables*. New York: United Nations. Retrieved from http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/publications/Files/WPP2012_Volume-I_Comprehensive-Tables.pdf
- Weihrich, H. (1999). Analyzing the competitive advantages and disadvantages of Germany with the TOWS Matrix - an alternative to Porter's Model. *European Business Review*, 99(1), 9-22.

Agenda or Accident?

Unraveling the 2014 Mass Exodus of Cambodian Migrant Workers from Thailand

Erich Molz

In May 2014, Thailand saw its latest military coup d'état overthrow an elected government. Shortly after, approximately 250,000 Cambodian migrant workers fled from Thailand into their home country. In this essay, I examine possible rationales for the Thai military junta's apparent cause of the mass exodus, by reviewing academic and media accounts and discussing them in light of actual Thai and Cambodian state behavior. I argue that the Thai junta attempted to consolidate its power among the Thai security forces themselves, on the one hand, and to fight human trafficking in order to improve Thailand's fading international reputation on the other. The military junta had not foreseen the dramatic consequences of the announcement to arrest any illegal migrant workers and the few raids conducted by military personnel. However, in retrospect, the exodus proved very useful for the junta as it was able to turn previously irregular Cambodian migrant workers into a vast cheap *legal* workforce. As such, the military junta weakened the rivaling police force that had benefitted from the trafficking business and threatened the military's power. The political divide in Thai society underlying this rivalry remains, nonetheless, unresolved.

Keywords: Thailand, Cambodia, labor migration, military coup d'état, politics of migration, Thaksin Shinawatra

Largely unnoticed by the global public, 7 June 2014 marked the beginning of a rapid mass exodus of Cambodians from Thailand back to their home country: within three weeks, approximately 250,000 Cambodian migrant workers returned to Cambodia (Finch, 2014). Taking all actors involved by surprise, the Cambodian government sent numerous army trucks and other vehicles to transport the returnees back to their homes while NGOs provided humanitarian assistance at the chaotic border crossings (The Cambodia Herald, 2014; The Economist, 2014, para. 2).

Although a major event in Thai-Cambodian bilateral relations in 2014, until now academics have abstained from exploring the background of the exodus. Therefore, this essay seeks to examine to what extent the Thai military junta might have caused the exodus. Specifically, causing the exodus may have been grounded in the larger political goals of the junta – possibly both national and in-

ternational ones.

In this paper, I first briefly analyze Thai internal politics and the 2014 coup. I then explicate the situation of Cambodian migrant workers in Thailand. Lastly, I review several potential rationales for the Thai junta's behavior in order to pinpoint the exodus inside a broader picture.

Thai politics in the 2000s

The exodus began roughly three weeks after the Thai military had staged their latest coup d'état in a country “polarized between [former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's] supporters and opponents” (Liow & Gamage, 2014, p. 13). The traditional elite in Bangkok, which consists of “the military, the monarchy, and the bureaucracy” (Chachavalpongpun, 2010, p. 335), had perceived their interests and power as threatened and took down Thaksin by military coup in 2006 (Chachavalpongpun,

2010, p. 339; Stout, 2014). However, this hardly contributed to the reconciliation of the “mostly rural, often poor, supporters of Mr Thaksin, and [the] urban middle class” (BBC News, 2014) on the ground, also known as the Red Shirts and Yellow Shirts. On the contrary, the coup plotters could not “prevent the re-emergence of a powerful and threatening government” (Pathmanand, 2008, p. 139) for in 2011, Thaksins’s sister Yingluck Shinawatra was elected Prime Minister in an “overwhelming victory” (Farrelly, 2013, p. 289).

The Yellow Shirts finally saw self-exiled Thaksin’s continuing influence on Thai politics proven when the House of Representatives supported a bill in late 2013 that “would among other things, absolve [...] Thaksin [...] of corruption charges against him” (Liow & Gamage, 2014, p. 12) and allow him to return to Thailand without fearing arrest. Although the bill was eventually refused by the Senate unanimously (BBC News, 2013), at times fatal mass demonstrations by both Yellow and Red Shirts continued and quickly focused on the legitimacy of the government itself (Liow & Gamage, 2014, p. 13). After months of political deadlock, street protests and the prospects of snap elections in July 2014 which were expected to keep her in power (Wade, 2014, para. 12), on May 7th a “court ruling removed [...] Yingluck from her position as prime minister” (BBC News, 2014). On May 22nd, the military seized control of government functions, declared martial law and suspended the constitution (BBC News, 2014; Wade, 2014), officially “in the interest of rule and order” (Campbell, 2014) but supposedly “to reverse the political trend towards democracy in Thailand back to royal political dominance” (Chachavalpongpun, 2014, p. 171).

On June 6th then, Thai army spokeswoman Sirichan Ngathong announced that “any illegal migrant workers found in Thailand ‘will be arrested and deported’” and added that Thai authorities “see illegal workers as a threat because there were a lot of them and no clear measures to han-

dle them, which could lead to social problems” (The Standard, 2014). Although the junta repeatedly denied crackdowns on migrant workers and called them rumors, reports of violent arrests quickly spread among Cambodians inside and outside of Thailand (Kijchalong, 2014; Wallace & Saing, 2014, para. 16). By June 25th, an estimated 250,000 Cambodian migrant workers had returned to their home country, mainly through official border crossings (Finch, 2014).

Labor migration between Thailand and Cambodia

In early 2014, an estimated 180,000 Cambodians were working in Thailand illegally (Promyamyai, 2014, para. 3). Additionally, after the Thai government “opened a registration window for irregular migrants” (Tunon & Rim, 2013, pp. 4-5), approximately 250,000 Cambodians had acquired legal status by 2012, which is consistent with an International Labour Organization (ILO) estimate of around 438,000 Cambodians in Thailand in total (Park, 2014, Chatter sparks fear, para. 5). Cambodian migrant workers are most often employed in construction, agriculture and fisheries (Hing & Lun, 2011, p. 2) with working conditions being “dirty, difficult and dangerous” (Chan, 2008, p. 2), and even though their wages are often below the Thai minimum wage, they are still considerably higher than in Cambodia (Tunon & Rim, 2013, p. 7; see Tolson, 2014, for interview reports). Both Pongsudhirak (2014, Follow the River, para. 4) and Human Rights Watch (2010, p. 20) agree that the absence of migrant workers from neighboring countries on Thai soil would create significant troubles for its economy.

Several studies revealed how prone Cambodian migrant workers, both legal and illegal, were to exploitation (Hing & Lun, 2011, p. 4; Human Rights Watch, 2010, p. 1). Given this situation, policy advice by the ILO (Pearson, 2006), Human Rights Watch (2010) and the International

Organization for Migration (Huguet & Chamratirong, 2011) was readily available to Thai authorities. Moreover, ever since 1997 a broad civil society coalition “ha[d] focused on the personal legal status and rights of marginalized groups such as [...] migrant workers” (Archavanitkul, 2014, pp. 192-193). Hence, the apparent helplessness in dealing with illegal migrant workers expressed Ngathong’s announcement is not convincing, especially when recalling the importance of migrant workers for the Thai businesses. With this in mind, I will now examine several academic and media accounts on whether the Thai military junta has indeed caused the exodus and if so, why.

Power Politics

Given the dispute about Preah Vihear temple and the refusal of Thai military forces to withdraw from this particular border area (Pou, 2013, p. 90), one might think that the junta’s “crackdown” on and expulsion of Cambodian workers was a show of force towards the Cambodian leadership. It might even be an attempt at intimidation not to interfere with Thai interior politics (The Economist, 2014, para. 4). For instance, Yingluck as well as Thaksin Shinawatra had very good relations with Phnom Penh (Sok, 2014, p. 268-270), and several political figures apparently considered fleeing to Cambodia after the coup (Finch, 2014, para. 9-16). Thailand’s elite could have perceived a Cambodian preference for the Red Shirts. Hence, causing a mass reflux of people that poses significant challenges could have been a warning signal to Cambodian authorities to mind their own business. However, rumors about a Phnom Penh based Thai government in exile were ruled out by Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen just days after the coup, long before Ngathong’s announcement. In fact, he clarified that his government would “work hard to keep a normal relationship with the Thais whether there is a civilian government or military government” (Khy, 2014, para. 6). And indeed, “on 31 May 2014, Cam-

bodia’s Deputy Prime Minister [...] turned up in Thailand to offer his government’s support for the Thai coup” (Chachavalpongpun, 2014, p. 181) and a high level Cambodian military delegation visited Thailand in July (Chongkittavorn, 2014, para. 9). Similarly, only five months later Hun Sen welcomed coup leader and new Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha in Phnom Penh, upon which they signed three memoranda of understanding (Khuon, 2014a). These events certainly do not reflect a pro-Thaksin bias in Cambodia. Instead, as Chongkittavorn (2014, para 3) observes, “the state of Thai-Cambodian ties has largely depended on the rapport between leaderships”. Hun Sen did not need any reminder from the Thai junta that the tables had turned. Rather, he sensed it himself and changed his affiliations accordingly for the sake of good bilateral relations (see also Ganjanakhundee, 2014). Thus, the Thai junta did not need to launch a severe bilateral crisis in the midst of internal turmoil at all – unless they had aimed for “unity.”

Unity

Chachavalpongpun (2010, p. 333) describes how the traditional elite in Bangkok are regularly evoking “unity” in apparent attempts to calm occurrences of serious unrest. In this regard, the severe divide between pro-Thaksin Red Shirts and elite-aligned Yellow Shirts during the last decade can obviously be seen as a situation where “national unity” might be called for. However, such discourse only serves the elite themselves as unity is usually synonymous with their interests (Chachavalpongpun, 2010, p. 339; Pathmanand, 2008, p. 133). It should not come as a surprise then that the Red Shirts are not expected to give up their demands for more participation on Thailand’s political stage after Thaksin had significantly improved their economic situation (Chambers, 2013, p. 70; see also Walker, 2012; p. 222). A call for unity therefore would easily dissipate. Thus, it is possible that the junta had decided to utilize

Thai resentments and feelings of superiority towards Cambodians (French, 2002, p. 462), based on the Preah Vihear temple and border dispute, or towards Burmese, representing the vast majority of migrant workers (Park, 2014, Chatter sparks fear, para. 5), to create an external “Other” threatening Thai society. As Derks (2013, p.225) states, “while constituting the backbone of Thailand’s low-cost, labour-intensive industries, the [...] migrant workers in the country are seen at the same time as a threat to its social order, national security and even to the health of its people”. This is consistent with a controversial public claim of a Yellow Shirt leader “that Cambodians were among Red Shirt ranks” (Finch, 2014, para. 23). Yet neither did Ngathong’s announcement constitute an inflammatory hate speech, nor was there abundant news on violent crackdowns on migrant workers. In fact, since the exodus predictably impaired business interests in Thailand (The Economist, 2014, para. 5; THE NATION, 2014a), it rather created conflict within the Thai elite – probably not one of the junta’s goals unless migrant-employing businesses were for some reason more aligned with the Red Shirts. Additionally, there was hardly any news on crackdowns on Burmese migrant workers, let alone a similar exodus (Finch, 2014, para. 17-20). This inconsistency is further evidence against the hypothesis of creating unity among Thais at the expense of Cambodian migrant workers. If anything, the junta’s violent operations “to annihilate [Red Shirt] networks” (Chachavalpongpon, 2014, p. 173) in Thailand’s north brought the society further apart (see also Fenn, 2014).

Internal power struggle

Though no accounts on political affiliations of Thai business owners could be found, evidence suggests that Thai *police* were indeed sympathetic towards the Red Shirts. Chambers (2013) recalls that “at times, Thaksin had given the Royal Thai Police more authority in areas traditionally re-

served for the military” (p. 72), while Yingluck, too, “has increasingly used police (considered to be more pro-Thaksin), rather than the military, for security objectives” (p. 76). In fact, Thaksin had tried to establish a network of well-disposed army leaders too, but was unsuccessful (Pathmanand, 2008, p. 127-129). Instead, “the armed forces have remained more or less autonomous” (Chambers, 2014, p. 113) and the divide of Thai society had manifested itself in the security forces. McCargo (2006, p. 53) for instance notes “bitter turf wars over the control of smuggling and other illegal activities” between police and the army. Furthermore, Hunt (2014, para. 5) reports “the Thai military was using [the exodus] to dismantle a powerbase that was forged around cheap and illegal labor, established and run by a rival institution (the Thai police)”. If this holds true, then the limited crackdowns can be seen as an effort by the traditional elite to re-establish its old powers and undermine those of competitors from inside the state. Moreover, powerful armed forces in favor of Thaksin who are opposed to the largely Yellow Shirt-aligned military could increase the risk of a civil war in the future (cf. International Crisis Group, 2014). In contrast, with so many migrant workers having fled the country, the Thai junta could then establish its control over the returning migration flows: “they will be allowed to return (to Thailand) but only after the paperwork has been completed and their direction will be facilitated by the Thai military” (Hunt, 2014, para. 7). In this sense, the exodus decisively helped the military junta in weakening the rivaling police and stabilizing their rule.

Thailand’s international relations

The United States has been a major partner of Thailand ever since WWII, reflected especially in profound military cooperation and development assistance (Zeboli, 2009, pp. 8-9). Furthermore, “the USA and other foreign governments have played key roles in the legitimization [*sic*] and

fortification of the royal family and its military backers” (Farrelly, 2013, p. 291). Thus, it certainly did not escape the junta’s attention that U.S. Secretary of State Kerry maintained there was “no justification for this military coup” (Wade, 2014, para. 3). Then came the “decision by the U.S. to downgrade Thailand to the lowest tier on human-trafficking – *which had been expected* [emphasis added]” (Finch, 2014, para. 29) during the exodus. Although this event might seem negligible, the consequences could be very costly: cuts in development aid, less foreign direct investment, diplomatic pressure, and even economic sanctions were under discussion (Hodal, Kelly & Roberts, 2014, para. 14). In fact, Australia had postponed “bilateral military operations with Thailand” (Chachavalpongpan, 2014, p. 175) already on May 31st. Given these prospects, the Thai junta could have decided to end illegal migration in a broader attempt to curb human trafficking (Tolson, 2014, Rumours, para. 5). In fact, numerous so-called one-stop services have been opened throughout Thailand under the auspices of the military to allow registration in only half an hour (Preutiwarodom & Saengpassa, 2014, para. 3). Similarly, a couple of one-stop services at border crossings have been set up to facilitate labor migration and allow for subsequent registration at the service points inside Thailand (Hul, 2014; Phorn, 2014). The junta has also called upon businesses to “follow labour laws protecting migrant workers and treat them the same way Thai workers are treated” (THE NATION, 2014b, para. 1) and threatened employers with substantial fines if they failed to register their migrant workers (THE NATION, 2014c, para. 2). This clearly marks a shift from former times when authorities “tolerate[d] the presence (and, in fact, the targeted recruitment) of extra-legal Cambodian migrant workers as long as they [did] not compete with Thais for jobs” (French, 2002, p. 434). Thus, it appears that “the coup makers have reacted with a great sense of nervousness” (Chachavalpongpan, 2014, p. 176) to the threat of international sanc-

tions. The exodus then provided a first opportunity to redeem themselves, at least with regard to human rights violations in Thailand. It should be noted that the United States and European Union indeed imposed sanctions on the junta *during the exodus* (see Chachavalpongpan, 2014, p. 173-175), which is further evidence against the claim that the Thai junta caused the exodus deliberately.

Conclusion

In this essay, I was seeking to provide an examination of different possible rationales for the Thai junta’s apparent crackdown on Cambodian migrant workers in June 2014, which caused a mass exodus of roughly 250,000 Cambodians within weeks. To this aim, I reviewed the academic literature on contemporary Thai politics as well as analysts’ explanations in the media and discussed them in light of actual Thai and Cambodian state behavior. The four “hypotheses” examined were the show of force towards supposedly pro-Thaksin Cambodian leaders; an attempt to unify the confronting Thai fractions by creating an external “Other” threat; a power struggle among the Thai security forces themselves; and a new endeavor to fight human trafficking in order to improve Thailand’s fading international reputation.

In light of the relevant accounts, it seems the Thai military junta did not foresee the dramatic consequences of spokeswoman Ngathong’s announcement to arrest any illegal migrant workers, coupled with the few raids conducted by security personnel. Although the Thai authorities were known for frequent violent crackdowns on irregular migrants (Derks, 2013, p. 219), “most countries must balance their security concerns with their need for large numbers of labour migrants” (Mitchell, 2012, p. 7) and Thailand is no exception. Hence, the proposition that the junta intentionally impaired Thailand’s economy and international reputation (even further) appears unlikely. Instead, the exodus might have partly been the result of low opportunity costs associat-

ed with leaving Thailand for Cambodian migrant workers (compared to Burmese) and fast-spreading, exaggerated rumors among Cambodian migrant networks (Finch, 2014, para. 21-27).

Yet, in retrospect, the exodus proved very useful for the Thai military as they were able to kill two birds with one stone. On the one hand, they turned irregular Cambodian migrant workers into a massive cheap *legal* workforce, something former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva had envisioned back in 2009 (Derks, 2013, p. 219); Khuon (2014b) reports over 650,000 legal Cambodian migrant workers on Thai soil today. In so doing, Thai authorities could finally prove their commitment to fighting human trafficking and to promoting human rights to the international community – albeit unsuccessfully (cf. U.S. Department of State, 2015, p. 54). On the other hand, they potentially weakened the rivaling police force that had benefitted from the trafficking business and threatened the military's power, as suggested by Hunt (2014, para. 5). Additionally, it is important to emphasize that the Thai junta did not intend to intimidate or punish the Cambodian leadership. Instead, the two governments managed to preserve positive bilateral relations, peace and security in the region, and thereby their own national security as well (Adamson, 2006, p. 180). Cambodians themselves have taken advantage of the chance of entering Thailand legally and making a good living for themselves and their families although it remains to be seen how sustainable the improvements will be (for contrasting views see Archavanitkul, 2014, p. 195, and Derks, 2013, p. 219). At the very least, the new Thai policies show that where there is a will, there is a way to solve pressing migration questions.

While the exodus can be regarded as a foreign policy success in hindsight, the political deadlock in Thailand is a lot more difficult to resolve. Although they might have diminished Thaksin's influence significantly and made his return unlikelier, it is highly questionable whether the traditional Thai elite are ready to endorse

democracy, as it threatens their societal predominance (see for example Hewison, 2014; Kuhonta & Sinpeng, 2014). Rather, it is likely that the divide between Yellow Shirts and Red Shirts will continue to linger underneath the regime's surface.

ERICH MOLZ is a Masters student of Peace, Mediation & Conflict Research at the University of Tampere, Finland. His primary areas of interest include East and Southeast Asia, forgiveness and reconciliation, and peace education. Email: Molz.Erich.X@student.uta.fi

References

- Adamson, F. B. (2006). Crossing Borders: International Migration and National Security. *International Security*, 31(1), 165-199.
- Archavanitkul, K. (2014). 2-2 Towards Managing Stateless People in a Thai Context. In Chen Tien-shi (Ed.), *Senri Ethnological Reports 118: Human Rights and Support for Stateless People around the World: Japan's Role: International Academic Conference Report* (pp. 185-196). Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Ethnology. Retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10502/5374>
- BBC News. (2013, November 12). Thailand Senate rejects controversial amnesty bill. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24903958>
- BBC News. (2014, May 22). Why is Thailand under military rule? Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-25149484>
- Campbell, C. (2014, May 22). Thai Army Declares Military Coup. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/108719/thai-army-declares-military-coup/>
- Chachavalpongpun, P. (2010). "Unity" as a Discourse in Thailand's Polarized Politics. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 332-342.
- Chambers, P. (2013). Military "Shadows" in Thailand Since the 2006 Coup. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 40, 67-82.
- Chambers, P. (2014). Constitutional Change and Security Forces in Southeast Asia: Lessons from Thailand and Myanmar. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 36(1), 101-127. doi:10.1355/cs36-1e
- Chan S. (2008). The Political Economy of Managing Labour Migration. *Cambodia Development Review*, 12(1), 1-4. Retrieved from <http://www.cdri.org.kh/webdata/cdr/2008/cdr08-1e.pdf>
- Chachavalpongpun, P. (2014). The Politics of International Sanctions: The 2014 Coup in Thailand. *Journal of International Affairs*, 68(1), 169-285.
- Chongkittavorn, K. (2014, October 20). Thai-Cambodian relations: Doing it right. *THE NATION*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/opinion/Thai-Cambodian-relations-Doing-it-right-30245788.html>
- Derks, A. (2013). Human Rights and (Im)mobility: Migrants and the State in Thailand. *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 28(2), 216-240. doi:10.1355/sj28-2b
- Farrelly, N. (2013). Why democracy struggles: Thailand's elite coup culture. *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 67(3), 281-296.
- Fenn, M. (2014, June 5). Tense Times in Thailand. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/tense-times-in-thailand/>
- Finch, S. (2014, June 26). Is the Thai Junta Targeting Cambodian Migrants? *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/is-the-thai-junta-targeting-cambodian-migrants>

- French, L. (2002). From Politics to Economics at the Thai–Cambodian Border: Plus Ça Change... *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, 15(3), 427-470.
- Ganjanakhundee, S. (2014, July 3). Hun Sen plays junta's card by freeing Veera. *THE NATION*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/politics/Hun-Sen-plays-juntas-card-by-freeing-Veera-30237627.html>
- Hewison, K. (2014). Thailand: The Lessons of Protest. *ASIAN STUDIES: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia*, 50(1), 1-15.
- Hing, V. and Lun, P. (2011). Addressing Irregular Migration from Cambodia. *Cambodia Development Review*, 15(3), 1-6. Retrieved from <http://www.cdri.org.kh/webdata/cdr/2011/cdr113e.pdf>
- Hodal, K., Kelly, A. and Roberts, D. (2014, June 20). US demotes Thailand and Qatar for abysmal human trafficking records. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jun/20/thailand-qatar-downgraded-human-trafficking-report>
- Huguet, J. W. and Chamrathirong, A. (Eds.). (2011). *Thailand Migration Report 2011: Migration for Development in Thailand: Overview and Tools for Policymakers*. Bangkok, Thailand: International Organization for Migration, Thailand Office.
- Hul, R. (2014, August 7). Migrants Skipping Gov't Plan for Thai Alternative. *The CAMBODIA DAILY*. Retrieved from <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/migrants-skipping-govt-plan-for-thai-alternative-65903/>
- Human Rights Watch. (2010). *From the Tiger to the Crocodile: Abuse of Migrant Workers in Thailand*. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch.
- Hunt, L. (2014, June 20). Cambodian Exodus Signals Tough Times with Thai Junta. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/cambodian-exodus-signals-tough-times>
- International Crisis Group. (2014.) Thailand: Conflict Alert. Retrieved from <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/alerts/2014/thailand-conflict-alert>
- Khuon, N. (2014a, October 31). New Thai Prime Minister Pays Official Visit. *The CAMBODIA DAILY*. Retrieved from <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/71429-71429/>
- Khuon, N. (2014b, August 22). Gov't Says 660,000 Workers Now in Thailand. *The CAMBODIA DAILY*. Retrieved from <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/govt-says-660000-workers-now-in-thailand-67021/>
- Khy, T. (2014, May 28). Hun Sen Rules Out Hosting Exile Thai Gov't. *The CAMBODIA DAILY*. Retrieved from <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/hun-sen-rules-out-hosting-exile-thai-govt-59785/>
- Kijchalong, T. (2014, June 13). Cambodian workers flee out of fear. *THE NATION*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Cambodian-workers-flee-out-of-fear-30236125.html>

- Kuhonta, E. M. and Sinpeng, A. (2014). Democratic Regression in Thailand: The Ambivalent Role of Civil Society and Political Institutions. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 36(3), 333-355. doi:10.1355/cs36-3a
- Liow, J. C. and Gamage, R. (2014). The Quest for Regional and Domestic Stability. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 1-19.
- McCargo, D. (2006). Thaksin and the resurgence of violence in the Thai south - Network monarchy strikes back?. *Critical Asian Studies*, 38(1), 39-71. doi:10.1080/14672710600556429
- Mitchell, M. I. (2012, June 12-15). *The Perils of Population Movements in International Relations: new directions for rethinking the migration-conflict nexus*. Paper Presented at the Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Edmonton, Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.cpsa-ac-sp.ca/papers-2012/Mitchell2.pdf>
- Park, M. (2014, June 19). 180,000 Cambodian migrant workers estimated to have fled Thailand. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/18/world/asia/cambodia-thailand-migrants-border/>
- Pathmanand, U. (2008). A Different Coup d'État? *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 38(1), 124-142. doi:10.1080/00472330701651994
- Pearson, E. (2006). *The Mekong Challenge. Underpaid, Overworked and Overlooked: The realities of young migrant workers in Thailand. Volume One*. Bangkok, Thailand: International Labor Organization.
- Phorn, B. (2014, July 21). Four Offices to Open For Thailand-Bound Workers. *The CAMBODIA DAILY*. Retrieved from <https://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/four-offices-to-open-for-thailand-bound-workers-64533/>
- Pongsudhirak, T. (2014). The Mekong Region. *Foreign Affairs*, 93(1), 45-50.
- Pou, S. (2013). Cambodia's Border Conflict with Thailand. *Southeast Asian Affairs*, 87-100.
- Preutiwarodom, M. and Saengpassa, C. (2014, July 1). Push to lure foreign workers. *THE NATION*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Push-to-lure-foreign-workers-30237478.html>
- Promyamyai, T. (2014, June 17). Thailand and Cambodia agree to quash 'rumours' after worker exodus. *THE NATION*. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Thailand-and-Cambodia-agree-to-quash-rumours-aft-30236439.html>
- Sok, U. D. (2014). *Factional Politics and Foreign Policy Choices in Cambodia-Thailand Diplomatic Relations, 1950-2014* (Doctoral dissertation, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin). Retrieved from <http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/dissertationen/deth-sok-udom-2014-07-10/PDF/deth.pdf>
- Stout, D. (2014, May 20). Thailand: Coups That Helped Shape the Land of Coups. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/105781/thailand-history-of-military-coups/>

- The Cambodia Herald (2014, June 22). Government urges NGOs to support migrant workers from Thailand. Retrieved from <http://www.thecambodiaherald.com/cambodia/government-urges-ngos-to-support-migrant-workers-from-thailand-6767>
- The Economist (2014, June 21). The Exodus. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/21604585/>
- THE NATION. (2014a, June 19). Exodus hits agriculture, construction sectors. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Exodus-hits-agriculture-construction-sect-30236592.html>
- THE NATION. (2014b, July 26). Treat migrant workers the same as locals: govt. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Treat-migrant-workers-the-same-as-locals-govt-30239510.html>
- THE NATION. (2014c, October 15). Registration for migrant workers ends this month. Retrieved from <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Registration-for-migrant-workers-ends-this-month-30245538.html>
- The Standard. (2014, June 11). Thai junta vows to arrest illegal migrant workers. Retrieved from http://www.thestandard.com.hk/breaking_news_detail.asp?id=50524&icid=4&d_str=20140326
- Tolson, M. (2014, July 3). Cambodian Migrant Workers Pay for Thai Documentation Scramble. *Inter Press Service*. Retrieved from <http://www.ipsnews.net/2014/07/cambodian-migrant-workers-pay-for-thai-labour-scramble/>
- Tunon, M. and Rim, K. (2013). *Cross-border labour migration in Cambodia: Considerations for the national employment policy*. Bangkok, Thailand: International Labour Organization.
- U.S. Department of State. (2015) Trafficking in Persons Report July 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245365.pdf>
- Wade, F. (2014, May 23). Thailand's Army Tightens Its Grip on Power. *TIME*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/110068/thailands-army-tightens-its-grip-on-power/>
- Walker, A. (2012). *Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Wallace, J. & Saing, S. (2014, June 28). Thai Junta Helps Media Get Migrant Story Straight. *THE CAMBODIA DAILY*. Retrieved from <http://www.cambodiadaily.com/archives/thai-junta-helps-media-get-migrant-story-straight-62710/>
- Zeboli, R. C. (2009). *Thailand: Economic, Political and Social Issues*. New York, NY: Nova Science.

Myanmar Activists in the Making Navigating in a Changing Political Landscape

Sara Ellegaard Nielsen & Camilla Jane Standhart

Based on four months of anthropological fieldwork this article contributes to an understanding of the lives of Myanmar youth activists. The aim is to portray how this particular group of youth differs in their motivations and activist practices from previous generations. In taking action, the youth of our research draw on capacities for building individual knowledge and skills acquired during training provided by an INGO (international non-governmental organization). Through the theoretical concept of the trickster, we argue that these youths embody an ambiguous and mediating role when engaging in activism. We show how the youth navigate and challenge the social and cultural norms of present society. They do this by negotiating and bridging ideas of democracy and human rights to their communities in such a way that the ideas become socially accepted and translated into a local context. These youth do not want another revolution. They want profound development and consolidation.

Keywords: Activism, change, Myanmar, trickster, youth

There is a strong tendency in both Asia and the Middle East for youth to engage in activism, and demand more democratic-like conditions (Bowie, 2005; Edmonds & Ho, 2008). This article provides a Myanmar perspective on the matter. Many within the international media are questioning to what extent the country is in fact becoming a more free society. Nonetheless, it is argued among scholars that new possibilities to engage in political work have occurred since the military junta initiated a move away from dictatorship towards democratic-like reforms in 2010 (Gravers & Ytzen, 2014). We are witnessing a transition period, where politicians, mainly from the opposition parties, and civil society question the norms of the past six decades that have dictated submission and obedience. However, the habit of compliance will not change overnight. For decades, the regime has managed to frighten the population into not daring to speak their minds through the use of violence, lack of education, poverty, discrimination and armed conflict (Fink, 2009 [2001]). Yet international non-governmental organizations, INGOs, can now legally offer training on activism that prepares people to utilize the increased freedom to speak and act in

public, which has gradually been permitted by the government under President U Thein Sein.

We wish to give the reader an understanding of why and how young people in Myanmar engage in activism. We find this to be of relevance as in the history of Myanmar, youth have played a central role when it comes to social change at several events. Initiating resistance towards the dictatorship, the youth have helped in altering the mentality of the population during the student uprisings in 1988 and the Saffron Revolution in 2007 (Gravers & Ytzen, 2014). Despite the military strategy of controlling the younger generation through an inadequate educational system it was a group of young students who initiated the national uprisings of August 8, 1988. Before this historical day when the students went to the streets and where thousands were killed in Yangon alone, students at the Yangon University initiated several demonstrations, demanding the possibility to establish student unions that could work for their interests (Gravers & Ytzen, 2014, p. 50-51). As the situation developed, the students started criticizing the authority of the regime (Fink, 2009 p. 47).

In this article, we look at how the young people in present-day Myanmar may differ from the politically active youth of the past in their reasons for engaging in activism. Our research shows that these youth do not want another revolution like that of 1988 but hope instead to contribute to a steady and permanent democratization of Myanmar.

Research Design

This article is based on empirical material collected during fieldwork conducted in Myanmar from January to May 2014. In order to get access to the field, we collaborated with an INGO training hub situated in Yangon. By attending a reunion for former participants, we got in contact with 23 young people. Our interlocutors defined themselves as youth. They were all between 20 and 33 years of age. During the INGO training, they were addressed as youth. Furthermore, as a result of their specific social and political work, they often had no stable economic situation or a family of their own, which, according to Myanmar customs, withheld them culturally from entering adulthood. As we have chosen to make use of this definition in our analysis, youth is to be seen as both an emic and etic term. Karen Tranberg Hansen (2008) argues that youth inhabit more agency than children and, like adults, have more responsibilities than adolescents (Hansen, 2008, p. 8-9). Based on comparative research among youth in Brazil, Vietnam, and Zambia, Hansen argues that the youth category is a social and cultural construction that differs in form and meaning depending on the situation (Hansen, 2008, p. 209).

The young people were engaged in different projects in a multitude of places with different groups of people. They had their connection to the INGO where they had attended a particular training session on activism in common. The projects of our interlocutors include among others organizing workshops for farmers about land

rights and teaching both adults and youth about health and human rights.

We carried out participant observation by watching the youth in action and we met with their families, friends, and colleagues. Apart from carrying out fieldwork in Yangon where two thirds of our interlocutors lived, we went to cities and rural villages in the Mon, Kayah, and Shan States, the Magway Division and the Delta Region. In order to achieve a more profound understanding of their motivations and practices, we conducted recorded interviews with all 23 interlocutors. We asked about what their activist practice entailed, what their motivations to engage had been, what challenges they faced in their daily work, and what dreams they had for the future.

Activism in Myanmar

The use of the concept of activism in Myanmar shows how the country has changed politically. Practicing activism was banned both in speech and in action during the military rule, but when INGOs started entering the country in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis in 2008, people started to use the English term activist in public (Petrie & South, 2014, p. 232). During our time at the INGO, trainers and participants referred to themselves as activists. However, once we left the training hub, where the youth received training in governance, human rights and democratic ideas, this was no longer the case. When following our interlocutors in their local communities, they would not translate the English term of an activist into their ethnic language to describe themselves. They told us how they instead applied the meaning of the English definition of a social and community worker. They argued that the activist word was still too controversial to most villagers. Nonetheless, when asked about it, the youth would define most of their work as being activist in character. As 24-year old Aye, who was spreading knowledge about reproductive health among young people in the rural South, told us,

“An activist is the person who does the things that people do not dare to do. They are active in doing something good. I used it when I attended the training but I do not use it in my work as it is forbidden to do”.

Too many negative connotations are still attached to the activist concept, especially among people older than our interlocutors, as they continue to be affected by the aggressive propaganda that was exercised by the military over half a century. To them, being an activist is dangerous and associated with risk, imprisonment and fear. Up until 2010, expressing your opinion in public was condemned, criminalized, and brutally punished (Fink, 2009). Our interlocutors wish to express their points of views even though activism is still a highly political word. What motivates them to take action is the strong emotions that originate from their experiences with injustice and violations of human rights during the military rule. This echoes other research on how taking action correlates with the awakening of indignation within a person (Beyerlein & Ward, 2007, p. 1; Hodgeson & Brooks, 2007, p. 18).

Through the INGO training the youth in our research have become more articulate about the activist qualities of their work, yet they do not label their daily activities as activism. Our interlocutors had no problem applying words such as “capacity building” or “campaign strategy” when explaining their work to us. However, when Htway, a 24-year-old man living in Yangon and organizing strikes, told factory workers about their rights, he would adapt and translate words like these into words that the factory workers could relate to. This highlights how the youth navigate surroundings that are not necessarily ready to embrace and make use of activist vocabulary. We argue that the aforementioned English terms provided during training become the activist language of the youth when they are with their peers or sharing their projects with outsiders, but it is not the language they use when interacting with their communities.

In the following we show that our interlocutors, at an interpersonal level, are contributing to the reshaping of the norms of family life and the norms of the kind of political activity that is socially accepted in Myanmar today. They are able to do this by belonging to the socially defined category ‘youth’, but also through their conscious choice to create change as activists.

Confronting Norms

Bourdieu (1977) addresses what makes one group believe that a certain kind of practice is natural or possible, while another group finds it unthinkable or scandalous. He defines habitus as something practically and bodily induced which creates naturalized values through socialization (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80). Habitus is a system of dispositions through which agents perceive, judge, and act in the world, and as such, it legitimizes and reproduces the way things are. Bourdieu states that “the habitus, the product of history, produces individual and collective practices” (ibid, p.82). In the following we will show how the practices of our interlocutors are influenced by the history of Myanmar.

Htway confronted the norms within the family sphere, which made the relationship with his parents rather tense. As he was working to improve the rights and working conditions of factory workers, he felt it necessary to confront his parents about their exploitation of child labor in their teashop:

“I have said to you that they don’t like my ethics because sometimes I am a little bit against the injustice [...] For example, my family opens the cafeteria and the children have to work for a long time, not 8 hours but 15 or 14 hours, so I am against that. They think I destroy their profit, but it is not like that.”

By criticizing his parents, Htway broke with a strong tradition of respecting the decisions of elders and authorities in society (Fink, 2009, p.

134). Due to the rule and practice of the recent military regime, the discussion of worker's rights and the establishment of unions was something quite new to the public. Even though he was a front-runner in the fight for the rights of exploited factory workers, he had not yet gained acceptance or convinced his family about the logic and good intentions behind his work.

Aye, who is concerned with health issues, described how she was working in the space between the very traditional ideas within her target communities and her desire to promote awareness among the younger generations:

"I am the one who lead the young people so I have to care a lot [...] about my young people, my colleagues, my peers. I think I can share knowledge but I cannot make a big workshop or big change. We have a lot of gaps [in our society], and we don't make any demonstrations or marching".

According to Aye, for the time being demonstrations were not a constructive way to change people's minds. She would rather create dialogue within communities and raise awareness by taking a one-on-one approach and telling the young people how they were "holders of certain rights". In doing so she implemented the human rights based approach (HRBA) that she had been taught during her training.

Htway and Aye tried to mediate ideas and knowledge between old and new styles of thoughts and habits. Their interaction with their surroundings is an example of a clash between two sets of habitus that is produced by "different modes of generation" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78). We see how they are both products, so to say, of the particular history of Myanmar. By doing the training they create a window of possibilities where they have access to knowledge about human rights and the constitutional laws. Furthermore, they have learned how to facilitate workshops and raise awareness about their causes. As such the

habitual practices that guide their actions become different from that of their parent's generation. The current time of transition in Myanmar society is providing a space where potential action can be facilitated. The youth and the communities find themselves between the consequences of the military regime and the potentialities of the new governmental system that are currently being negotiated.

Levine (2011, p. 426-428) argues that youth in times of cultural transition come to act as intermediaries and facilitators of change of culture. According to Levine, youth often indirectly and unintentionally end up introducing new habits to the people in their local communities when they return from urban educational centers. This may well apply to the youth of our research, but what characterizes them more is that they intentionally aim to create change in their role as not only youth, but as youth activists. As agents of change, the youths are breaking with the traditional patterns of behavior; they are breaking with the habitus of both their own and their parent's generation.

This leads us to the concept of the trickster, a historical and mythological phenomenon that in anthropological literature is presented as a figure with multiple characteristics (Brown, 1947; Radin, 1956; Pelton, 1980; Hyde, 2010[1998]). The paradoxical and ambiguous nature of the trickster relies on the fact that he/she is never fixed to a particular structure. Babcock-Abrahams (1975, p. 164) defines the trickster as "the embodiment of the contradictory power attendant upon the violation of fundamental taboos". By violating taboos for the profit of his group, the trickster is a mediator who is both sacred and profane. This figure represents opposites and can thus be interpreted in multiple ways – both as a trickster or outsider and as a cultural hero (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975, p. 161). It is this ambiguous, never fixed, and mediating role, which our interlocutors inhabit. They are brought up in different villages, towards which they feel a strong sense of respon-

sibility even though some of them no longer live in these villages. They attend training and are educated in Yangon where most of them only live temporarily. Consequently, our interlocutors felt as if they were constantly torn between rural and urban areas, traditions and new knowledge, and between being responsible community leaders and young activists.

The trickster helps us understand the complexity of the social role of our interlocutors as they confront the established norms and make long existing taboos visible. Examples include how Htway challenge social norms by confronting his parents about child rights and how Aye addressed long held taboos when discussing health and sex with young people in very conservative rural villages. They are dialogical, as they are outsiders in the sense that they do not act according to the majority and they are cultural heroes as they lead the way and guide their communities. Furthermore, they make sure that the knowledge they have access to in the urban areas is transmitted to people in the rural areas.

The youths are thus molding the idea of what an activist is within the population by moving away from the revolutionary approach practiced by the youth during the uprisings of 1988 and 2007 and instead by working with knowledge sharing and consolidation. It is by adapting their activist role to the social situation of their time that they achieve a position from where they can challenge and change status quo. In approaching our interlocutors through the trickster figure, we are given a concept that embraces the specific role of our interlocutors as mediators, not only as being youth or activists, but as those who challenge the norms of their society and who create a window for change through their projects. They show their communities an alternative. Babcock-Abrahams argues that one of the many functions of the trickster is that of being evaluative – of creating a space for reexamining the existing conditions, which can then lead to a possible change of things (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975, p. 183). This is what

Aye is doing when letting young women know that abortion is a possibility and what Htway is facilitating by arranging strikes with the factory workers. They are creating a space at a certain time and place where people are explicitly made aware of and invited to discuss and reflect upon the status quo.

Conclusion

In this article, we have examined how youths in Myanmar engage in activism. Their actions are motivated by their personal experience with social injustices. They have had access to INGO facilitated activist training, which has provided them with the vocabulary and knowledge to address these injustices in a time of change. In applying their knowledge about social change to their local communities, these youths have to adjust and navigate in the often very conservative social settings of their projects.

In embodying the trickster qualities by being mediators as well as provocateurs, our interlocutors are indirectly given the mandate by their surroundings to challenge the established norms and promote new ways of thinking without being excluded from their communities. This feature is what characterizes youth activism in Myanmar today. Applying the trickster concept to analyze the social position of our interlocutors is done deliberately as to indicate how these youth are not compliant to conformity. They want to contribute to a profound change and improvement of the socio-economic-political situation of their communities. As the trickster, they will continue to develop, change, and adapt their practices to achieve this goal.

SARA ELLEGAARD NIELSEN graduated with a Masters in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. She is currently facilitating workshops and giving lectures on the topic of Myanmar. Email sara_nielsen@hotmail.com

CAMILLA JANE STANDHART recently graduated with a Masters in Anthropology from the Department of Anthropology at the University of Copenhagen. She was selected for the Teach First Danmark graduate programme and is currently teaching at a school. Email camillastandhart@hotmail.com

References

- Babcock-Abrahams, B. (1975). A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered. *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 11(3), 147-186.
- Beyerlein, K. & Ward, M. (2007). *The Importance of Anger for Explaining Participation in Various Types of Activism*. University of Arizona: Department of Sociology.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowie, K. A. (2005). The State and the Right Wing: The Village Scout Movement in Thailand. In: Nash, June (ed.), *Social Movements. An Anthropological Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Press, p. 46-65.
- Brown, N. O. (1947). *Hermes the Thief. The Evolution of a Myth*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Edmonds, R. L. & Ho, P. (2008). *Chinas Embedded Activism – Opportunities and Constraints of a Social Movement*. London: New York: Routledge.
- Fink, C. (2009 [2001]). *Living Silence in Burma. Surviving under Military Rule*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Gravers, M & Ytzen, F. (2014). *Burma/ Myanmar. Where Now?* Copenhagen: NIAS Press.
- Hansen, K. T. (2008). Introduction: Youth and the City and Conclusion: Urban Youth in a Global World. In: Hansen, Karen Tranberg, Anne Line Dalsgaard, Kathrine V. Gough, Ulla Ambrosius Madsen, Karen Valentin & Norbert Wildermuth (eds.), *Youth and the City in the Global South*. (p. 3-23, 207-220). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hodgson, D. L. & Brooks, E. (2007). Introduction: Activism. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 35 (3/4), 14-25.
- Hyde, Lewis. (1998 [2010]). *Trickster Makes the World. Mischief, Myth, and Art*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Ciroux.
- Levine, R. A. (2011). Traditions in Transition: Adolescents Remaking Culture. *Ethos*, 39(4), 426-431.
- Petrie, C. and South, A. (2014). Development of Civil Society. In M. Gravers & F. Ytzen (Eds.), *Burma/ Myanmar. Where Now?* Copenhagen: NIAS Press, p. 87-94.
- Pelton, Robert D. (1980). *The Trickster in West Africa. A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Radin, P. (1956). *The Trickster. A Study in American Indian Mythology*. New York: Schocken Books.

Asia in Focus

A Nordic journal on Asia by early career researchers

Aims and scope

Asia in Focus is a biannual journal where Master's and Ph.D. students affiliated to a Nordic institution have the possibility to publish their findings in a widely accessible, transnational forum. The focal point of the journal is modern Asian societies, from Central Asia to Oceania but excluding Australia and New Zealand, from the perspective of the social sciences and humanities. We aim at a high academic level in a concise, focused and readable form, and publish both academic essays and articles.

Submissions

- Paper submissions are warmly received all year round to ASIAINFOCUS@NIAS.KU.DK
- Include in your submission confirmation that you have obtained the right to quote interviewees, publish pictures, maps and such in a public open access journal.
- For any other enquiries, please email us at ASIAINFOCUS@NIAS.KU.DK

Preparing your paper

Before a paper can be published it must conform to the Asia in Focus style guide, which is summarized below. Please be sure to read and adhere to the rules of the comprehensive [ASIA IN FOCUS STYLE GUIDE](#).

- The language of the journal is English.
- When submitting your article for publication, it must have been proof read by a native speaker of English.
- Text length: 3500 words (+/- 350 words), excluding photos, graphs and references.
- The paper should be prepared in MS-Word compatible software
- For references you should use parenthetical in-text [APA STYLE](#).
- Do not include any endnotes or footnotes.
- Please state whether the submission should be considered an academic article or an essay.
- A concise abstract of no more than 200 words is required upon submission. Citing references in the abstract should be avoided.
- Provide a maximum of six keywords. The reader should get a strong impression of the main ideas discussed in your piece from this short list.
- Please include a short biography, including information about your affiliated institution, academic degree and your primary research interests.
- Please state whether or not we may publish your email address or other contact information .
- Think about the scope of the journal when you write your paper. Asia in Focus is multi-disciplinary with readers from different academic backgrounds. Thus theoretical stances and arguments should be used carefully. The geographical/cultural focus of your article should always be introduced to the reader.

