



The fourth International Convention of Asia Scholars was held in Shanghai at the impressive and historical Shanghai Exhibition Center. Previous meetings were held in Leiden (1998), Berlin (2001) and Singapore (2003). ICAS is a platform for Asian, Australasian, American, African and European Asianists to study issues pertaining to Asia and find solutions of interest to all.

The ICAS panels transcended the boundaries between disciplines, between nations and regions studied, and especially between the geographic origins of the presenters. The list of institutions participating clearly illustrates the convention's driving force. There were 1200 participants from 52 countries. More than 450 universities and many more institutes, departments, schools, programmes, and organizations were represented. This year for the first time, Asia scholars from Africa and the Middle East were at ICAS. All this guaranteed the boundary-crossing discussions the Selection Committee and ICAS had in mind.

The convention's focus is on panels. Only 10 per cent of which were institutional and organized top down. We thank all participating institutions and hope that more institutions will follow suit to use ICAS as a platform. Likewise we thank the scholars who organized 30 per cent of the panels. The remaining panels were put together by the Selection Committee on the basis of individual abstracts. These were grouped under the 13 general themes of ICAS 4 such as Global Asia, Identity, Economy and Knowledge.

The 280 panels ranged from Urbanization, Megalopolis and Regional Development to Investigating Law and from the Impact of ASEAN to Bad Girl Writers. On average a panel consisted of four papers but there were also panels exceeding 10 speakers. In all more than 1200 papers were presented. Out of the sheer number of abstracts the idea was born to put all information pertaining to ICAS 4 on a USB-stick. This made for a portable programme book and all information readily accessible.

We were happy to welcome about twenty key publishers in the field of Asian Studies who showcased their latest state of the art publications in the exhibition space. We thank them for the more than forty books contesting for the ICAS Book Prizes.

The ICAS secretariat hopes all participants enjoyed an inspiring and stimulating convention in Shanghai and invites you to join ICAS 5 in Kuala Lumpur in 2007! <

Based on the opening remarks by the Secretary General of ICAS Prof. Wim Stokhof during the opening session of ICAS 4 in the Central Hall of the Shanghai Exhibition Center in Shanghai on 20 August, 2005.



The future of Asia: cross-cultural conversations

Scholars who have devoted their academic lives to the study of Asia can play important roles in furthering the vision of universality, partly as researchers whose work can contribute to cross-cultural understanding, but more specifically as teachers of future generations and sponsors and facilitators of student exchanges.

Barbara Watson Andaya

Most of us, and particularly historians, are committed to the idea that the past has something to say about the future. Individuals have always played a key role as linguistic and cultural mediators, with far-reaching influence - both positive and negative - exercised by the written interpretations they produced. People who are well acquainted with cultures that are not their own will be as important in shaping the global relationships underpinning Asia's future as they have been in the past.

From early times Southeast Asia, being at the cross roads between India and China, offers a multitude of examples of visitors who recorded their impressions, sometimes simply as an official report, sometimes intended for wider dissemination. Few college textbooks on Southeast Asia, for instance, would fail to mention the description of Angkor left by Zhou Duguan, a member of a Chinese embassy who spent a year in Cambodia at the end of the 13th century. In a very different time, and in a very different place, we can consult the report of a Persian scribe included in a mission to the Siamese capital of Ayutthaya in 1685 who remarked on the willingness of the Thai ruler "to learn about the kings of the inhabited world, their behavior, customs and principles.... He sent everywhere for pictures depicting the mode of living and the courts of foreign kings."

It is important to recognize that this was a conversation, not a monologue. Over time, individuals from Southeast Asia traveled to distant lands, and detailed their experiences for posterity. In the early nineteenth century, for instance, the Riau scholar Raja Ahmad and his young son Raja Ali made the pilgrimage, not only meeting some of the most eminent Muslim leaders in Mecca but going to Medina with a caravan of two thousand camels. One can only imagine the enthralled audiences who listened to Raja Ahmad's stories following his safe return. Although mental adjustments are impossible to quantify, it is not difficult to imagine that such experiences could reshape an individual's views of his or her own society. Many of us can attest the subtle attitudinal shifts that travel and overseas living has brought about in our own lives. Cross-cultural conversations among ordinary people, most notably the young, lie at the heart of international education.

There has been a proliferation of programs that allow students to spend time in another country, as students or for an extended visit. The bulk of exchanges have been between the West and Asian societies, while a significant and growing number of young people from Asia spend time in other Asian countries. The knowledge they acquire reaches far beyond the acquisition of language skills; what is important is learning "how things are done" in another culture. Ultimately this kind of knowledge demands an awareness and non-judgmental acceptance of difference, and these values can never be learnt too early. If we accept that the future of Asia, with all its promise, will ultimately rest with its youth, then the education of a globally perceptive generation is a matter of the highest priority.

Historians of premodern Southeast Asia have learned to distinguish between observers with only a passing knowledge of "the other" and those with much greater experience in the region. Two examples of early "exchange students" whose experiences continue to speak to us across the years illustrate the kind of person I have in mind. The first is a young Chinese man, Wang Dahai, who spent ten years in Java between about 1783 and 1793, and whose account of Java written in 1791, reprinted at least seven times, was first translated into English in 1849. Having apparently failed the examinations, and anxious to help his debt-ridden family, Wang followed the path of numerous other young Chinese, and left for the "southern seas." He traveled in Java, entered service as a tutor with a wealthy Batavian Chinese family, and married before eventually returning to China.

Despite sometimes caustic comments, Wang Dahai obviously enjoyed living in Java. He appears to have been comfortable speaking Malay, and his account, Claudine Salmon tells us, introduces 89 Malay words in Chinese characters. He also knew something of other societies in the region, noting as many as 17 different ethnic groups, and commenting on distinctions between the Malay, Bugis and Javanese language and writing systems. He spoke of attending shadow plays and poetry recitations; his account of household interiors and the ways guests were received speaks to his personal relationships, and presumably his own marriage to a local woman. Wang's primary interests revolved around trade, but he seems to have developed a passion for tropical vegetation, and collected the names of many plants. The same interest apparently led him

ICAS Book Prizes 2005

The idea behind ICAS Book Prizes, awarded for the first time this year, is to create international attention and increasing visibility for publications on Asia through a global competition.

All scientific books on topics pertaining to Asia published in 2003 and 2004 were eligible. Three prizes were awarded: best study in the Social Sciences, best study in the Humanities and best PhD study in Asian Studies. The award consists of EURO 2500 for the first and second category while the best PhD study will be published in the ICAS/Brill Series.

The Reading Committee reviewed 38 books (23 Humanities and 15 Social Sciences). In each category three books were nominated as were two dissertations. Thanks goes to the Reading Committee: Anand Yang (President Elect of the Association for Asian Studies), chair; David Hill (professor at Murdoch University), Krishna Sen (vice-president of the Association of Asian Studies of Australia); Dr Guita Winkel (Leiden University) and Dr Mehdi Amineh, (fellow at the International Institute for Asian Studies) and Dr Paul van der Velde (ICAS Secretary).

Citations

The best book in the Social Sciences category is

Elizabeth C. Economy
The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge to China's Future.
(Ithaca NY: Cornell U Press: 2004).

The Chinese people have transformed their country from a developing nation to economic powerhouse. Equally striking, however, has been the price that China's environment has paid for this transformation. Elizabeth C. Economy captures extraordinarily well the complex historical, systemic, political, economic, and international forces that are shaping China's environment. No other volume on this enormously important issue is as comprehensive, balanced, and incisive. The style is direct, factual, uncluttered by jargon and accessible to the non-specialist. The book concludes with scenarios for China's future. Economy has written a well-researched analysis of the environmental degradation that happened in China and its implications for the rest of the world.

The best book in the Humanities category is

Christopher Reed
Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937
(Vancouver/ Toronto: UBC Press. 2003)

Christopher Reed knits together cultural and technological histories, in a simultaneously readable and erudite text. It is based extensively on Chinese language documents and is a response to the 'western' historiography of print technology and its consequences in late 19th and early twentieth century China. Reed describes the existing print culture of China prior to the arrival of Guttenberg's moving letter press machine and shows how the new technologies had to be embedded into an existing print culture and technology with its own pre-existing norms. He also shows that the print-led socio-economic transformations were equally in the hands of the machinists, who moved the locus of Chinese publishing from Canton and Hong Kong to Shanghai within the space of about a generation and a half. It is a wonderfully detailed history of the press. It will appeal to a wide range of scholars of China and theorists of culture and technology.

The best book dissertation is

Samuel Kwok-Fu Wong
Community participation of Mainland Chinese migrants in Hong Kong - rethinking agency, institutions and authority in social capital theory
(University of Sheffield, 2004)

Wong reviews the concept of social capital to question common assumptions underlying policy prescriptions in pro-social capital programs. His research is based on fieldwork conducted in 2001-2 among poor, newly arrived mainland Chinese immigrants to Hong Kong. His well-written thesis is an original contribution that aims not so much to cast 'social capital' away as a theoretical concept as to soften its rigid use in current development strategies. His study is of wider impact than for Hong Kong immigrants alone and calls for a reconsideration of conventional understandings of development programs. <



in history

to compile considerable detail about the collection of certain rare commodities like bêche de mer, swallows' nests, birds of paradise, bezoar stones, and tortoise shell. His readers would have been reminded that such activities were never purely an economic matter. Those collecting birds' nests, Wang tells us, must select an auspicious day and success can only be guaranteed through the propitiation of spirits in songs and dance. The special nature of Wang's observations lies in the fact that he was what we would now call a participant observer, and one can sense his personal enjoyment of Java. Much of his pleasure he attributed to the emphasis his host cultures placed on food and rest. "Even if there is an urgent affair, they do not attend to it immediately." He paid Java the greatest compliment of all: even the rice was superior to that of China! It could certainly be argued that Wang's gratitude to his rich merchant hosts encouraged him to offer an especially positive picture. On the other hand, it is also likely that Wang emphasized the appealing features of a non-Chinese to encourage his compatriots to think more deeply about their own.

My second example of the "inquiring mind" concerns John Adolphus Pope, a fifteen-year-old apprentice born in 1771 in Plymouth employed on an English country ship from 1785 to 1788. His time in Southeast Asia thus coincides with that of Wang Dahai, and again what struck me when I read his letters to a friend in Bengal was his intellectual curiosity and his genuine interest in his surroundings. The crews of the country ships not only had to be first class seaman, but also needed working understanding of local societies so that they could trade. In this sense, John Pope was an orientalist of the best type. In the Malay port of Kedah, for instance, he met Dul Bad-dul, the son of the Royal Merchant; they became good friends, even discussing matters like religious differences. Describing various ports from Yangon to Aceh, Pope's letters reveal a genuine pleasure in meeting new acquaintances and in re-visiting places where he could have already made friends. "Those who say the Malays have no virtues," he wrote, "have never lived among them. I have been received by them as a child and domesticated, I may say in their families as far as the prejudices of religion would allow, universally treated with kindness and generosity. . . I shall always think of the inhabitants of this spot with complacency and pleasure." Pope went on to become a captain in his own right, and had a long career trading in India, China and other parts of Asia.

These contemporaries, Wang Dahai and John Pope, seem to me to be prime examples of the expanded outlook that that can come about when young people are given the opportunity to live for some time in a culture which is not their own. It may be difficult at times, and certainly the writings of both Pope and Wang show that they were by no means immune from feelings of frustration, and that they themselves sometimes were targets of hostility. But both youths learned that appropriate interactions with others are always culturally contingent and that appreciation of the good in another society enables one to view one's own more clearly.

The 21st century offers unprecedented opportunities of communicating with other societies on many different levels and via many different media. At no point in world history has it been more important to educate global citizens who have the capacity to approach each other as potential friends, regardless of differences in religion, language, ethnicity and culture. Central to the future of Asia must be a renewed commitment to sustain meaningful cross-cultural conversations informed by the universal and human values of intellectual curiosity, empathy and simple kindness. <

Based on the keynote speech of ICAS 4 Shanghai on 20 August, 2005.

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