

[IKOS](#) - Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo

[NIAS](#) – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

10th Annual Nordic NIAS Council Conference

Environmental Asia

Voksenåsen, Oslo 20-22 November 2017

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PhD course

University of Oslo 23-24 November 2017

Call for conference papers

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Global environmental degradation and climate change are possibly the greatest challenges of our times. They have roots in humanity's long history of creatively making use of natural resources to generate change, often with unforeseen and unpredictable consequences. As the gravity of the world economy shifts east, Asia finds itself at the center of the global environmental crisis. It is home not just to 60 percent of the world's population, but also to some of the world's most rapidly expanding middle classes in the largest emerging economies. As a consequence of climate change, Asia is already feeling the social and economic impact of intensified droughts, floods, storms and pollution.

Asia has a history of sophisticated philosophical debates on man and nature, intertwined with pre-modern practices of transforming and redesigning the environment to serve human needs. At the same time, shifting regimes of capitalism, socialism, colonialism, neo-liberalism and authoritarianism have co-existed and informed environmental debates, practices and policies. While Asia is an extremely complex region to engage, it remains crucial for understanding both the historical roots of current environmental problems as well as for exploring joint future solutions.

The aim of this conference is to facilitate critical discussions about Asia's environmental pathways. What interests are at stake in current environmental policies, and who represents them? How will Asian societies deal with the double-bind of economic development and environmental protection? What roles do Asian religions and philosophies play in environmental debates? How have people reacted to and coped with major environmental changes in the past, and how do they anticipate the future? By exploring these questions, the conference aspires to promote a deeper understanding of environmental change in Asia.

We invite proposals for panels, roundtables or individual papers on these and related topics. Proposals should approach processes of environmental change in Asia from the perspective of the humanities or social sciences, including interdisciplinary ones that also integrate insights from the natural sciences. The conference encourages younger scholars, especially PhD and postdoctoral candidates to submit individual paper or panel proposals. Participants in the PhD course (that follows immediately after the conference) are expected to also take part in the conference (with or without paper presentation).

Keynote Speakers

The following speakers will inspire our proceedings:

- [Georgina Drew](#), Lecturer, Anthropology and Development Studies, The University of Adelaide, Australia
- [Susan Darlington](#), Professor, Anthropology and Asian Studies, Hampshire College, USA
- [Heiner Roetz](#), Professor, Department of East Asian Studies, Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany
- [Mahesh Rangarajan](#), Professor of History and Environmental Studies, Ashoka University, India

Pre-organized panels:

Participants may submit an abstract for a specified panel or roundtable, or an individual paper related to one of the pre-organized panels listed below.

The number of panels and session will be adjusted to the number of participants and their fields of interest.

1. Assessing Asian Environments

Environmental impacts assessment (EIA) tools are used across the globe in connection with projects related to industrial or infrastructural development or mining that have significant environmental implications. EIAs are mandatory in many Asian countries and are projected as a tool that, through the means and language of science and technology, will ensure a sustainable use of nature. But, in practice EIAs are often found to operate first and foremost as a technology that works to legitimize predefined projects. This panel invites papers that critically engage the discourses, practices and politics implicated in assessing Asian environments, as well as the ways in which such assessments enable or disable far-reaching environmental changes.

2. Energy in Asia

How energy is produced, transmitted and consumed can have immense cultural, social, political and environmental consequences. A long-term structural change in energy systems towards increasing use of renewable energy sources – the so called 'Energy transition' seems inevitable to tackle contemporary global and local environmental challenges. Simultaneously, a considerable portion of Asia's population lack access to adequate energy, resulting in health deprivation, poverty and social inequality. As the world's most populous region, the complexities of energy in Asia are in need of further exploration that moves beyond conventional technical and economic factors. We are looking for panelists from the Social Sciences, Humanities or Inter-disciplinary Studies that are interested in exploring these issues across Asia.

3. Food, agriculture and sustainability in Asia: Politics, environments and practices

The social and economic transformations in major Asian countries during the last decades have also involved the reshaping of food and agriculture. Forms of production, distribution and consumption of food have changed in striking ways, affecting and affected by global, regional and local food systems and food cultures. These changes are giving shape to new Asian 'agrarian environments' while posing serious challenges to global and local environmental sustainability. This panel invites papers with a focus on the sustainability of

food production and/or consumption in 'emerging' Asia. Relevant topics include, but are not restricted to: Changing food systems, food value chains, agrarian transformations and urban consumer culture.

4. Environmental history and traditions in Asia

Papers in this panel will address the history of climate change, environmental degradation and human adaptation to these changes, or historical views on nature and the environment in Asian traditions. Both scientific data and written sources in Asia carry historical evidence of large scale climatic changes, of degradation of the environment due to human exploitation of nature, and of human adaptation to a changing environment. Asian philosophies and religions carry traits of indigenous Asian views on the relationship between man, environment and nature. Historically, nature and the environment have been on the agenda in fiction, in philosophical and religious texts, and in public discourse in Asia. All these various historical perspectives on human-nature-environment relations may be the basis for papers in this panel.

5. Policies and the public

Asia includes many different political models and regimes, influencing forms of interactions and interfaces between political authorities and different groups in the population. How is that reflected in the formulation and implementation of environmental policies and in people's ways of responding to environmental degradation? What variants of collaborative and authoritarian forms of environmental governance are observable? What role does science play for the different involved actors – policy makers and citizens, for instance – in identifying problems and searching for solutions? Also, does Asia stand out with regard to instruments of environmental governance that find application in different countries, or cross-regionally?

6. Religion, nature and environmental issues in Asia

In recent years, numerous scholars and religious leaders have made the association between religion, nature conservation and environmental issues. Asian traditions such as Buddhism, Daoism, Hinduism and Shinto have all acquired new meanings in the light of contemporary environmental concerns. Sacred texts and ritual practices have sometimes been reinterpreted as "traditional ecological knowledge", while sacred forests and temple mountains in China, India, Japan, Thailand and elsewhere have been redefined as biodiversity hotspots and subjected to conservation practices. For this panel, we invite papers that critically explore the interplay between religion and the environment in Asia. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, environmental activism by religious organisations, conservation of sacred sites, identity politics and environmental rhetoric, relations between nature worship and environmental change, and conceptions of nature in sacred texts.

The programme will consist of keynotes, panel debates and roundtables, while also reserving time for informal discussions and networking. The event will offer good opportunities to meet people in the field, network, and informally exchange views and ideas. The conference is followed by a two day PhD course (see separate announcement below).

Participation

Conference participation is open to scholars and doctoral candidates in the social sciences and humanities. We encourage contributions with emphasis on interdisciplinary perspectives. It is possible for a limited number of participants to attend the conference without presenting a paper, or to attend only the keynote speeches.

Conference Fee and Accommodation:

The conference fee for paper presenters is 250 Euro, which includes accommodation during the conference, as well as conference dinners and lunches (according to the programme). Accommodation will be provided at Voksenåsen, which is also the conference venue. For more information please visit the conference website.

If you wish to attend the conference without presenting a paper the conference fee is 100 Euro and does not include conference dinners and lunches.

Deadlines:

International researchers working on Asia in any social science and humanities discipline are invited to submit abstracts for papers. Each abstract should not exceed 300 words.

- 29 August 2017: Deadline for submitting abstract (maximum 300 words)
- 25 August 2017: Acceptance of abstracts by Academic Committee
- 1 November 2017: Deadline for paying the conference fee

Abstracts should be submitted by registering on the conference website where all practical information about the conference is available:

www.environmental-asia.com

Organizing committee:

- Mette Halskov Hansen, Professor, University of Oslo
- Arild Engelsen Ruud, Professor, University of Oslo
- Aike Peter Rots, Associate Professor, University of Oslo
- Rune Svarverud, Professor, University of Oslo
- Kenneth Bo Nielsen, Researcher and Network Coordinator, University of Oslo
- Katrine Herold, Project Coordinator, NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies

For further information please contact

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- Arild Engelsen Ruud, Professor, University of Oslo, a.e.ruud@ikos.uio.no

PhD Course – Working with Environmental Asia

The conference will be combined with a PhD course where doctoral candidates will present and discuss their research projects with senior researchers as well as with fellow doctoral candidates.

This PhD course will focus on the methodology when working with Environmental Asia. Taking the questions, problems, dilemmas and decisions of the individual research project as the point of departure the focus will be on how to work with sources, how to do fieldwork, how to integrate theory and how to organize a thesis.

The course can be taken as a 7.5 ECTS credit course (to be approved by the individual student's home university/institution). To receive the credits, doctoral students must attend the conference on November 20-22, the PhD course on November 23-24, submit and present a paper (10-12 pages) which draws on the course readings, and give comments to a fellow PhD student's paper.

Doctoral candidates are also encouraged to present a paper at the main conference. This paper may not be similar to the methodology paper prepared for the PhD course. Students wishing to present a paper at the conference and to attend the PhD course must submit two abstracts.

Commentators for the PhD Course

- **Susan Darlington**, Professor, Anthropology and Asian Studies, Hampshire College
- **Heiner Roetz**, Professor, Department of East Asian Studies, Ruhr-Universität Bochum
- **Georgina Drew**, Lecturer, Anthropology and Development Studies, The University of Adelaide
- **Geir Helgesen**, Director, NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies
- **Mette Halskov Hansen**, Professor, University of Oslo
- **Arild Engelsen Ruud**, Professor, University of Oslo
- **Aike Peter Rots**, Associate Professor, University of Oslo
- **Rune Svaverud**, Professor, University of Oslo
- **Kenneth Bo Nielsen**, Researcher and Network Coordinator, University of Oslo

Fee and Accommodation PhD Course

The fee for the PhD course is 250 Euro, which includes conference fee, accommodation, lunches and dinners (according to the programme). Accommodation is provided for 4 nights from 20 to 24 November 2017.

More information is available on the conference website.

PhD course – Guidelines and reading list

The course will focus on the 'doing', that is the processes, practices, procedures, and theories involved when studying environmental issues in Asia. Methodology is understood to involve all the considerations when choosing the research question(s) and the theories and actual methods that will be used to address the question, as well as the challenges you encounter in the process of gathering and processing data. The first part of the course consists of your participation in the lectures and sessions that form the conference Environmental Asia. The second part of the course will consist of your individual written work, oral presentations and feedback from and discussion with teachers and course participants.

Your presentations

You are expected to prepare and present a 10-12 page text about the doing of your research in which you draw on and relate to at least parts of the course readings.

What you write will of course depend on where you are in the research process:

- If you are at the very beginning of defining your study you may choose to write about your considerations regarding the formulation of a researchable question. You might do this by drawing on the course texts as well as by drawing inspiration from a selection of monographs while reflecting on the authors' problem formulation, theories and methods used, and knowledge production.
- For those who have come a bit further in the research and whose project is well under way, you can present your research proposal as well as further reflections on methodology, use of theory etc. related to the course texts.

Your text should not present and discuss your research findings in the format of a traditional academic paper or article. The focus should be on reflection and discussion of methodological issues. The point is to discuss aspects of your project that are difficult, or that you are struggling with and where you can benefit from a discussion.

Course readings:

TBA

www.environmental-asia.com

For further information please contact

- Katrine Herold, Project Coordinator, NIAS, Katrine.herold@nias.ku.dk
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