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From the Editor's Desk

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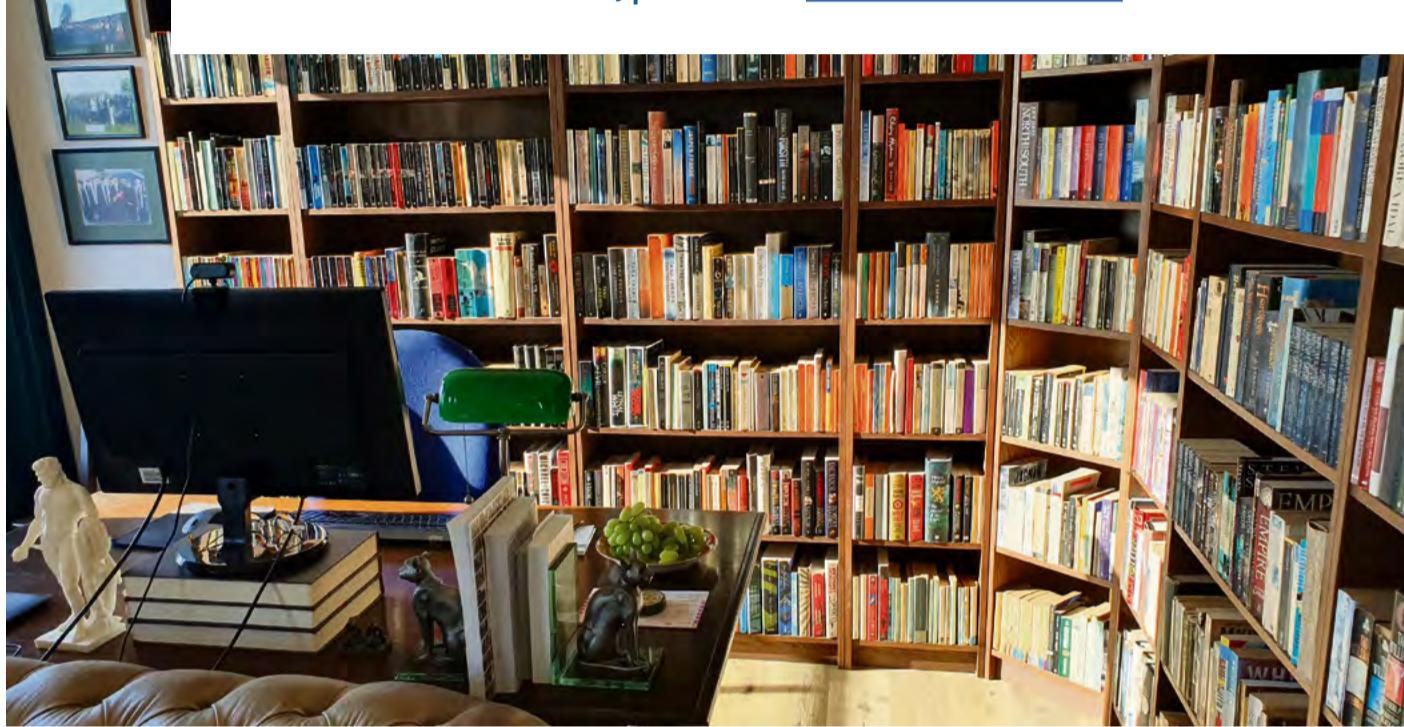
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From the Editor's Desk

Gregory Bracken

The International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is a wonderful place to work. I had the good fortune to be a Research Fellow there from 2010 to 2016, during which I finalised and wrote up the research for a monograph (based on my PhD thesis, which I defended in TU Delft in 2009). The book, *The Shanghai Alleyway House: A Vanishing Urban Vernacular*, was published by Routledge in 2013, and it was through contacts made at IIAS that it was translated into Chinese two years later.

While at IIAS I also organised a series of annual conferences around themes I was interested in. This proved to be not only a very effective way of getting in touch with people interested in similar topics (often from other disciplines – a good way of broadening horizons); it also proved a fecund generator of publications, with just over 50 percent of these events leading to books or special issues of journals.

The conferences themselves were usually one- or two-day events. If it was intended to lead to a publication, it was definitely two-day in order to have a larger pool of potential papers. The series continued even after I left IIAS, thanks to their generous support. Spring 2022 saw the latest installment (the 13th): a conference on “Future Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West.” This is the third in a series dedicated to the Care of the Self (Michel Foucault’s concept). The first two were “Ancient and Modern Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West” and “Contemporary Practices of Citizenship in Asia and the West,” both of which were developed into edited volumes published by IIAS and Amsterdam University Press in their Asian Cities series.

Other edited volumes generated by IIAS conferences were *Asian Cities: Colonial to Global* (2015) and *Aspects of Urbanization in China: Shanghai, Hong Kong, Guangzhou* (2012, predating the Asian Cities series). There were also two special issues of

the journal *Footprint*: “Mapping Urban Complexities in an Asian Context” (2008, Issue 2) and “Future Publics: Politics and Space in East Asia’s Cities” (2013, Issue 12). *Footprint* was co-founded by myself with a group of colleagues at the Delft School of Design (now the Theory Section of the Architecture Department, TU Delft). The journal is dedicated to architectural theory and focusses on a wide variety of issues relating to the built environment. Our focus on Asia made for an interesting addition.

I have, in fact, also written quite a number of books. There’s the Walking Tour series of architectural guides on (mostly) Asian cities (but also including London and Paris). I illustrate these books as well with line drawings. The series spawned some spin-offs, with guides to Dublin and Cork in Ireland (where I am originally from) and even Ahmedabad in India. I also wrote two novels in the 1990s, one of which, *Unusual Wealth*, was set in Thailand (where I lived at the time) and was a national bestseller there. This led to interviews in newspapers and magazines and even on TV in Australia and Singapore – something that also happened when *Dublin Strolls* (written with my sister Audrey) became a surprise bestseller in Ireland in 2016. We also found ourselves being interviewed by newspapers, magazines, and on radio and TV. I’m only mentioning this to point out that I have worked with a number of publishers, in Europe and Asia, but that Amsterdam University Press is one of the most consistently pleasant to work with: efficient, professional, and friendly.

Editorial process

And now to the editing. Using a conference (or, if you’re lucky, a series of them) as a basis for publications is a good idea. I claim no credit for this strategy, it just sort of happened. If you gather a group of researchers together, then a book or an issue of a journal is a good way to disseminate

research. The key is planning to do it from the beginning. As only a little over half my events led to publications, it actually led to a very workable rhythm, with shorter conferences alternating with longer ones (the ones that led to the publications).

When planning an event with a publication in mind, it needs to be clear to those involved that it is a two-step process: step one being the conference itself, and step two being the publication. What I have done in the past is to compose a call for abstracts specific enough to coalesce around given themes but broad enough to attract a wide field of interest. Cross-disciplinary endeavours have proved particularly interesting because they lead to the most surprising and rewarding results: anything from an analysis of Korean martial arts to seeing graffiti’s role in a city’s politics (there are of course more ‘classical’ aspects of urban research as well, including gentrification, citizen participation, heritage issues, etc.).

Once the call has gone out, a selection is then made from the submissions. Usually, I’ve been lucky with the numbers: the latest, on future practices of citizenship, had well over 100 applicants (for only 16 places). This is great, on the one hand, because you have a wide range to choose from, but it’s also tough, because decisions sometimes exclude potentially interesting papers.

This latest event is a useful one to illustrate the whole process, from call to editing. For the first time I had co-convenors: Paul Rabé, from IIAS, with whom I have worked for many years on projects such as co-editing *Future Challenges of Cities in Asia* (with R. Parthasarathy, Neha Sami, and Bing Zhang – also in AUP’s Asian Cities series), and Nurul Azlan, whose PhD I supervised in TU Delft, and whose work on the digital aspects of spatialisation of politics was one of the themes we were hoping to explore in our call.

Given, as I said, that we had so many applicants, we decided to institute a system of assessing the abstracts, with a yes, maybe, or no (the maybe also had a plus or a minus aspect). We were quickly able to identify the papers we wanted – that is, those that best fitted the themes and each other. We then organised the panels to cover the topics: citizenship, the digital age, Covid-19 and its responses, and sustainability. Papers that adopted a comparative approach are

particularly welcome, as you get not only individual research in a case study but the combination of these to further enrich the knowledge.

We make it clear that we do not expect people to present finished papers at the event – this is why we only ask for abstracts initially. We prefer to see a work in progress, with the event acting like a seminar or symposium rather than the more traditional conference. After people present, they receive feedback from us, as coordinators, but also from their fellow participants and audience members. We expect people to attend both days in full and to involve themselves in the discussions. This year’s event was particularly good for the discussions, and one of the benefits of being a small event is that we can allow sessions to run over time without adversely affecting the programme. We always allow plenty of time for each session, as well for breaks, which can (and do) get shortened to allow for interesting discussions to continue.

Publication

The next step is the publication – and here we finally come to editing. Within a month or so of the conference I contact contributors with feedback. This consists of comments made during the discussions. (This is also when contributors are informed if their papers have not made it to the next stage – I usually prefer to have more people at the conference than can fit into the book as this is a good way of ensuring we have enough papers). Some people drop out, for personal reasons, and some fail to make it through peer review (although this is rare, thanks in part to the diligent incorporation of feedback from the conference). I, as editor, also suggest places where contributors can refer to each other’s work (something praised by reviewers of past volumes).

We always organise the event in the spring, usually April or May. This means that contributors have the summer to finish their papers. If they have been able to incorporate the feedback, they usually have a relatively smooth run through the peer-review process (which is usually blind, although it can sometimes be double-blind, if a particular contributor requests it).

First-draft papers are submitted by 1 September and edited during the autumn. The peer review takes place early the following year, with the following summer for contributors to redraft their papers (if they’ve made it through peer review). There then follows a second editing period in the autumn, which pulls everything together prior to sending the MS in to the publishers. This is when I usually add my own Introduction and, where appropriate, an Afterword or Conclusion. The format of the book may differ from the conference, and it all depends on finding the best way of fitting the papers together so that there is cohesion as well as a logical progression.

I have traditionally been quite a ‘hands-on’ editor, meaning that I make changes rather than simply suggest them to the contributors. Any changes that are made are always run by the contributor (who is usually only too happy to find that things have been done for them). I also do the proofreading at this stage.

The third and final editing stage is when Amsterdam University Press’s editorial team gets involved. Final corrections are made, and this is when I compile the index, a time-consuming task but one which I rather enjoy (probably because I don’t have to do it too often). Finally, a cover is selected (usually from a range of my images, as I have built up quite an archive of Asian photographs over the last three decades). Once the book comes out, I try to ‘launch’ it. This means giving short lectures at the IIAS, TU Delft, and elsewhere. I also present it at conferences, basically anything to let people know it’s out.

I do hope this brief sketch of my editorial process is helpful, especially to anyone planning similar activities. Do feel free to get in touch if you would like to know some more.

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