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Director's note

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Director's note

It must have been in the 1990s that one often heard people say that photography was dead. Dead as a medium, dead as a technology, it was seen as an instrument of the past, sitting somewhere between what we consider to be documentation and art. Many believed it would be forgotten as a serious occupation. The boom of digital photography heralded a new age of information and communication; even the word photography was replaced by 'digital imaging' or just 'imaging.' Photography had become superfluous.

But those who predicted the demise of photography had been premature. Photography was not dead. On the contrary. Alongside the interest in new technological means to make pictures and send them to any place in the world in a matter of seconds, a new interest in the value of photographs as a socio-historical source developed. Museums of photography sprang up – notably, but not exclusively, here in the Netherlands – and photography experienced a renaissance. Photographic art, commercial photography, documentary photography and combinations of these genres all received new attention. The digital revolution in photography, it seems, has opened up new possibilities of preserving fragile old photographic prints and negatives, and making old photographs accessible to a wide public of academics and others.

Photography dates back to the beginning of the 19th century and it is no surprise that we continue to find collections of photographs made in colonial times: photographs of landscapes, people, enterprises, photos of temples and works of art, and of course of family life. Some are found in archives, some in private possession, some are well documented while others depict unknown events and persons. A veritably inexhaustible source.

The theme of this Newsletter is Asia's Colonial Photographies. We may be surprised by the high quality of some of these photographs, we may be moved by images that nurture the tempo dulu feeling or simply left curious about the scenes they depict. Whatever emotional or aesthetic appeal they may have, these photo-collections are first and foremost a goldmine of historical evidence, a source that certainly holds the promise of inspiring much future work. Our authors have carried out research on various aspects of the photographs, giving us a privileged insight into the stories they tell.

Max Sparreboom,
director



The International Institute for Asian Studies is a postdoctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Our main objective is to encourage the interdisciplinary and comparative study of Asia and to promote national and international cooperation in the field. The institute focuses on the humanities and social sciences and their interaction with other sciences.

IIAS values dynamism and versatility in its research programmes. Post-doctoral research fellows are temporarily employed by or affiliated to IIAS, either within a collaborative research programme or individually. In its aim to disseminate broad, in-depth knowledge of Asia, the institute organizes seminars, workshops and conferences, and publishes the *IIAS Newsletter* with a circulation of 26,000.

IIAS runs a database for Asian Studies with information on researchers and research-related institutes worldwide. As an international mediator and a clearing-house for knowledge and information, IIAS is active in creating international networks and launching international cooperative projects and research programmes. In this way, the institute functions as a window on Europe for non-European scholars and contributes to the cultural rapprochement between Asia and Europe.

IIAS also administers the secretariat of the European Alliance for Asian Studies (Asia Alliance: www.asia-alliance.org) and the Secretariat General of the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS: www.icassecretariat.org). Updates on the activities of the Asia Alliance and ICAS are published in this newsletter. <

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