

Editorial

For a few years now, the illusory safe haven for humanities and social sciences in general and of Asian Studies in particular appears severely challenged by substantial budget cuts in many countries across the globe. How could this happen? As Asia's prominence and international role is increasing, wouldn't it make more sense that Asian Studies achieves a higher profile? In the previous issue, I voiced some personal concern that the scientific community has created a separate niche for itself and neglects one of its core responsibilities towards society at large, namely critically examining politics and power. One could imagine that if Asian Studies takes up this responsibility of informing the public and involves itself more in broader political, economic, and cultural public debates and events, policy makers will be more likely to appreciate its intrinsic value. These brief thoughts fit in well with Jan Annerstedt's article on this page, which emphasizes the relevance of academic involvement in the Asia-Europe Meetings and Business Forums. It also links to the front-page article, in which Mongolian parliamentarian Sanjaasuren Oyun addresses the dark side of globalization and expounds the ways in which Mongolia's post-communist economic development has been going awry.

Economic globalization has an equally marked (but surely not necessarily negative) impact on Asian cities and ranks high among the causes for their lasting attraction to the rural poor, to (foreign) investors, and to various layers of government. The current and expanding global and regional importance of Asian cities warrants an extensive (11-page) theme section on 'Mega-Urbanization in Asia'. Theme editor, Dr Peter Nas, has edited a wonderful collection of articles on a number of urban areas, in which both universal and city-specific aspects of mega-urbanization are addressed. Due to the sheer size and rapid expansion of these cities, the Asian landscape steadily becomes more urban. In due course this changed geographical reality will no doubt prompt research fields such as anthropology, sociology, urban planning, socio-economy, cultural studies, but also history, to adjust their approach. Whether this rapid urbanization is lamentable or not, Asian cities bear witness of a waning importance of rural in favour of urban areas and deliver another blow to Orientalist images of an unchanging rural Asia. At the same time, by conveying some specific forms of urbanization in the non-Western context, the universal concept of urbanization is being redressed. We hope that you agree that this issue's theme proves a promising step in the above direction.

To conclude, Yasser Tabbaa's article 'Lessons from Looting' deserves a short remark. The much-debated unreliability of the figures on looted material that the Iraqi National Museum's director presented some two months ago, no doubt add to the controversial nature of this topic, for which reason we open the floor for your reactions to this article in particular. As always we also warmly welcome your comments and suggestions to other parts of the newsletter. Enjoy reading. ◀ ***Maurice Sijm***