

Conference Report: 'Asia – Transition of a World Region'

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The international conference 'Asia – Transition of a World Region', jointly prepared by the German Association of Asian Studies (DGA) and the GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies, was held in Hamburg from 16 to 18 May 2017. Scholars from a number of different fields of study presented their research and discussed recent developments in Asia. The conference was organized into four panels: Challenges of Urbanization, Science and Technology in Asia, Climate Change and Social Equity.

Prior to the academic discussion, the 50th anniversary of the DGA was celebrated with a reception in the Hamburg City Hall on 16 May. Welcome addresses were given by the First Mayor of Hamburg Olaf Scholz and the Chairman of the DGA Rahul P. Das, focusing on the contribution of the DGA to the development of Asian Studies. In his keynote speech about 'The Future of Asia: Prospects and Challenges' Chief Economist of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Yasuyuki Sawada, analysed the current growth and income models of Asian countries. He argued that Asian countries will further develop from middle-income into high-income societies, if the appropriate policies are implemented going forward.

The academic conference itself started with welcome addresses by the Chairman of the DGA Professor Das and the Vice President of GIGA, Patrick Köllner, on 17 May. In his opening speech on 'Megatrends in Asia – Implications for Europe' ADB Chief Economist Yasuyuki Sawada pointed out that Asia is critical for achieving sustainable global growth, and especially for the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions. The conference continued with two parallel panels in the morning and again in the afternoon. In the first panel on Challenges of Urbanization, Michael Waibel from the University of Hamburg talked about the difficulties in Vietnam's urban development that are mainly caused by the lack of economic incentives to promote sustainable growth. Frederike Trotier from the University of Frankfurt focused in her presentation on Indonesia's urban development, taking the city of Palembang as an example. She argued that because of political decentralisation, local government officials were able to improve the image of their home province or hometown in order to be attractive to investors, tourists and citizens alike. Philip Spaeth from the University of Freiburg analysed the development of smart- and eco-cities in China. Taking the city of Ningbo as an example, he drew attention to the various policy mechanisms that are shaping China's new ecology-oriented cities. Vanessa Copa from Monash University, Australia, concentrated in her presentation on the issue of sustainable water management in Asian cities, especially on Surabaya's (Indonesia) urban water system. She applied a framework in order to analyse key barriers, best practices and benchmarking on the macro level.

The second panel focused on Science and Technology in Asia. Nele Noesselt from the University of Duisburg-Essen presented a paper on digital politics and cyber power in China. She pointed out that China might not be able to achieve the status of a global power in cyber industry due to the extensive control and censorship of online debates. Iris Wieczorek from the GIGA introduced the concept of a 'smart platinum society' in her presentation. Using the example of Japan, she analysed the opportunities digital technologies offer to elder people – who can therewith take part equally in society and in everyday life. In his comparison of 'Industrie 4.0' development in Germany, China and South Korea, Patrick Kabasci from the Fraunhofer Institute for Production Technology IPT, Aachen, pointed to best practices and optimal environments for the integration of digital technologies with manufacturing. Following Kabasci, cooperation in areas such as data security is of mutual interest for all countries. Simone Weske from the DLR Project Management Agency, Bonn, presented data on the scientific development of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Based on the analysis of patent and publication data of individual countries in the region and their research cooperation, Weske pointed to the emergence of a new research area (Asia-Pacific Research Area, APRA) that is becoming increasingly relevant for global R&D development. The final presentation in this panel was given by Rainer Frietsch from the Fraunhofer ISI, Karlsruhe. He compared patent applications in advanced manufacturing technologies (AMTs) and key enabling technologies (KETs) in Europe, North America and Asia, stating that while Europe – and especially Germany – still dominates the AMT market, Asia is leading the field of KETs while it is also gradually narrowing the gap in AMT patent application cases.

The third panel centred on Climate Change and climate policy. Chris Höhne from the Technical University of Darmstadt analysed multi-level global climate governance in Indonesia, focusing specifically on the impact of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on local governments in Indonesia. Ulrich Volz from SOAS, University of London, and the German Development Institute, Bonn, stressed the important role that the alignment of the financial system with sustainability goals through 'green finance' plays in achieving green transformation. In this way, projects that invest in sustainable energy and resources can be prioritised. The final presentation in this panel by Annika Styczynski from the O.P. Jindal Global University, India, focused on the impact of the fast-growing Indian automotive industry on both the global and the local climate. She presented new insights into the various government policies and plans that promote electric cars in order to mitigate CO₂ emissions and to reduce the need for fossil fuels.

In the fourth panel, on Social Equity, Andrea Funk from the University of Wuerzburg presented her ongoing joint research with Doris Fischer on financialisation as a driver of social inequity in China. She pointed out that the partial withdrawal of the state from public services has resulted in decreasing opportunities for lower-income households to partake in the growing national economy. As the second speaker in this panel, Daniel Neff from the GIGA presented the case of the Scheduled Tribes (STs) in India being the most deprived and excluded social group in this country. Based on his research, Neff stressed that social policy has to comprise a number of different instruments in order to meet the needs of various subgroups of STs. Gabriele Vogt from the University of Hamburg addressed in her presentation on healthcare givers in Japan the failure of government policies to adequately respond to an aging society, and a lack of young Japanese people interested in working in the healthcare sector.

On the third day of the conference, 18 May, a joint discussion together with the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce and the German Asia-Pacific Business Association was held. The half-day event took place at the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, and focused on megatrends in Asia and their implications for future R&D development in Germany. In addition to academic speakers from the conference (Doris Fischer, Iris Wieczorek, Simone Weske and Rainer Frietsch) and from the University of Hohenheim (Alexander Gerybadze) Clas Neumann, Senior Vice President and Head of SAP Labs Network in China, also participated in this discussion – which brought into sharp focus the crucial role of the Asia-Pacific region's development for German companies.