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# Off-shoring Asian Studies?

## Director's note

The revamped Far Eastern Economic Review in its new monthly format has several advantages: its articles have become even better, and now that it is a monthly, we can keep up. Robyn Meredith's article 'The Next Wave of Offshoring' in the March 2005 issue drives home a message most people in the West turn a deaf ear to. In the near future this may no longer be possible as the message reads: you are fired!

Off-shoring is the substitution of foreign for domestic labour and is one of the main effects of globalisation. Why would a company hire a \$100,000-a-year computer programmer while the same work can be done by a programmer in India or China who is equally educated, more motivated, and earns \$10,000? Off-shoring or outsourcing is by no means a new phenomenon - blue collar work has been outsourced since the 1970s. But now that it is hitting the middle class, it is attracting attention and debate.

The Lisbon goals of the European Community stating that Europe should be the world's most competitive knowledge economy by 2010 is losing momentum. One reason is that this goal remains thwarted by national research agendas. Science is inherently universal in nature; until well into the eighteenth century, only natural barriers stood in the way of cooperation. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, nationalism together with imperialism cast the humanities and social sciences into national straightjackets (the hard sciences partly escaped the nationalist encroachment due to their abstract language, which eluded the bureaucracy and thus censorship). It gave birth to national research traditions, which were increasingly embedded in conservative research institutions using the national language, a trajectory that has clearly run its course.

This is largely due to diminishing research budgets at the national level. The time when any single country, no matter its size, could support full-fledged research in all scientific domains is long past. If we look at developments in Asian studies over the past decade, we see the gradual development of institutionalised cooperation in the European Alliance for Asian Studies. But regional European Asian studies associations have remained largely unchanged: no debate has developed on the future of Asian studies in a European context, let alone at the global level. There is thus no vision - and where there is no vision, crisis lurks, a crisis which could become the midwife of change.

Instead of sitting back to watch the withering away of Asian studies in Europe, we might begin to see the development of Asian studies in a global context. Europe could tender out research to centres in India, China and other Asian countries, retaining several flexible and agile centres of excellence as their counterparts. The cost of living in many Asian countries remains relatively inexpensive; wages could be a third of what they are in Europe. Off-shoring's biggest advantage, however, would lie in the greater number of (PhD) students and scholars pursuing their studies in an Asian environment. They would bring 'home' the knowledge of Asia that Europe needs to remain competitive in the twenty-first century. <

Wim Stokhof  
Director, IIAS



## IIAS Newsletter

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The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a post-doctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Our main objective is to encourage the interdisciplinary and comparative study of Asia and to promote national and international cooperation in the field. The institute focuses on the humanities and social sciences and their interaction with other sciences.

IIAS values dynamism and versatility in its research programmes. Post-doctoral research fellows are temporarily employed by or affiliated to IIAS, either within the framework of a collaborative research programme or on an individual basis. In its aim to disseminate broad, in-depth knowledge of Asia, the institute organizes seminars, workshops and conferences, and publishes the *IIAS Newsletter* with a circulation of 24,000.

IIAS runs a database for Asian Studies with information on researchers and research-related institutes worldwide. As an international mediator and a clearing-house for knowledge and information, IIAS is active in creating international networks and launching international cooperative projects and research programmes. In this way, the institute functions as a window on Europe for non-European scholars and contributes to the cultural rapprochement between Asia and Europe.

IIAS also administers the secretariat of the European Alliance for Asian Studies (Asia Alliance: [www.asia-alliance.org](http://www.asia-alliance.org)) and the Secretariat General of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS: [www.icassecretariat.org](http://www.icassecretariat.org)). Updates on the activities of the Asia Alliance and ICAS are published in the *IIAS Newsletter*. <