

Editorial: On Changes and Legacies – Rethinking ‘Asia’ and ‘Copenhagen’

VERA SKVIRSKAJA AND TRINE BROX

We are pleased to announce the publication of the first issue of the CJAS at the Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies (CCRS), the University of Copenhagen. The CJAS effectively moved from the Copenhagen Business School back to the University of Copenhagen during the lockdown in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020. Asia was on everybody’s mind and not for a good reason. Old stereotypes, new hostilities and animosities surfaced on the street and more so on social media, provoked by the supposedly ‘Asian’ or ‘Chinese’ virus. During the lockdown, stereotypes, of course, worked in various ways. While many Danish students were troubled by what they perceived to be the Danish state’s authoritarianism represented by the social distancing rules and online teaching, the Chinese exchange students stranded in their dormitories humorously commented that the lockdown had, at least, spared them bicycle rides to the University campus in cold, rainy weather.

What is ‘Asia’?

For the new editorial team of the CJAS and the journal’s supporters, discussing the journal’s new profile and, in this respect, concepts of regions and regionality also brought to the fore widespread stereotypes about Asia. The journal has always been dedicated to the study of modern Asia, and our thinking about the regional coverage of Asia has been influenced by our concerns about how to define and delimit Asia without falling back onto orientalist paradigms, proliferating in and outside the academia. What are the boundaries and types of exclusion and inclusion that will define the scope of the journal? Today, any world region is envisioned differently by the variously positioned political actors, and geopolitical realities are constantly evolving. While we focus on Asia, what is ‘Asia’? We hope that this very question will be addressed in all its complexity on the pages of the CJAS.

This article can be accessed at <https://doi.org/10.22439/cjas.v38i1.6064>.

In the academic profile of the journal, we have adopted a very broad 'regional' vision of Asia that blurs and incorporates Eurocentric and Asiatic perspectives. It also includes both the Asian diasporas and the Western/Southern/Northern diasporas in Asia; it furthermore encompasses inter-Asian north-south connections, be they shared cultural traditions or paradigms of religious life, that, for instance, give rise to ideas of West Asia. That is to say, in our take on Asia, we recognise the importance of global connections that solidify, break down or re-emerge in different sectors, from educational migration, religious movements and refugees to transnational commerce, entrepreneurship, development efforts and multiple Silk Roads. Our main goal is to disseminate research on Asia thus circumscribed across global communities of scholars, the general public, mass media and governmental agencies.

This wide coverage can only be made possible, or indeed feasible, by reinforcing and expanding the interdisciplinary platform of the CJAS, building on the interface between humanities and social sciences. The first issue of the revamped CJAS reflects this aspiration. From a historical-anthropological perspective, and using a case study of Afghanistan and Central Asia, the contribution by Marsden explores the legacy of urban cosmopolitanism in Muslim Asia. Christopher investigates a very different dynamic of cosmopolitan coexistence in his ethnographic study of Gaddi tribals and Tibetan refugees in the Indian Himalayas. Working within a framework of area studies, Sørensen addresses the use of printed media in promoting the ideological agenda of the Chinese Communist Party that legitimised workers' inequality and stratification after Mao's death.

Why 'Copenhagen'?

During the journal's transition back to the University of Copenhagen, Danish-based scholars specialising on Asia deliberated whether the CJAS should also change its name. For some, 'Copenhagen' in the title of an English language journal had connotations of parochialism, if not provincialism. Does it indicate the prospective authors' connection to Copenhagen or Denmark or Scandinavia? Does it hint at the location of the journal's main readership? Surely, none of these connections would hold well for an online journal in the globalised world of mobile scholars.

Yet, we have decided in favour of the original title for two reasons. First, the revamped CJAS remains committed to its original agenda

reflected in its name, namely to promote Danish research on modern Asia on a par with contributions by international scholars. As far as possible, we would like to maintain a certain degree of balance between Danish and international submissions, hereby encouraging young Danish scholars and strengthening the Danish research environment and its international networks. Second, by choosing to keep the name, we also acknowledge that today 'Copenhagen' is a brand and connotes something different from what it did thirty years ago when the CJAS was established. If thirty years ago Copenhagen, in and outside academia, was just opening up to the full swing of global cultural influences and transnational currents, today 'Copenhagen' is in vogue and aspires to be the vanguard of cultural life and intellectual creativity, attracting top international scholars, exchange students from all over the world, and producing cutting-edge scholarship. It is this creative energy and ambition that the CJAS would like to draw upon and contribute to.

Further Aspirations and Collaboration

As for the practical details, the journal aspires to maintain its independent status and will remain an open access publication accepting reports from the field and essays alongside original research articles. We will also attempt to continue publishing a small number of hard copies; first of all, to give to our subscribers and contributors, as well as to those who still prefer the feel of a printed journal. This first issue of 2020 is proud to introduce a new international Editorial Board that reflects the diversity and interdisciplinary profile of the revamped journal, but also welcomes on board some old members. Besides experienced specialists on Asia, the new international Advisory Committee includes two fellow Editors-in-Chiefs who will help us to navigate the world of online publishing, innovation and advertising. Finally, at the new 'headquarters' of the CJAS at the CCRS, we are grateful to the founding editor –Professor Kjeld Erik Brødsgaard – for his continuing support of, and participation in, the journal's life as a co-Editor-in-Chief.

We would also like to acknowledge the key role of the former head of the CCRS, Ingolf Thuesen – without his moral support, financial encouragement and contagious optimism throughout the lockdown and transition period, the CJAS might easily have succumbed to the virus.

We hope you stay safe and stay up to date with your knowledge about Asia!