

ICAS Book Prizes: 2007 Citations

The Reading Committee ICAS Book Prizes Kuala Lumpur 2 August 2007

For the second time the ICAS Book Prizes were awarded. Established in 2004, this global competition aims to create an international focus for publications on Asia while at the same time increasing the visibility for Asia studies worldwide. All scientific books pertaining to Asia and published in 2005 and 2006 were eligible. Four prizes were awarded: Best study in the field of the humanities; best study in the field of social sciences; best dissertation in the field of Asia studies and the Colleagues Choice Award.

The Reading Committee reviewed 80 books and 10 dissertations. The members of the Reading Committee were: Anand Yang (Chair, director Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies and past president Association for Asian Studies), Jennifer Holdaway (Program Director Social Science Research Council), Christopher Reed (Associate Professor, Department of History of The Ohio State University and winner of the IBP Humanities 2004), Guobin Yang (Associate Professor, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, Barnard College, Columbia University) and Paul van der Velde (Secretary, Senior Consultant IAS and Secretary ICAS).

The prizes were awarded on the 2nd August 2007 by Deputy Prime Minister Dato'seri Najib Tun Razak, during the ICAS dinner at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

Citations

Humanities

Madeline Zelin,

The Merchants of Zigong (Columbia University Press 2006)

This pathbreaking study of industrial enterprise in 19th and early 20th century China is based on extensive archival research. It focuses on private entrepreneurs in Zigong, the largest industrial town in its time in northern China. Zelin convincingly shows that lineage-based clan groups provided the basis for effective business organisation, capital investment, industrial management, and business innovation. This finding challenges longstanding claims about state monopoly of the salt industry in late imperial China, and it demonstrates the capacity of entrepreneurs to pool financial resources through lineage-based trusts to organise and manage their businesses through customary contracts. Magisterial in scope and subtle and intricate in historical analysis, this work forces us to rethink not only the history of economic development in modern China, but modernity itself.

Social Sciences

Pei-Chia Lan,

Global Cinderellas. Migrant Domestic Workers and Newly Rich Employers in Taiwan (Duke University Press 2006)

This is an important contribution to the sociology of international migra-

tion, globalisation and the intersections of gender and class in domestic work. Based on careful ethnographic research and interviews, Pei-Chia Lan provides a rich account of the daily life experiences of foreign guest workers in Taiwan. The analysis of the relationship between guest workers and their Taiwanese employers in the context of immigration policy sheds light on the broader picture of global inequality. The book also shows how the host society draws discriminatory boundaries against the foreign 'other' and how foreign domestic workers, who are poor but often well-educated, negotiate their identities using their cultural capital (such as superior English language skills). The concluding part links the ethnographic story to broader issues of general theoretical concern. Well-written, and full of empathy the book will be read widely.

Dissertation

Karen Laura Thornber,

Negotiating and Reconfiguring Japan and Japanese Literature in Polyintertextual East Asian Contact Zones: Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan

(PhD Harvard University)

Drawing on dozens, even hundreds of works of literature and biography written in Japanese, Chinese and Korean, (as well as a vast secondary literature in multiple languages), Thornber ties together loose cultural, literary, and biographical strands held in memory with many sources she has discovered herself. The result is a polyintertextual East Asian hybridity, competition, and exchange. Never before has the Reading Committee read a dissertation so clearly destined to become an influential book (or two, since it is nearly a thousand pages long!). Starting from the stance that literature travelled widely and was frequently contested and rewritten, Thornber has composed a highly empirical account that shows Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese writers reading, borrowing from, and recasting literary vernaculars in the (semi)colonial context of the 1895-1945 years. Her accomplishment took the Reading's Committee breath away.

Colleagues Choice Award

Nordin Hussin,

Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka: Dutch Melaka and English Penang, 1780-1830

(NIAS Press 2006).

Without doubt Trade and Society in the Straits of Melaka is a truly pioneering study of urban history and breaks new ground in the context of Malaysian studies. It is a fine-grained social history, one that we rarely see in Southeast Asia. This study compares Melaka and Penang in the context of overall trends, namely, policy, geographical position, nature and direction of trade, morphology and society, and how these factors were influenced by trade as well as policies. The study is exhaustively researched and the arguments presented are supported by a close study of archival documents that will make new material available to other scholars. By documenting the impact of imperialist ambitions on the economy and society of two major trading centres, this book will provide a point of reference for all future research concerning the period.

Sharing a future in Asia

From 2 to 5 August 2007 the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) took place in the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, Malaysia. It was hosted, (under the aegis of the ICAS Secretariat), by the Institute of Occidental Studies and the Institute of the Malay World and Civilisation, both based at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The local host picked 'Sharing a Future in Asia' as its overarching theme, alluding to Asia's brisk progress.

PAUL VAN DER VELDE AND JOSINE STREMMELAAR

ICAS 2007 was the first time such a large scale event on the humanities and social sciences has taken place in Malaysia. "Yet the humanities and social sciences are critical areas of study especially to a multi-ethnic country like Malaysia", says host Datuk Prof. Shamsul AB. "They are the pivot of Malaysia's well-being... no amount of computers can help us stay together." He added that "it is high time that the social sciences are championed" [New Straits Times, 8 August 2007]. This is just one of the reasons why the ICAS Secretariat believes that it is imperative for ICAS to remain a travelling conference in Asia, drawing special attention to local dynamics of the country where the convention is held.

Triumphalism

"Asia is often proclaimed as the fastest growing region in the world today, in spite of the fact that nearly a billion of its population is still living in poverty. Some social scientists feel that the rapid growth in Asia has perpetuated Asian "triumphalism" which denotes an overwhelming sense of optimism and bullishness in the region" [NST, 8 August 2007]. In his keynote address entitled Towards a Shared Future in Asia: Illusion or Emerging Reality?, Datuk Dr Abdul Rahman Embong (President of the Malaysian Social Sciences Association), was critical of this notion of Asian "triumphalism". "If we want to share a future in Asia, we have to share its problems too, says Abdul Rahman. "Before Asia can begin to blow its own trumpet, it must address critical issues taking place in its own backyard". Shamsul took this argument a step further by stating that Malaysia has "been disadvantaged by Asian "triumphalism". We have 'made it' in some aspects. But in the process of 'making it', we have (prematurely) proclaimed that we are a developed country".

In his opening address Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak approached this topic pragmatically by stating that "This will require leadership and looking at Asia today, I don't doubt for a minute that leadership can be brought forth. What is needed is a serious and collective effort of Asian countries towards this end. Whether Asia will succeed in doing so, or whether we will continue to remain a continent united on a map, but not quite in reality, remains to be seen. Of course only time will tell. But all of you, scholars of Asia, can contribute towards the outcome of this question", he said. [NST online 6 September 2007].

Olympics of Asia studies

This debate and many other discussions took place in more than 300 different panels in 22 concurrent sessions convened during ICAS 5 which was dubbed by its local host Shamsul AB as the 'Olympics of Asian studies'. The majority of the nearly 1500 participants were from the social sciences and humanities - scholars, researchers, graduate students and representatives of civil society at large - originating from over 50 countries. Interestingly, the interdisciplinary and interregional nature of the convention has drawn an increasing number of natural scientists from medical and health studies, environmentalists, and engineers whose research specialisations are in Asia. This is an important development for ICAS, as we can only start working towards solutions for global problems by transcending borders and widening our focus.

We hope this trend will be strengthened at ICAS 6. The next torch-bearer is Chungnam National University and its Centre for Asian Regional Studies (CARS) in Daejeon Metropolitan City in South Korea. Daejeon boasts more than one hundred institutes focussing on a wide variety of applied sciences. Daejeon is the capital of science in the heart of the Korean peninsula. It is a major communication and transportation hub with a one-hour bullet train link to the international airport near Seoul. Daejeon merges its long history of culture and tradition with leading research in science and technology. The intriguing intersection of technology and human sciences has been a decisive factor in why Daejeon was chosen above two other cities in Korea to be the next venue of ICAS. For the ICAS Secretariat Daejeon is the embodiment of a trend which was already sensed at ICAS 5 in Kuala Lumpur: the increasing awareness of the interconnectedness of all sciences.

