Trajectories of memory embodied in memorial and historical sites


Kleinen, J.

Published in:
IIAS Newsletter

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

UvA-DARE is a service provided by the library of the University of Amsterdam (http://dare.uva.nl)
Building the New Silk Road

A collective and interdisciplinary analysis of social progress

Building material knowledge through conservation in Indonesia

Celebrating 25 years of the International Institute for Asian Studies
From the Director
3 Second Africa-Asia Conference in Dar es Salaam: Boundless Circulation of Knowledge

IIAS celebrates 25 years
4-5 A number of special activities have been planned for the upcoming year in honour of IIAS’s 25th anniversary.

The Study
6-7 Imaginaries of Jurong Industrial Estate, Singapore
Loh Kah Seng
8 The lingering corpse in the Chinese urban Qin Shao
9 A besieged artist: Hal Wichers in the Netherlands Indies Louis Zweers
10-11 China’s country music: China wind Milan Ismangil

The Region
12-14 China Connections
15-17 News from Northeast Asia
18-19 News from Southeast Asia
20-23 News from Australia and the Pacific

The Review
24-25 New reviews on newbooks.asia
26-27 Selected reviews from newbooks.asia
28 New titles on newbooks.asia

The Focus
29 A collective and interdisciplinary analysis of social progress
Guest editor: Olivier Bouin
30 Rethinking Asia for the 21st Century Ravi Kanbur
31 Social justice and well-being: lessons for Asia Hiroshi Ono
32-33 Values and principles for social progress Henry S. Richardson
34-35 Economic growth, social progress and planetary welfare Purnamita Dasgupta
36-37 Public health and social progress Vivian Lin, Britta Baer and Kate Silburn
38-39 Sustainable social progress begins with education: current perspectives on the Asia region Suman Verma
40 Religion and social flourishing in Asia Samia Huq

The Network
42-47 Reports
48 New Publication
49 Announcements
50 Digital Resources
51-52 Announcements
53 IIAS Fellowship Programme
54-55 IIAS Research, Networks and Initiatives

The Portrait
56 Song of Spring: Pan Yu-Lin in Paris
Chantal Miller Gallery, Asia Society Hong Kong Center (ASHK)
The Newsletter is a free periodical published by IIAS. As well as being a window into the institute, The Newsletter also links IIAS with the community of Asia scholars and the worldwide public interested in Asia and Asian studies. The Newsletter bridges the gap between specialist knowledge and public discourse, and continues to serve as a forum for scholars to share research, commentary and opinion with colleagues in academia and beyond.

Postal address
PO Box 9500
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands

Visitors
Rapenburg 59
Leiden
T +31 (0) 71-527 2227
iias@iias.nl

Colophon
The Newsletter
No. 81 Autumn 2018
Managing editor:
Sonja Zweegers
Guest editor for The Focus:
Olivier Buin
Regional editors:
Terence Cheng (SEAS),
Ihong Ko (SNMAC),
Cheryl M. Schmitz (NYU Shanghai),
Edwin Jurriëns, Ana Draguljovic
and Andy Fuller (Asia Inst. of
The University of Melbourne).
The Review pages editor:
Wai Cheung
The Network pages editor:
Sandra Dehue
Digital issue editor:
Thomas Vostier
Graphic Design:
Paul Oram
Lava
Printing:
EPC, Belgium

Submissions
Issue #82: 15 November 2018
Issue #83: 15 March 2019
Issue #84: 15 July 2019

Submission enquiries
iiasnews@iias.nl
More information:
iias.asia/the-newsletter

Free subscriptions
On to: iias.asia/subscribe
To unsubscribe, to make changes
(i.e., new address), or to order
multiple copies: iiasnews@iias.nl

Rights
Responsibility for copyrights and
for facts and opinions expressed
in this publication rests exclusively
with authors. Their interpretations
do not necessarily reflect the views
of the institute or its supporters.
Reprints only with permission from
the author and The Newsletter
editor iiasnews@iias.nl

iias.asia
Scholars, artists and eyewitnesses participated at a conference in Utrecht in 2017 to discuss the history of memory embodied in Tuol Sleng, a Phnom Penh secondary school converted into a special interrogation and execution place by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. They discussed the memorial museum itself, but also artifacts, pictures, movies, theatrical productions and paintings that contain tangible and intangible traces of the Khmer Rouge’s mass slaughtering, which turned Cambodia into an enacted utopia between 1975 and 1979. Phnom Penh was liberated on January 7, 1979. The prison became an impressive memorial for the victims who were executed 15 kilometers from Tuol Sleng/S-21 at Choeung Ek. The prison was the summit of a system of 197 interrogation centers that together formed the center of the Killing Fields of Cambodia. In Tuol Sleng alone an estimated number of 18.000 people were interrogated, tortured and killed. Just a dozen male prisoners and four children survived. Pol Pot’s reign of terror between 1975 and 1979 was accountable for the death of at least 1.7 million people. Nowadays Tuol Sleng is open to the public as a genocide museum. It plays a role in the painful ‘heritage’ left by the former regime, for imagining a past that is remembered, but nearly lost. As proof of an atrocity it tells a narrative that is elsewhere created. The contributors of this special issue reflect upon this legacy in a kaleidoscopic way. Important is that local voices are included here, like the former and present directors of the museum, Chey Sophara and Chhay Visoth, who give the reader an intrinsic Cambodian perspective upon a painful past. They also tell of the laborious way the museum had to struggle with the help of foreign donors to engage with the institutional technology of representation. Rachel Hughes’ article about the role and function of visitor source and a medium of agency, even until today. A well-known iconic image is the photo of prisoner number 462, a mother and her child; she too had her name returned to her. Chan Kim Srun became the symbol of the way the Khmer Rouge crushed innocence and reduced people to dust. The display of photographs also played a pivotal part in the outreach work of the extraordinary chambers in the courts of Cambodia (ECCC). While the verdicts of judicial cases against the main perpetrators might have been a deception for many who suffered from the Pol Pot regime, the criminal
process is, like Sarah Williams argues in her contribution “only one dimension of an ongoing process of remembering” (p.75). Julia M. Fleischman, however, suggests that the results of forensic medical anthropology in the form of human remains are used quite late during the trials of former Khmer Rouge leaders. Her findings are supported by the contributions of Chhay Visoth (about explicit graffiti) and Magali An Berthon (about textile and clothing), who also make an appeal not to dismiss these forms of evidence.

This special issue dealing with the Cambodian genocide——still a term that requires explanation——also gets its weight from the visual material it presents (including archive photos of the museum itself) and the various interviews the editors held with Cambodian and non-Cambodian artists, who were asked to share details of their relationship with Tuol Sleng and the ways in which their work is influenced by the past.

The interview by Stéphanie Benzaquen-Gautier with American anthropologist Eve Zucker concludes the section with a fascinating account of memory practices of villagers who try to cope with the horror in their community. It also reflects on the fieldwork she conducted in Cambodia——an experience she recounts in her book Forest of Struggle: Moralities of Remembrance in Upland Cambodia (2013)——as she tracked the recovery of a village community in the southwest of the country, a site that was a Khmer Rouge base and battleground for nearly thirty years. The interview opens up the question of the remembrance of Khmer Rouge atrocities beyond Tuol Sleng and the urban environment. It points to a nationwide traumatic landscape, which in turn helps to better understand the role of the museum in today’s Cambodian memory politics, and to imagine alternative forms of memorialization of a historical period that continues to haunt generations of Cambodians. This closing paper reminds the reader of the limited space most of the authors have contributed to debates about theoretical issues. Ever since Jean Lacouture’s inapt verdict about the Khmer Rouge as an expression of tropical fascism, allusions to the Gulag or Laogai systems have been scarce. As said, the Khmer Rouge’s mass slaughtering as a means to create an enacted utopia, inspired by Maoist China, comes closer to realities than the many references to Nazi-Germany. An approach as proposed by Dutch sociologist Abraham de Swaan in his book The Killing Compartments (2015) might be a way-out to understand and to compare the tragedy that struck the inhabitants of Cambodia between 1975 and 1979. 

—John Kleinen
Visual anthropologist and historian, Dept. of Anthropology at the University of Amsterdam and the Amsterdam International School for Social Science Research (AISSR), j.o.g.m.kleinen@uva.nl