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**Title:** Experiencing Asia : The 3rd International Asian Congress The Changing Role of Asia in the Contemporary World : Toruń, (18-20 May, 2016), Towarzystwo Azji i Pacyfiku

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## Experiencing Asia

The 3rd International Asian Congress *The Changing Role of Asia in the Contemporary World*.

Toruń, (18–20 May, 2016), Towarzystwo Azji i Pacyfiku.

**Abstract:** The paper reports the Third International Asian Congress “The Changing Role of Asia in the Contemporary World” that took place in Toruń on May 18–20, 2016. It presents the range and scope of the conference and its main scientific results. The conference report describes influence of the Congress on the development of Asian studies in Central Europe, as well as the reception of this event, including participating diplomats, policy-makers and respected scholars. Moreover, it briefly presents accompanying events of the Congress and its unique character of the place where politics, business, science and culture can merge together.

**Keywords:** *conference report; Asian Congress; Asian studies; Asian politics; Asian culture*

Changes occurring in the contemporary world, especially the transformation of existing political and economic relations, pose a challenge for researchers trying to identify, analyse and describe the emerging trends. What is one of the most significant phe-

nomena is the increasing role of Asia in the modern world, generated by the shifting of decision centres to Pacific coastlines. The growing economic and military potential makes people perceive Asian nations as new creators of international relations in the global dimension rather than 'developing tigers'. Asia's demographic potential is of utmost importance here as its positive balance is one of the continent's competitive advantages over the ageing societies of the West.

Differences between Asian countries and the rest of the world, which have their origin in history, culture or economy, are the subject of extensive scientific investigations. On the one hand, Asian studies are one of the fastest developing areas of research; on the other hand, it is in Asian countries where new and thriving research centres and universities are established. Asia is the leader of innovation and a perfect example of successful symbiosis between social and economic development. On top of that, a great variety of political formulas are adopted there, from Western-like liberal democracies to political systems based on authoritarian or totalitarian rule. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Asian studies are developing in Poland and Central Europe.

On 18–20 May 2016, the Third International Asian Congress "The Changing Role of Asia in the Contemporary World" was held in Toruń. There is no doubt that it is one of the biggest and most significant European events devoted to Asian studies. It dates back to 2007, when the First International Conference on contemporary Asia was held. Year by year more and more scholars, but also businesspeople and diplomats participated in the conferences, which gave rise to the idea that these annual meetings should become a congress.

The Congress was organised by the Towarzystwo Azji i Pacyfiku, headed by Dr Adam Marszałek. The co-organisers include: Professor Czesław Mojsiewicz's International Cooperation Fund, the Centre for Eastern Studies, Marshall Office of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodship, Toruń City Council, Department of Polish Political System of Nicolaus Copernicus University and Institute of Political Science of University of Warsaw. The comprehensive cooperation of such a wide group of organisers ensured the high scientific level of the Congress and made it possible to reach not only academic, but also local government and business circles.

More than 400 people participated in the Congress. Among the guests were diplomats, such as: Her Excellency Ms Patricia Ann V. Paez, Ambassador of the Republic of the Philippines, His Excellency Mr Manasvi Srisodapol, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand, His Excellency Mr Bakhrom Babaev, charge d'affaires of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Ms Cai Lian, Cultural Affairs Counsellor of the People's Republic of China, Mr Kim Ju Dok, Counsellor of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Mr Ziyad Raof, Representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Other honorary guests included, among others, Mr Krzysztof Szumski, former Ambassador to the People's Republic of China, Ms Margita Lalić-Terzić, former Minister Counsellor, charge d'affaires of Serbia and Montenegro in Poland, Mr Jerzy Bańkowski, Honorary Consul of Lithuania, Mr Jan Mrozowski, Honorary Consul of Moldova, Dr Stanisław Rakowicz, Honorary Consul of Peru, Senator Przemysław Termiński, Senator Piotr B. Zientarski and Mr Jan Krzysztof Ardanowski, Member of Parliament.

The Congress was officially opened by Professor Joanna Marszałek-Kawa in Dwór Artus in Toruń. Greeting the guests, she thanked for the patronage over the event to: Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Witold Waszczykowski, Governor of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Province Mr Mikołaj Bogdanowicz, Marshal of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodship Mr Piotr Całbecki, President of Toruń Mr Michał Zaleski and Rector of Nicolaus Copernicus University Professor Andrzej Tretyn. After speeches of the invited guests and diplomats, Professor Jerzy Jaskiernia delivered an inaugural lecture entitled *Challenges and Opportunities of the Chinese Migration to Europe in the Analysis of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*.

The scientific programme of the Congress included 42 panels in Polish and English, at which almost 250 speakers discussed problems of contemporary Asia. The subjects of the panels concerned Asian politics, domestic security, foreign policy, economic cooperation, system of law, culture, religion, mythology, as well as issues of education, mass media, environment or bioethics. It should be emphasised that the speakers represented almost all universities in Poland, and many of them were the representatives of foreign institutions, including University of Oxford, Moscow City University, Victoria University of Wellington, Islamic State University of Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Bishkek Humanities University, Poltava University of Economy and Trade or Indira Gandhi National Open University.

The organisers also made sure that the participants could experience Asia in all possible ways. They were invited to a number of accompanying events – they could taste Uzbek, Indian and Thai cuisine (Thai dishes were prepared by the cooks of the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand), learn about Indian and Thai art, see traditional garments, and admire classical dances. They also visited a photographic exhibition, watched the movie, and attended lectures on Thai spirituality.

What added to the significance of the Third International Asian Congress was the signing of numerous accords and agreements between Polish and foreign partners. Among them were the cooperation agreement between Kirgiz-Russian Slavic University in Bishkek and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, the publishing agreement between the Foreign Languages Press and Adam Marszałek Publishing House, the cooperation agreement between National University of Uzbekistan in

Tashkent and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, and the intent agreement between Toruńskie Wodociągi and Time Marszałek Group.

The general objective of the Asian Congress is to develop Asian studies in Poland through discussion within the academic community and cooperation with scholars from other countries. The Congress significantly contributes to the promotion of cooperation between researchers interested in Asian studies, being also a platform for knowledge- and experience-sharing. One of such forms is definitely the participation of policy-makers and diplomats, who not only create the *today*, but also design the political *tomorrow* of European-Asian relations.

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