

ICAS Book Prize 2017

The ICAS Book Prize (IBP), established by the International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) in 2004, and sponsored by The Asian Library at Leiden University (Netherlands) since 2015, aims to create an international focus for academic publications on Asia.

Paul van der Velde



THE IBP IS THE LARGEST region-, theme-, and discipline-transcending book prize in the field of Asian studies. Jury prizes are awarded to the best books in both the Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Colleagues' Choice Award gives the academic community the opportunity to vote for their own favourite publication. Another indispensable component of the IBP is the inclusion of dissertations; Alex McKay, Chair of the ICAS Dissertations Reading Committee, tells us more about this aspect of the Prize in his article below.

The seventh edition of the IBP will take place on 20 July 2017, during ICAS 10 in Chiang Mai, Thailand (www.icas.asia). The June issue of The Newsletter (#77) will include the shortlisted titles, and a brochure will become available at the time of ICAS 10, which will include all shortlisted titles, winners, jury citations and the full list of accolades awarded.

The IBP has hitherto always been limited to English-language publications, but the IBP 2017 will for the first time ever also include books in Chinese, Korean, German and French. More than 200 titles were submitted in these 'new' languages, marking a promising start thanks to the support of the sponsors in those language areas. The June issue of The Newsletter (#77) will provide exact details about, and pay well-deserved attention to, these local academic institutions.

The submissions for the English-language IBP

The previous IBP (2015, awarded at ICAS 9 in Adelaide, Australia) saw approximately 50 dissertations and more than 200 books submitted. As we see with each subsequent IBP, the numbers continue to rise. This upcoming edition of the IBP has received 330 English-language books and 126 dissertations!

The number of worldwide publishers taking part increased only somewhat, from 58 to 64; thus generally remaining constant over the past few editions. However, for the first time we could clearly discern a core group of 7 prolific publishers

who submitted more than 15 books. These were Amsterdam University Press, Brill Publishers, Cambridge University Press, Harvard University Asia Center, ISEAS Publishing, NIAS Press, and University of Washington Press. The following 13 publishers submitted 5-15 books: Columbia University Press, Cornell University Press, Hong Kong University Press, Hurst & Company, Lexington Books, NUS Press, Oxford University Press, Peter Lang, Polity Press, Primus Books, Routledge, SUNY Press, and University of Hawai'i Press. The remaining 44 publishers, most of them academic, submitted fewer than 5 books each. If we are permitted to take the IBP as an indication, we could comment that a smaller group of publishers seem to be producing the majority of Asian studies titles. It is certainly an interesting trend to monitor.

Shifting trends

In our summary of the previous IBP we commented on two noteworthy 'shifts'. Firstly, we noticed a clear shift among the submitted titles from traditional humanities to contemporary social sciences: 35% fell into the former category, 65% into the latter. During the very first IBP in 2005 those percentages had been near enough reversed. However, this current IBP has in fact seen each category receive an equal number of titles, and so it might have been a premature conclusion. Nevertheless, the other shift we took note of was one involving the authors' nationalities; and that has again proven to be a trend. Among the submitted English-language publications, the number of authors of Asian descent has over the years risen rapidly, and continues to do so. From 10% in 2005, to 40% of the 500 authors, editors and contributors involved in the publications submitted for the IBP 2017 English edition. More and more, Asian scholars in Asian studies are succeeding in having their work published in English by international publishers. This is one of the reasons we are reaching out to international

academic publishers, encouraging them to personally attend the ICAS Asian Studies Book Fair, so that they can meet face-to-face the vast numbers of young Asian scholars who will be presenting their dissertations during ICAS 10.

Another trend that has become evident over time is an increasing number of studies on 'Global Asia', mirroring the rise of Asia on the world scene. Furthermore, it will come as no surprise that almost 50% of the titles submitted are about East Asia, with 60% of those on China. Whereas Japan was always comfortably in second place it now has strong competition from Korea with nearly the same number of books. South Asia is the region with the fewest studies among the submitted titles. India is by far the most studied country in that region, but mostly by Indian scholars. The number of studies on Southeast Asia is clearly on the rise. While Indonesia is most studied there is a growing number of publications on all countries in that region, with a clear interest by authors from other ASEAN countries. For the first time publications on Central Asia were submitted. We hope for more in the future.

Popular themes

The consistently most popular themes, ever since the first IBP, include arts and culture, diasporas, migration and minorities, East-West relations, gender and identity, language and literature, religion, and society – approached mainly from the academic fields of anthropology and ethnography, history, archaeology, international relations, politics, and philosophy. Increasing in popularity are studies of media and technology, urban culture, natural disasters, war, violence, crime and law, economy, heritage and architecture, in which scholars and practitioners work closely together to uncover new layers of knowledge, the results of which are published in periodicals or edited volumes. This new type of inclusive research has been translated into a considerable surge in the number of edited volumes submitted for the IBP 2017. No less than 50, which is double the amount of the previous IBP.

The 'new' language editions

The June issue of The Newsletter (#77) will include our observations with regard to the French, German, Korean and Chinese IBP editions. It is too early now to comment on the submissions, other than to say that we have been pleasantly surprised with the numbers and interest garnered by the local institutes/universities involved. We look forward to seeing these editions grow steadily and come into their own, as we have seen the English IBP do.

Paul van der Velde, ICAS Secretariat (icas@iias.nl).

The IBP 2017 Dissertation Awards: a progress report

Alex McKay

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN 1998 when the first International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS) was held in Leiden (the Netherlands), ICAS has become the largest gathering of its kind in the world. ICAS 10, to be held in Chiang Mai (Thailand) from 20-23 July 2017, is expected to attract approximately 1500 scholars whose presentations will result in 300-350 panel sessions. Among the many academic attractions at ICAS is the ICAS Book Prize (IBP), which rewards not only the 'Best Books', but also the 'Best Dissertations' in Asian studies. The Awards and Accolades are given in the two categories of the Humanities and the Social Sciences. Winners of the two main Awards will receive a cash prize intended to facilitate their attendance at ICAS.

By the 15 October 2016 deadline, a total of 126 submissions from recent doctoral candidates at 95 universities in more than 20 countries had been accepted for the IBP Dissertation Awards (a handful were rejected for various reasons). Of these, there are 59 submissions in the Humanities and 67 in the Social Sciences, all of whose authors were awarded doctorates between June 2014 and June 2016 (with a certain latitude to allow for the processes involved). The Dissertation Judging Committee, overseen by ICAS Secretary Dr Paul van der Velde and myself, are currently compiling a 'long list' of 10 dissertations in each category. From this a 'short list' of three will be chosen, prior to the final selection of an Award Winner in each category. The winners will be announced at ICAS 10 in Chiang Mai.

In addition to the main Awards, the judges will also grant Accolades in both disciplines for (1) Most Accessible and Captivating Work for the Non-specialist Reader; (2) Specialist Dissertation; and (3) Ground-breaking/Innovative Subject Matter. The Accolades draw attention to dissertations that, while not judged the best overall in their discipline, are non-the-less of considerable quality in important areas. Winners of these Accolades will also be announced in Chiang Mai.

The making of a winner

The question of what is an award-winning dissertation is of course a matter of interpretation by the judges. But clearly the

best dissertations will have the primary merit of originality, along with scholastic qualities such as depth (and breadth) of research, evidence of intellectual quality, clear and sophisticated arguments, good organisation and presentation of evidence leading to significant conclusions liable to be of interest to the wider field, a consistent and properly considered theoretical and/or methodological framework, and of course it must include due acknowledgement of sources and proper presentation of bibliography, notes and associated scholastic apparatus. They will also have the minimum of typographical errors and the standard of writing and use of English language will be of a good standard. (Here we should note that just as the IBP Book Awards have been expanded to include languages beyond English, consideration is now being given to similar future expansion in the Dissertation Awards.)

Receiving a Dissertation Award or Accolade, and even to be included on the long and particularly the short lists, is an important career milestone for any young scholar. It gives a significant boost to their resume and perhaps most importantly, alerts academic publishers to the quality of their work. Many major academic publishers will be represented in Chiang Mai, and can be expected to give serious consideration to any publication proposal for which the submitter has received an IBP award/accolade.

The PhD pitch

ICAS 10 will also offer another opportunity for recent PhDs to promote their work. A 'PhD pitch' has been introduced at which they will have the opportunity to briefly describe the significance of their work to an audience of interested scholars, publishers and even potential employers - who may question the candidates on their findings. This is intended to be a relatively informal chance for presenters to meet others interested in their field of enquiry.

Thematic trends

An interesting aspect of the submissions for the IBP Dissertation Awards are the insights they provide into wider trends in Asian studies, in particular the direction in which the field is heading. Of course the sample is comparatively small and there is no doubt

that certain fields must be under-represented. There is, for example, only one submission in the field of language studies and very little in the environmental field. But what of the virtual absence of both grand narratives and grand theories? Does this imply a mistrust of such constructions or suggest increasing specialisation? Certainly it does not imply a lack of wider perspective or indicate insularity, for at least 25% of the submissions concern cross-cultural issues in some sense.

Issues of identity, however, seem more implicit than explicit, while 'the body' as an investigative subject seems less prominent than formerly. Political or organisational histories also seem less popular and, except in regard to early literary figures, there are only a handful of studies that reference the pre-medieval period. Indeed there is a strong historical emphasis on the colonial period. Studies of material culture are prominent and if art history is under-represented there are a number of studies of historical photography, which is clearly an emerging field of interest. Theatre and performance in the widest sense attracts attention, as do educational issues and to a lesser extent music and tourism. There appears to be a tendency towards trans-national rather than national studies, with migration and cultural encounters in various contexts a common field of enquiry. In gender studies there is a clear tendency towards occupationally-based research.

Regional focuses are indicated by the fact that while around 25 submissions may be classified as focussing on more than one country, another 25 are concerned with India and 21 with China. Indonesia, with 10 and Japan with 8 are the next most popular areas, while there is just one thesis in each case relating to Macau, Burma, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Thailand.

Moving with the times

What is also notable is that the form of a doctoral dissertation has lost the traditional boundaries of extensive text and relevant illustration. Many submissions incorporate video and other technological innovations of the last decades, once tentatively but now confidently deployed by a generation that has grown up with new tools of expression. That tendency, like ICAS itself, is likely to only grow.

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