

**WHAT'S IN IT FOR SWEDEN?  
TOWARD A SHARED AGENDA FOR  
SWEDISH EAST ASIA RESEARCH**  
Gothenburg, April 26-27, 2018



**Conference Report**





## A Word of Thanks

On April 26-27, 2018, the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP) organized the second installment of the conference series East Asia Research in Sweden. The first conference in the series took place in May 2017 in Stockholm and provided an arena to discuss the current state of East Asia Research in Sweden. This year, we set out to explore deeper what a shared agenda for Swedish East Asia Research could look like, whether a shared agenda is possible, and how it could be put into action. This time around the conference took place at the University of Gothenburg. In this conference report, we summarize the day's panel discussions and their findings. Videos of the full panels, including comments from the audience, can be found on ISDP's website, [www.isdp.eu](http://www.isdp.eu).

A special thanks goes to the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences, who through generous funding made this conference possible, and to the University of Gothenburg who provided the conference venue. We would also like to thank all speakers and audience for their active engagement and participation.



Institute for Security &  
Development Policy



RIKSBANKENS  
JUBILEUMSFOND

STIFTELSEN FÖR HUMANISTISK OCH  
SAMHÄLLSVETENSKAPLIG FORSKNING

# Agenda, April 26

- 10:10-10:20**      **Introductory Words** by Niklas Swanström, Executive Director of the Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP)
- 10:20-12.00**      **Panel 1 - What Unites Us? What Divides Us?**  
Claes-Göran Alvstam, the University of Gothenburg  
Herbert Jonsson, Dalarna University  
Marina Svensson, Lund University
- 13.20-14.50**      **Panel 2 - Compete or Cooperate for Resources?**  
Richard Nakamura, the University of Gothenburg  
Martin Nordeborg, the University of Gothenburg  
Niklas Swanström, ISDP
- 15:10-16:40**      **Panel 3 - Toward a Shared Agenda?**  
Göran Blomqvist, the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences  
Ari Kokko, Copenhagen Business School and the University of Gothenburg  
Lars Vargö, ISDP

# Agenda, April 27

- 09:00-09:05**      **Introductory Words** by Patrik Ström, Head of Department, the Department of Business Administration, the University of Gothenburg
- 09:05-10:55**      **Research Panel 1**  
Gabriel Jonsson, Stockholm University  
Alin Kadfak, PhD Researcher  
Julian Tucker, ISDP
- 11:00-12:30**      **Research Panel 2**  
Herbert Jonsson, Dalarna University  
Mariya Aida Niendorf, Dalarna University
- 13:30-15:20**      **Research Panel 3**  
Bent Jörgensen, the University of Gothenburg  
Ernils Larsson, Uppsala University  
Curt Nestor, the University of Gothenburg

# In Short:

- Aim of this year's conference was to continue last year's discussion and to zero in on whether, how, and why Swedish East Asia research can and should have a "shared agenda."
- There should be an effort among Swedish East Asia researchers to reach out to researchers outside of their home region and particularly to Asian researchers.
- Funding has not decreased over time, but the intensiveness of the competition among researchers and organizations has.
- The importance of interdisciplinarity was emphasized by several of the speakers.
- University departments being larger can have the positive effect of bringing researchers from different fields together.
- Structural factors within universities are often not conducive to collaboration, or to Asian Studies. Greater efforts should be made to convince universities of the value of language studies and centers dedicated to East Asia research.
- Streamlining the field within Sweden and creating a national division of labor could be a way toward more efficient usage of resources.
- On the conference's second day, presentations from several different disciplines focusing on different countries in East Asia were exchanged, providing a venue for the transdisciplinary often sought after.



# Introductory Words, April 26

## Niklas Swanström

Dr. Niklas Swanström, Executive Director of ISDP, began the proceedings by welcoming all attendees and thanking the Swedish Foundation for the Humanities and Social Sciences for generously contributing the funding necessary to make the conference possible. Dr Swanström also extended his thanks to the University of Gothenburg for providing the conference venue.

Dr. Swanström remarked that since the inauguration of this conference last year in Stockholm, the aim has been to encourage engagement and dialogue that progresses the field of Swedish East Asia research and to come up with practical solutions to some of the pressing issues that the field is facing. Sweden is a small country with limited resources, and an important question is how the country can be more efficient in its research collaboration on East Asia.

Dr. Swanström commented that one of the most interesting outcomes of last year's conference was the assertion of the sheer amount of

East Asia research that was being undertaken in Sweden. That these varied and broad research efforts take place means that organizations and researchers can specialize and let other equally important research be done by others.



In order for specialization to work, exchanges at conferences such as these serve an important role in facilitating an understanding of what different organizations and researchers can achieve.

He continued by commenting on the fact that this conference should be used as an opportunity to break down some of the

barriers between the older and younger generations of researchers allowing both to establish cooperative relationships.

Dr. Swanström concluded his opening remarks by emphasizing the need to establish better channels of communication within the field of East Asia research, and to promote our findings. This will lead to better cross collaboration and ensure that Sweden is seen as a leader in this research field. Dr. Swanström explained that this was why it was so important to hold this conference over two days and let the second day focus on research presentations. In formatting it this way the hope is that it will allow all attendees to further their insight, and in the long run advance Swedish East Asia research.

# What Unites Us? What Divides Us?

**Claes-Göran Alvstam, Herbert Jonsson & Marina Svensson  
Moderated by Lars Vargö**

Dr. Marina Svensson of Lund University opened the discussion by stressing the need for greater interdisciplinarity within Asian studies in Sweden. She said it was of particular importance that Swedish researchers communicate out-



side their home region and build relationships with academics in Asia itself. Though a lot was being done at the EU level, she argued that Sweden could use its partnerships with other Nordic countries to leverage their combined influence in achieving these aims together. A concrete example of a positive development given would be increased funding for Asian studies PhD candidates, contributing to a pipeline of new talent and fresh ideas into the field.

In terms of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Dr. Svensson stressed the need to engage with China on such issues, but that Sweden, and Europe more generally, should be cautious of the aims of these types of large projects and their impact on the EU.

Dr. Claes-Göran Alvstam of the University of Gothenburg spoke of the positive trend of a greater inflow of Asian researchers to the West, which had traditionally not been the case. He asked in what ways Asian research conducted in Sweden actually benefitted its society, which he believed should be a central aim.

In terms of business, he spoke favorably of the strengthening ties between universities and companies in Sweden and those in places like China. In Gothenburg for example, he said that the Chinese investment in Volvo may



have saved the company from bankruptcy. Given the growth of Asian domestic consumption, he pointed to businesses in Sweden and Europe having numerous opportunities to exploit this potential. In this light, he also spoke positively of the BRI linking China with European markets, and the benefits that such investment could bring. Overall, he felt that Sweden was lagging behind many of its larger EU

competitors in this regard and needed a more coherent strategy to address this.

In his remarks, Dr. Herbert Jonsson of Dalarna University pointed to the problem of the divide between different humanities disciplines in academia. In addition, he felt that the need to teach difficult languages was limiting the ability to produce and retain East Asian researchers. Though scholars of China, Japan and Korea have much to learn from one another, he said that they rarely collaborate, with the same also being true of links between the different universities in Sweden.

Dr. Jonsson also talked about the ascendancy of Asian culture in general, and that he saw a shift away from the predominance of American culture in Europe. Given this, he felt the need to learn Asian languages would help build trust and foster deeper ties between the two regions, and that it was dangerous to rely too heavily on English, for example.

# Competing or Cooperating for Resources?

**Richard Nakamura, Martin Nordeborg, Niklas Swanström,  
Moderated by Claes-Göran Alvstam**

Dr. Richard Nakamura of the University of Gothenburg opened the panel by discussing the evolution of the research environment. He stated that funds have not decreased but the competition is much more challenging than it used to be 20 years ago. Supplier funds are actually higher



than ever creating a paradox since the competition is considerable higher. This leads to more difficulties for researchers to obtain resources and their work is sometimes done on non-paid time. Unfortunately searching and applying for funding is a major part of researchers' work, therefore, taking away a lot of their potential research time.

Dr. Nakamura made the point that since resources are scarce there should be more emphasis on cooperation. There is a tendency for researchers to get stuck in a discipline where the resources are, rather than reaching out to collaborate with others. To Dr. Nakamura, it is essential to build up informal cooperation that can

generate more cooperation to write articles, create new research centers, forums and meetings. Bringing people together allows them to create new bonds and networks built upon shared interests, thereby, leading to more cooperation between disciplines in the academic field. He also stressed the need to create more incentives for students to become researchers and expand the community of east Asian researchers in Sweden.

Dr. Martin Nordeborg of the University of Gothenburg centered his discussion on the personal experience at the language department of the university. He argued that larger departments in universities create more cooperation bringing people from different backgrounds together to give new perspectives to a project. He also raised the issue of funding for researchers, arguing that these funds can come



from outside Sweden since the Swedish system is a very locked and closed path to get

funding. To bring more students to the research field, he presented his idea of a four years program instead of a three-years program that allows students to add a specialty to their program and benefit from the cooperation with another field of study.

Dr. Niklas Swanström concluded the panel by presenting the case of the ISDP. As a small think tank in a very competitive environment worldwide, ISDP is heavily focused upon cooperation. Advocating for more centralization, Dr. Swanström explained that one key strategy of the institute was to establish centers on specific geographic areas but to act diverse in terms of studies. He also stressed the importance of informal meetings to encourage further cooperation. He would like to see the Swedish government focusing more on building competencies within the country, which would be extremely helpful for the field.

# Towards a Shared Agenda?

Göran Blomqvist, Ari Kokko & Lars Vargö  
Moderated by Roger Svensson



Dr. Ari Kokko opened the panel by noting the shared challenges facing Nordic universities but also the opportunities for such small countries to create successful cross-university collaborations such as joint online masters with courses in Asian studies between Nordic universities. This type of “organic collaboration”, could help pool multidisciplinary approaches and resources together that in turn could facilitate a generational transfer of knowledge and research infrastructure to benefit Asian studies in the Nordics.

Dr. Kokko further noted that the current state of university management and politics does not always favor research into East Asia, as funding is cut for language studies and membership in research networks. This is why more effort needs to be put into convincing university superstructures on the importance of research centers and institutes dedicated to Asian studies.

Dr. Lars Vargö shared personal insights and experiences as

a Japanologist and diplomat, to remark on how the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has shifted its attitude from preferring a work force of generalists to promoting specialists to fill its ranks.

He argued that the voice of a specialist is necessary since it challenges the general popular thought, listing the example of the supposed “efficiency” of the Japanese management style that Western powers clamored for in the 1980s. Concluding that the debate over preferring generalists over specialists and vice versa are found in many different areas, Dr. Vargö argues that specialists have an increasingly important role to fill in today’s society and most notably in the work force.

Mr. Göran Blomqvist opened his statement by noting the importance of creating forums where people with an interest in East Asian studies could meet. Arguing that universities today are not always willing to lead original research in East Asian studies, he emphasized the need for individual

researchers to initiate projects themselves. Although Asian studies are not a prioritized subject in terms of funding in Sweden, he claims that the subject is not treated “worse” than any other fields; calling on researchers to apply for funding rather than to mull over the potential futility of doing so.

He further notes the importance of sorting out the policy relevance of East Asian studies scholarship and proposes



a national division of labor and resources to streamline the Swedish field, as he has a hard time seeing how the field can sustain itself otherwise.

# Introductory Words, April 27

## Patrik Ström

Dr. Patrik Ström, Head of the Department of Business Administration, the University of Gothenburg, made the opening remarks on the second day of the conference which would focus on ongoing research projects. Dr. Ström stated that it was fitting that the conference was taking place at the School of Business, Economics and Law because of the School's various research engagements with Asia and its strong teaching focus on the region, not least at the undergraduate level. The University's Economic Geography program in particular has a sustained focus on East Asia.

Those who are within this field know that there has been a lot of work on areas like international trade, foreign direct investment and company location strategies. The latter area has received a lot of focus due to the amount of Swedish and Western firms locating themselves in Asia. Moreover, in the last 10-15 years there has been an increased focus on firms in emerging markets establishing themselves in the traditionally mature econo-

mies. One example of this is of course the Chinese automotive group Geely and their engagements in Gothenburg.

The University also has a strong focus on Asia in its Executive MBA Program, Dr. Ström continued. This program provides opportunities for professional connections with alumni focused on Asia



as well as younger Executive students. The University of Gothenburg has the only Business School in Sweden with the "Triple Crown" or three accreditations, signifying good output in areas such as research and education.

For a small country like Sweden, bringing Asia researchers together can be a very fruitful endeavor, Dr. Ström said. He was himself part of a Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences effort to integrate Swedish East Asia research in the early 2000s with the SSAAPS Program. This program was important for many reasons, not least in creating a network for researchers from different disciplines but with a shared interest in Asia to meet and exchange views. This created an institutional platform for Asia research, and brought about professional relationships that have been important to many researchers in the field.

Dr. Ström closed the proceedings by saying that he hoped this conference will continue for further years and tour to different areas of Sweden where there is a strong focus on East Asia research.

# Research Panel 1

## Gabriel Jonsson, Alin Kadfak & Julian Tucker Moderated by Erik Isaksson

Initiating the panel discussion, Dr. Gabriel Jonsson of Stockholm University gave a brief presentation on his research pertaining to South Korea's development assistance to Nepal. He explained the country's journey from aid recipient, to major aid donor in a short time span, and that its citizens were, therefore, keen to help other states in the same way. One such Asian country receiving Korean aid is Nepal. The developing country has experienced many challenges over the past few decades, including great political and systemic upheavals, natural disasters (such as the devastating 2015 earthquake), and numerous transfers of government since it democratized in the early 1990s.

Although Dr. Jonsson did find some positive outcomes from South Korean aid to the country, such as in the education and energy sectors, he argued that a culture of aid dependency had taken hold in Nepal. Dr. Jonsson believed this had held back its economy and that remittances from Nepalis living abroad, especially in India, amounted to a more important source of income than foreign aid. He concluded by pointing to a potential shift in Nepal's historic dependence on India, with Chinese investment growing ever more significant in recent years.

Ms. Kadfak continued the panel discussions by explaining her research on fisheries policy in India and the links with human rights in Thailand

for workers in the industry. As there is a marked shortage of fish off the Thai coast, many boats enter Indian and Burmese waters instead. However, major trading blocs such



as the EU hold great sway as they use sustainability criteria to determine which countries can sell fish into its market. Ms. Kadfak explained that Thailand has responded to the issue by attempting to improve the long-term sustainability of its fishing industry, but with mixed results so far.

Ms. Kadfak also stated that urbanization, with the resultant shift of populations away from rural areas, plays a key role in regional fisheries trends. Though much of her research has thus far been exploratory in nature, she aims to build on her work in the future by looking at issues of global governance and alliances between state and non-state actors.

Mr. Tucker concluded the panel discussions about his research; a paper he co-authored on China and Afghanistan. He noted that Afghanistan had conventionally been placed in many regional groupings, such as in Central Asia, the Middle East and South Asia. His research instead explored the country's fit within the

East Asian context, given its under-explored importance to China. Though Afghanistan has been referred to as the "graveyard of empires", Mr. Tucker believed this was colonial-centric as it ignored that each power had attempted to prop up a local administration, and not to rule in its own right.

Chinese interests in Afghanistan are more extensive than one may think and they go back a long way. For instance, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 caused panic amongst China's policymakers as they scrambled to secure



their Western borders. Mr. Tucker also noted that China has maintained dialogue with all the major competing factions in Afghanistan, including the national government and the Taliban. When speaking in terms of what Sweden could learn from the country, he suggested it should make better use of the native speakers of Afghan languages that now reside in the country. This could lead to more nuanced engagement with the complex realities of conflicts in South Asia.

# Research Panel 2

## Herbert Jonsson & Mariya Aida Niendorf Moderated by Niklas Swanström

Dr. Mariya Aida Niendorf of Dalarna University started the proceedings on the second panel by presenting her research on the use of Keigo. She defined and described the uses of this polite form of dialogue,



which is also called Honorific speech in Japanese society. Her research consisted of a comparison between the use of the honorific speech in Japanese and its use in society, to the use of politeness in the Swedish language and its respective society. Using her background as a teacher in the U.S. and Sweden, she perceived a gap between the formal language in Japan reflecting the strict hierarchy of the society compared to the informal language in Sweden.

Dr. Aida Niendorf felt that her Swedish students were not interested in learning Keigo seeing it as an unnecessary accessory to the language. The main reason she identified for this disinterest was their perception of the society as constituted by equals individuals without hierarchy. Also, the difficul-

ty of Keigo made them less keen on learning it. She assessed the main differences between the politeness practiced in Japan and in Sweden. In the first case, politeness is mainly expressed in the language and needs to be explicit while the politeness as practiced in Sweden is rather exercised through gestures and is implicit. Speaking Japanese without mastering the Honorific Speech may be perceived as rude for Japanese people and lead to unintended implications of rudeness.

Dr. Herbert Jonsson presented his work on Haiku and sketching Haiku. He studied the concept of Shasei and its usage in contemporary Japanese Haiku. A Haiku is a short one-line poem including a “season” word and a “cutting” word. Along with Masaoka Shiki and modern Haiku, his research also included premodern Haiku and early modern Haiku using editions of poetry, commentaries, biographical and historical studies. He described the challenges while studying contemporary Haiku: Firstly, there is a very small amount of academic research on the topic and secondly, there is almost no scholarship in English which offers an insight to the form of poetry. To Dr. Jonsson, researching Haiku is necessary as it is a global phenom-

enon and an exclusive form of expression. Through his attempts for funding to the Swedish Research Council, he has done multiple presentations and opened a course on poetry within the university.



# Research Panel 3

## Bent Jørgensen, Ernils Larsson & Curt Nestor Moderated by Oskar Gustafson

Dr. Bent Jørgensen started out the panel by presenting his study of antibiotics resistance in Vietnam. He noted how the



issue was exacerbated by a lack of oversight of pharmaceutical distribution channels and how cultural factors inspired distrust amongst medical authorities and overreliance on the idea of antibiotics as a “miracle drug”.

Dr. Jørgensen described how the overuse and sometimes illicit sale of antibiotics undermines the Vietnamese public health care system as medical staff often relied on antibiotics as an “easy solution” to common ailments and were sometimes pressured into prescribing them. The study pointed to the need of emphasizing the role of medical staff in informing the public of the dangers of antibiotic resistance. He also called upon the social sciences to examine how to change user behavior and strengthen Vietnam’s medical and political institutions. Finally, he noted how in face of an emerging global health threat, the global governance of antibiotics re-

sistance should be studied.

Mr. Ernils Larsson presented the topic of his upcoming PhD thesis that examines the role state-Shinto has in Japanese politics of constitutional reform regarding Articles 20 and 89 which stipulate the freedom of religion and the limitations of the relation between state and religion respectively.

Mr. Larsson studies the ties between the National Association of Shinto Shrines to the controversial Nippon Kaigi and to Prime Minister Abe himself, to whom constitutional reform has been a long-time political goal. He notes that those wanting Shinto and the state to have a closer rela-



tionship like they did prior to Second World War, constitutional reform is paramount, as it could provide special provisions for Shinto as a favored religion. This, he notes, is a problem as it undermines the rule of law. Furthermore, he describes pre-war state Shinto that the Japanese religious

right wants to revert to is based on militaristic and nationalist attitudes incompatible with modern day values.

Dr. Curt Nestor presented his research into Vietnamese and Chinese bilateral economic relations as they pertain to border trade.



He finds that this border trade is divided into two types: official border trade and contraband smuggling. The former being part of a regional support policy, which allows border dwellers to cross into China to purchase tax free goods for “personal use”. However, controls are not always enforced and purchases are often made for commercial use.

In addition, Dr. Nestor notes that the contraband smuggled across the border also contributes to the around 200 billion USD of “missing” imports as the goods avoid being taxed and registered. As the trade employs and benefits many locals and customs officers, this smuggling has become institutionalized and thereby extremely difficult to stop. Customers of the smuggling also find the practice more efficient than ordinary trade as it offers competitive prices and fast delivery.



