

International Convention of Asia Scholars 6

Daejeon, Republic of Korea, August 6-9, 2009

The 6th International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) was held this year in Daejeon, which is known as South Korea's research and development hub. Convened at the Daejeon Convention Center and jointly hosted by the ICAS Secretariat, the Daejeon Metropolitan City, the Chungnam National University and the University's Center for Asian Regional Studies the ICAS brought together 800 scholars from over 50 countries, who attended 170 panels or visited the exhibition hall. Most of the panellists came from North- and Southeast Asia, the United States, Europe and India with most of the panels covering the themes Society and Identity, Politics and International Relations as well as History. Although the number of participants declined in contrast to ICAS 5, which was held in Malaysia and gathered 1350 academics in 330 panels, the biennial held conference is one of the largest gatherings in the field of Asia-related research. According to the organizers the ICAS is the only major, regular Asia studies event taking place in Asia. The overriding motto of this year's conference was to "Think Asia", which ought to underline the emerging significance of the world's largest continent. Reflecting also the diversity of Asia the ICAS covered a wide range of topics and research areas reaching for instance from religion, media communications and environment energy to law, welfare health and development urbanization.

Keynote speeches were given from three speakers. The opening speech was given by Dominique Girard, who is the Executive Director of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). While giving a general introduction into the activities of the ASEF, Girard casually commented on the problems with delineating the boundaries of the Asian continent.

He was followed by Gilbert Rozman, who is the Musgrave Professor of Sociology at Princeton University. In his talk Rozman compared the national identities of China, Japan and South Korea to disclose regional commonalities. He argued that these regional similarities reveal the presence of what he calls the "East Asian National Identity Syndrome". Rozman outlined a six-dimensional – ideological, sectoral, temporal, vertical, horizontal and depth – framework for the analysis of the Chinese, Japanese and South Korean national identities. Due to reasons of space, his approach can not be discussed here in full length. Generally, Rozman's division of national identity into six fragments is problematic since the delimitation of each of the dimensions, e.g. ideological, sectoral and temporal, is unclear or overlap. Furthermore, Rozman rightly mentioned the role of the United States in affecting the national identity of China, Japan and Korea, which denotes for him the horizontal dimension, but he ignores the role of the three East Asian entities themselves for the development of a national identity. Not to mention that for instance Russia also plays a crucial role in regional identity formation processes. Another problem is his so called depth dimension, in which Rozman attempts to measure the intensity or

strength of national identity in the three East Asian countries. He asserts that the intensity of national identity reached its highest level in China. Challenging here is the question how to gauge the different degrees of strength of national identity or rather how to identify basic indicators, which could range from comparative standardized surveys to the counting of national flags or singing of national anthems in each country. It appeared also that Rozman revealed a culturalist argumentation and essentialist understanding of identity in his speech neglecting the socially or discursively constituted character of identities.

The last speaker was the Korean philosopher Kim Young-oak. In his vocally presented speech Kim lamented that “we have so far been too neglectful of the value of Asian identity” and campaigned for a reevaluation of the “entire inheritance of all of humanity within the context of the Asian Continent Civilization”. Although Kim’s appeal appears somewhat overconfident he went further by co-opting or referring to specific historic developments as ‘Asian’-originated achievements or ancestry, which are for him the hallmarks of a civilization. As he asserts, besides Confucianism and Buddhism every major religion of the world such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam is of ‘Asian’ origin. Moreover, instead of seeing Jesus merely as a Jew, Kim proposes to conceive him also as “an Asian who was intimately familiar with the Wisdom Tradition of Asia”. In his praise of the putative ‘Asian’ accomplishments and his criticism of a Eurocentric view on history Kim oversees that the term ‘Asia’ he used throughout his speech can serve as the very instance of a Eurocentric perspective since Asia, but also other hegemonic representations such as the Orient or Africa, were European (colonial) inventions. That there is no indigenous Korean, Japanese or Chinese word for ‘Asia’, should serve as an example of this modern concept.

In total ICAS 6 was a well organized conference, which also enjoyed the appreciation of the South Korean government by sending the Prime Minister Han Seung-soo, who delivered congratulatory remarks at the ICAS welcoming dinner. The next ICAS will be held in 2011 in Hawaii.

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Indien nach der Wahl: Politik - Religion - Gewalt

Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll, 18.-20. September 2009

Der Ausgang der letztjährigen Wahlen in Indien wurde in Deutschland nur mit mäßigem Interesse verfolgt, obwohl Indien mit mehr als einer Milliarde Menschen als „größte Demokratie der Welt“ gilt. Im Vergleich mit dem Rummel, der um die US-Wahl und um die Person Barack Obamas allerorten entfacht wurde, wurde von der subkontinentalen Wahl eher am Rande Notiz genommen. In letzter Zeit ist Indien immer wieder durch nationalistische und religiöse Exzesse aufgefallen. Vor allem die Christen in Orissa fürchteten ein Erstarken der Hindunationalisten, die dort