

ASIAN STUDIES AT A TURNING POINT

Tandem walk or boxing match between social sciences and humanities?

Conference and PhD workshop, 6-7 November 2006, Turku University, Finland

A Nordic roundtable on Asian studies

7 November 2006, 08.30-12.30

Background

While Asian studies (research and research based education) are changing their focus as well as their basis in the Nordic countries these years, we seldom take the time, space and luxury to discuss what we are doing at the 'meta' level of Asian studies. Nor do we discuss – at least not enough – where we are going with Asian studies as area studies.

Goal

The roundtable is designed to examine the Nordic state of affairs in Asian studies and inspire discussions on where to go in the future. Especially with a focus on what Nordic collaboration can do to further enhance the scope and quality of Asian studies in the Nordic countries.

Format

- ▶ Each participant will have **10 minutes** for their presentation
- ▶ One chair and two discussants will facilitate discussions after the presentations
- ▶ Minutes to be consolidated by NIAS and circulated after the conference

Chair

- *Jørgen Delman*, NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

Discussants

- *Paul Midford*, Department of Political Science & Sociology, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU)
- *Pekka Korhonen*, Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä

Participants and summaries

- *Anton K. Alexeev*, University of St. Petersburg

Asian Studies in Saint-Petersburg: history and modern situation

Asian Studies appeared in Saint-Petersburg shortly after the founding of the city in 1703.

Concentration of Asian Studies at Saint-Petersburg was determined by the status of the city, which became the new capital of the country. Russia ran active policy in the East, so the country needed the qualified specialists in different directions, especially in Central Asian, Asian and Near

East Studies. The main principles of the Saint-Petersburg of Asian studies became language and history researches based upon narrative sources. Recently the situation changed and we can find several new approaches to Asian studies in Saint-Petersburg.

- *Monica Braw, European Institute of Japanese Studies, Stockholm School of Economics*

(East) Asian Studies in Sweden Evaluated

As a result of Swedish government policy, Chinese, Japanese and Korean studies at undergraduate and graduate level have been evaluated by a group of Nordic academicians. The results can be discussed both in a national, a Nordic and an international perspective. The latter is related to the existence of a Swedish Asia Strategy which emphasizes the importance of extended academic competence in knowledge about Asia. Regarding the national and Nordic perspective, cooperation between universities is recommended in order to make use of scarce resources and to create synergy.

- *Mette Halskov Hansen, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo*

Is it possible to merge humanities and social sciences? – The experiences from Oslo

Two developments in recent years have had a considerable influence on the development within Asia studies in Norway and Oslo: The establishment of the Norwegian Asia-network, and the new "study-programmes" which, in the University of Oslo, have for the first time made it possible for students to combine traditional disciplinary studies with studies of Asian languages and Asian area studies. This constitutes a much needed change in the approach to the study of Asia in Norway. However, it also forces those of us who work in the field of Asia studies to reconsider what Asia studies and studies of Asian languages should be, and what these fields have to offer that is unique and not merely tools for the social sciences.

- *Bruce Lambert, KTH - Royal Inst of Technology and NIAS*

Developing European Resources & Alliances in Asian Studies: Anguish & Advantages

Asian studies in the Nordic region is particularly challenging due to our physical distance from Asia. Basic costs are high, with isolated scholars often unable to share basic overheads and expenses such as reference library development. Area studies is always a diffuse focal theme on an institutional level; we often lack the critical mass of subdisciplinary experts such that scholars feel part of a team of similar specialists. Can we work together to improve research, and to provide better output and services at lower costs?

Asian specialists usually have substantive abilities and experiences beyond their specialty, such as tenacity, independent living skills, and entrepreneurialism that garnishes funding for expensive, far-off activities. Many of us now contribute to mutual understanding, peace and security - could such activities become part of career assessment, or receive official compensation?

- *Staffan Lindberg, Institute of Sociology, Lund University and SASNET*

Building Networks for research and higher education related to South Asia

I will present the ideas behind building a network like SASNET and how these are changing over time. In the beginning we emphasized networking between researchers anywhere here and in South Asia, but we are now discussing if some type of centre is, after all, needed to ensure a sustainable network (certain positions, library, etc.) Another important academic development is the emphasis on research groups rather than departments and institutes. What does it mean for SASNET networking?

- *Riikka Länsisalmi*, Nordic Association for the Study of Contemporary Japanese Society (NAJS)

Let All the Flowers Bloom? Japanese Language in Finnish Higher Education

Knowledge of the relevant Asian language(s) is a prerequisite for academic research in humanities and social sciences focusing on Asia. My presentation describes how (poorly) this principle is acknowledged and supported in Finnish higher education and language education policies. Japanese language studies, for example, are often provided sporadically without higher education/university-like curriculum planning and with little or no continuity and integration with content studies in the students' main fields.

- *Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt*, Research Center on Development and International Relations, Aalborg University

New Challenges in East and Southeast Asian studies

There is a shortage of East and Southeast Asian studies focusing on the role of emancipation, collective action and social change as a way of overcoming the traditional division of contemporary academic literature. The latter has been separated between what has been termed the ethnocentric Confucian perspective, the freedom of the market idea, and the statist focus on authoritarianism and guidance, while studies in a political economy perspective have been downplayed. With the end of neo-liberal globalization and the emergence of new catching-up economies cum global players like India and China there is a need to rethink development studies and international political economy. This has a major impact on humanities and social sciences in Europe, including the Nordic countries, and elsewhere which challenge the very notion of "area-studies" itself.

- *Marita Siika*, National University Network for East and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Turku

Normalcy in Asian Studies

"Normalcy in Asian studies" seeks factors that give directions to Asian studies in the globalizing world where Asia plays an ever more crucial role. The audience of the small community of scholars in Asian studies has suddenly grown enormous, which means remarkable tasks with regard to the third sector of university responsibilities.

"Normalcy..." also views the research and teaching contents in contemporary Asian studies and claims that it should be normal for a student in any discipline to acquire enough knowledge of Asian studies to discuss phenomena in an Asian society within his/her academic field. The scholars in Asian studies should not treat their academic field as something exotic.