

THE STATE OF SWEDISH EAST ASIA RESEARCH

Stockholm May 2017



Conference report



A word of thanks

On May 11, 2017, researchers from all over Sweden focusing on East Asia gathered in Stockholm. The conference, organized by the Institute for Security & Development Policy and the European Institute of Japanese Studies at the Stockholm School of Economics, aimed to create opportunities to discuss the current research environment, challenges in the field, and prospects for increased cooperation. In this conference report, we summarize the day's panel discussions and their findings. Videos of full panels, including comments from the audience, can be found on ISDP's website, www.isdp.eu.

A special thanks goes to Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, who through generous funding made this conference possible, and to the Stockholm School of Economics who provided the conference venue. We would also like to thank all speakers and participants for their engagement and positive feedback.



Institute for Security &
Development Policy

Conference schedule

- 09.00-09.05** **Welcoming remarks**
Lars Ågren, Senior Executive Vice President, Stockholm School of Economics
Niklas Swanström, Director of the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP)
- 09.05-09.25** **Keynote speech**
Urban Ahlin, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament
- 09.25-10.00** **The Asian Future - Effects of Asia on Sweden**
Cecilia Ruthström Ruin, Head of Department for Asia and the Pacific, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden
Frédéric Cho, Frédéric Cho Advisory AB
- 10.10-10.55** **Tried and Tested - Building for the Future**
Stein Tønnesson, Leader of Programme on the East Asian Peace, Uppsala University
Börje Ljunggren, Former Ambassador to China and Vietnam
Marie Söderberg, Director of the European Institute of Japanese Studies (EIJIS), Stockholm School of Economics
- 10.55-11.45** **The Present and Future of Swedish Asia Research**
Linus Hagström, Professor of Political Science, Swedish Defence University and Senior Research Fellow, UI
Johan Lindquist, Professor of Social Anthropology & Director of the Forum for Asian Studies, Stockholm University
Marina Svensson, Director of the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University
- 13.00-13.55** **Thinking Outside the Box - Solutions from Different Approaches**
Joakim Appelquist, Director and Head of International Division, Vinnova
Eva Hansson, Coordinator and Researcher with the Forum for Asian Studies, Stockholm University
Niklas Swanström, Director, Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP)
- 14.00-14.30** **Key findings**
Lars Vargö, Distinguished Fellow, ISDP
Karl Gustafsson, Associate Professor (Docent) & Senior Research Fellow, UI
- 14.30-17.00** **Research mingle**

In short:

- The Swedish East Asia research environment is strong, but is scattered among many different institutions. The field needs to be better consolidated.
- More coordination and cooperation is needed, not only between researchers, but also with funders and consumers of research.
- Asia's rapid development makes it important to understand and interact with the countries in the region.
- Sweden needs to form strong relationships with Asian counterparts.
- Better consolidation of the research field is needed.
- Researchers need to remain aware and critical of the differences in societal systems and approach to issues such as academic freedom, human rights and free and fair trade.
- There is a need to attract young researchers to the field to bring in new ideas and innovation.
- Claims that the research area is underfunded were brought up by several speakers, but were also challenged by representatives of funding organs.
- Sweden is small compared to Asia, but can have increased leverage together with the other Nordic countries.



Keynote speech

Urban Ahlin

After welcoming remarks by Dr. Lars Ågren, Senior Executive Vice President of the Stockholm School of Economics and Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director of ISDP, Mr. Urban Ahlin, Speaker of the Swedish Parliament, opened the seminar with a keynote speech.

It is no exaggeration to say that the developments in East Asia have bearings on what happens in Sweden, said Mr. Ahlin. We live in an era where there is an enormous shift towards Asia, in terms of military weight, political weight, financial weight, and intellectual weight.

With rapid economic development and continuous population growth, Asia will remain influential on the global scale for a long time. Mr. Ahlin argued that, whether one likes it or not, it is therefore important for Sweden to understand the dynamics and processes at play, as well as how to interact with and benefit from Asian countries.

In this process, research and education is extremely important. Although the shift

will most likely take time, we will need to be prepared.

Mr. Ahlin went on to put forward the point that Sweden may be small on its own, but can make a sizeable impact in cooperation with its Nordic neighbors. As such, the Nordics should not be timid but instead be confident in their well-functioning societies; even though, he added, the Nordics may be the countries that end up more changed by Asia than the other way round.



Reminding the audience that we live in a globalized and highly competitive world, Mr. Ahlin contended that Sweden needs higher innovation, and

to find platforms in which academia, politics, and business can work together to increase their influence and impact.

Mr Ahlin mentioned two challenges for Asia in particular. Asia faces serious environmental challenges including climate change. Sweden, he argued, is a leader in environmental research and new technologies. Another challenge in this region is the South China Sea issue, which is probably the biggest threat to peace. He posed two questions to keep in mind: how is this situation to be solved, and can Sweden play a role in its resolution?

In the conclusion of his speech, Mr. Ahlin once again called for more networking between different sectors and greater collaboration within society to be better prepared to face future challenges.

The Asian future - Effects of Asia on Sweden

Cecilia Ruthström Ruin & Frédéric Cho
Moderated by Marie Söderberg

Ms. Ruthström-Ruin opened the discussion with reminding the audience of the diversity and expansiveness of Asia, and the consequent range of opportunities and challenges that the region contains for Sweden. She highlighted the inevitability of an “Asian future” as indicated by several



growth forecasts which have led to the 21st century being referred to as the “Asian century”. With growth, however, also looms the potential for grave challenges that might endanger the interests of not only Asia, but also Sweden.

With issues such as climate change, natural disasters, energy security, human rights violations and constraints on

free and fair trade, there is a need to bolster Asia-focused research in Sweden in order to effectively discuss and preempt such challenges.

Ms. Ruthström-Ruin emphasized that because of Sweden’s dependence on Asian markets, both for import and export, securing Asia is of crucial importance to Sweden.

Ms. Ruthström-Ruin then concluded by highlighting the importance of increasing cooperation between Sweden, (the European Union at large) and Asia to make procurement systems inclusive of life cycle costs rather than just minimizing costs, thereby ensuring stability.

Mr. Cho began by questioning the more near-Asian future given the uncertainty of the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Paris Climate Treaty under the Trump administration. He brought up the fact that very often, European actors tend to look at Asia through the “American lens”. This needs to change, he argued, in order to reflect more specific and independent European interests.



According to Mr. Cho, while Asia’s future will definitely have effects for Sweden, there are also many areas where Asian actors would like to learn from Sweden, such as pension reforms and financial crisis management. These areas could be leveraged by Sweden to build long-lasting relationships with Asian countries. Asia-focused research in Sweden will play a major role in advancing these relationships, thereby helping Sweden to remain relevant in Asia.

Tried and tested - Building for the future

Stein Tønnesson, Börje Ljunggren & Marie Söderberg
Moderated by Björn Jerdén

Prof. Stein Tønnesson built his presentation on a number of successes and mistakes in the East Asian Peace (EAP) Program at Uppsala University. Prof. Tønnesson began by highlighting the importance of finding a suitable funder and base of operation of the program. He argued for finding a specific, research focus, with a clear dependent variable to produce impactful results.



He further emphasized the importance of allowing competitive theories to form within the program instead of trying to find consensus, and to include a gender perspective.

The limitations of the Program include a reticence in inserting its research within Asia research in Sweden, a lack of women in the Advisory board, an inability to create a single cohesive research group, and insufficient use of social media.

Dr. Börje Ljunggren, former Swedish Ambassador to China and Vietnam, discussed important trends he has observed in Asia in recent years. These include a drift from an economy-driven to a security-driven Asia, which is making peace more and more fragile; China's growing role; increasing globalization; the reduction of poverty; and the retreat of democracy and human rights. Dr. Ljunggren concluded by claiming that Asia research in Sweden is under-funded and resources are too scattered.

Prof. Marie Söderberg, Director of the European Institute of Japanese Studies (EIJS), Stockholm School of Economics, reflected on what has worked and what has not in Asia research in Sweden so far. Firstly, she stressed the importance finding 'the right'

people, and of not remaining closed within the small Swedish community, but rather to find partners abroad, especially in Asia. Secondly, Prof. Söderberg also argued that researchers should provide policy-makers with innovative ideas for cooperation. Sweden should "listen to Asia" more, not necessarily by promoting the "Asian model", but certainly by being aware of it.

Finally, she stated, continuity is essential to enhancing cooperation between Swedish researchers.



The present and future of Swedish Asia research

Linus Hagström, Johan Lindquist & Marina Svensson
Moderated by Sangsoo Lee

Prof. Linus Hagström opened the panel by discussing the present state of Swedish Asia research. Swedish universities are increasingly internationalized and autonomous, he said, but Asia research still needs to be consolidated. Stockholm is a case in point, he argued, as Asia research is scattered across different university faculties and think-tanks.



Overall, cooperation is scarce and more efforts should be made in developing networks. Moreover, there is a need to increase the focus on Indonesia, and to re-think the concept of “area studies”, de-territorializing them and recognizing cultural differentiation processes. Prof.

Hagström concluded by underlining the importance of being aware of the differences in interests between think tanks, academia, businesses and governments, in order to develop “instrumental” forms of cooperation and find ways to create and fund more formalized networks.

The problem of funding was raised by many speakers, including Prof. Johan Lindquist, who emphasized the need for scholarship programs to attract young people to Asia research and bring in new ideas. He also noted that the distribution of narratives at the global level can have a strong impact on policy. For this reason, he emphasized that Asia researchers and experts should increase their impact by publishing in important journals, as well as by creating an inventory of circulating opinions and interpretations and assessing them in a critical way.

Prof. Marina Svensson concluded the panel by presenting the work of the Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies at Lund University and by underlining the im-

portance of enhancing Master’s programs on Asian studies, as education and research should be more integrated. She stressed the importance of a physical location for the future of Asia research. As such, she expressed the wish that Lund could become a hub to welcome new people and ideas, and form a room for collaboration on a national level. She called for a more inclusive approach, to connect more with Asian colleagues, and to improve communication and networking tools.



Thinking outside the box - Solutions from different approaches

Eva Hansson, Niklas Swanström & Joakim Appelquist
Moderated by Johan Lindquist

Dr. Eva Hansson, research administrator at the Forum for Asian Studies at Stockholm University, was the first speaker on the panel.

Dr. Hansson began by stating that we today live in a world that is increasingly anti-intellectual, and where there is shrinking space for academic freedom. As opposed to Sweden, where academic freedom is fairly protected, scholars in South East Asia face severe challenges.



However, she said, Sweden is not immune. Adding to the insecurity is the fact that 1/3 of staff at Swedish Universities are on temporary contracts. This disincentivizes focus on what is seen as narrow fields of research, such as studies of certain Asian countries, she said.

Dr. Hansson concluded her presentation by touching upon the differences between academic and policy research, stating that universities, as opposed to policy organizations, have a responsibility to provide free space for the creation of knowledge, and formation of democratic societies, and to convey this knowledge to students. If universities don't take on this role, she said, they lose their reason for being.

Dr. Niklas Swanström, Director of ISDP, discussed ISDP's approach to research as a fast-paced policy-oriented think tank often working with short-term projects, in comparison to academia, where the time-span often is longer.

ISDP staff often operate on short-term contracts. The Institute taps into a wide network in Europe, the US, and Asia to produce reports and work on projects.

While ISDP's approach sometimes leads to financial insecurity, and less production of 'slow-cooking research', it can grant greater flexibility and independence argued Dr. Swanström. However, challenges such as decreased Swedish funding, and time constraints in projects need constant attention and innovative thinking.

Dr. Swanström concluded by stating that one strong actor often can strengthen the field as a whole by creating positive competition and higher awareness our region of focus.



Dr. Joakim Appelquist was the final speaker on the panel. He is Director and Head of the International Division of Vinnova, a funding agency that focuses on fast-paced, innovative research, and sustainable long-term growth. Vinnova operates on the approach that bringing people from different sectors together promotes innovation. Based on input from international partners, Vinnova has in recent years focused less on academic-to-academic cooperation, and more on cooperation between different sectors, including local partners, with a solution-based approach. Dr. Appelquist concluded by stressing the importance of going out into society to anchor solutions in local communities.

Key findings from the day

Lars Vargö & Karl Gustafsson

Dr. Karl Gustafsson, Associate Professor and Senior Research Fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, and Dr. Lars Vargö, head of the Stockholm Japan Center at ISDP, were tasked with summarizing the day's key findings.



Dr. Vargö opened by saying that Asia is growing both in our minds as well as in reality. On the proliferation of research centers on Asia that had been brought up during the day, Dr. Vargö argued that there is room for everyone, so long as the research centers can cooperate. The need for specialized researchers is obvious: politicians and bureaucrats cannot do everything; they need researchers to make informed decisions. In

turn, researchers must be aware of their weaknesses and strengths. It is imperative that researchers and politicians complement each other. Dr. Vargö further seconded one participant's views who had asserted that people-to-people contacts are important – that we should be talking international relations in the plural, not in the singular.

Dr. Gustafsson focused on greater research and research funding. Most of the funding available to Asia research is not earmarked toward Asia, and the earmarked funding that does exist largely comes from the region itself, he claimed. Competition for funding is healthy, but the underfunded situation that characterizes Asia research is not conducive to the kind of slow research that would produce the best results. To make Asia researchers less fragile and to release some of the time spent competing for grants, more Asia-specific funding would be very helpful.

Nonetheless, the claim that Asia research is underfunded was disputed by some members of the audience, who stated that Asia research does not receive more or less funding than other research areas. Instead, Asia researchers should increase cooperation and coordination to create change and improvement in the field.



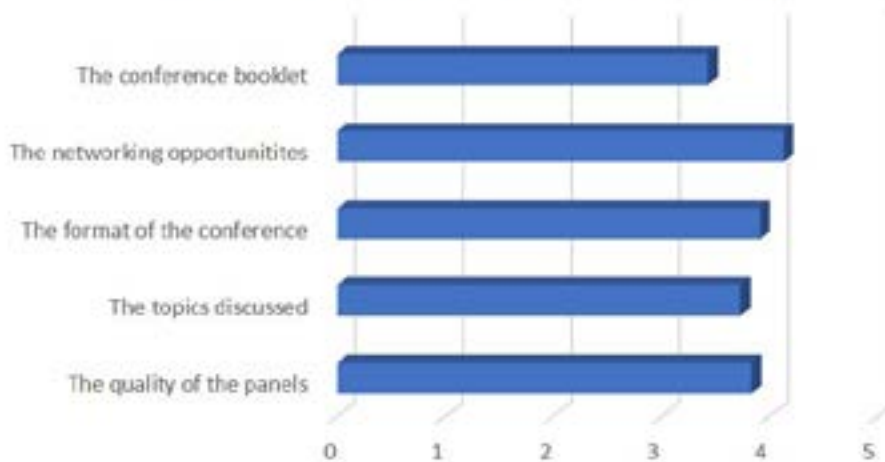
Participant feedback & Comments

Overall, how would you rate this conference?



■ Excellent ■ Very Good ■ Good ■ Fair ■ Poor

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate:



If there were a similar event next year, I would like to join.



■ Agree ■ Disagree

Next year, I would like to discuss:

“Practical cooperation opportunities and possibilities with institutions in Asia.”

“Research topics conducted among Swedish scholars on Asia. I think the research policy issues have been vented on the recent event to a large degree.”

“Straighter to the problems and more discussion about alternatives.”

“Opportunities for collaboration between researchers on Asian area studies. More concrete ways in which we can cooperate, such as special issues of journals or joint participation in specific academic Conferences.”

“Even more on how research conclusion may influence policies and strategies.”

“What Sweden gets out of the accumulated knowledge on Asian Studies? What is missing? Can other countries than China, Japan and Korea like India get more attention? What about Sri Lanka? Laos? Thailand?”

“How to move forward. How to create a coordinating platform. An actor that takes responsibility for enabling contacts and collaboration between research and policy makers as well as between different research groups.”

“Implications of changing demographic structure in the region.”

“We must reason on how research can be sold or bought. By putting it online for free is not sustainable in the future. Sharing knowledge between researchers and research institutes should be done in a coded way in order to preserve the particularity of a Swedish view on the research over Asia.”

www.isdp.eu
www.hhs.se/eijs