



Fig. 1: The Cultural Platform of ICAS 12, with an interface designed to virtually evoke the city of Kyoto.

ICAS 12: A Retrospective

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On Tuesday, 10 August 2021, we are sitting in the IIAS office in Leiden, the Netherlands, looking at each other and wondering whether everything is ready before sending the access codes for the ICAS 12 Academic Platform to the participants. In the past couple of weeks, the ICAS 12 panel participants have carefully prepared their presentations and have either uploaded it or recorded it within the platform. Now the time has come to make it available to their ICAS 12 colleagues. A rich database of more than 1000 presentations was available to be explored in the two weeks before ICAS 12 officially opened on 24 August.

Once the decision was made in April to organize ICAS 12 fully online – the ongoing pandemic made it impossible to organize ICAS 12 live in Kyoto as originally planned, and even a hybrid conference proved to be too optimistic – the ICAS Secretariat in Leiden worked together intensively with Kyoto Seika University, our local partner in Japan, to present an immersive online ICAS 12 experience.

Beyond presentations: the ICAS 12 Cultural Platform

After the launch of the Academic Platform on 10 August, we were proud to present the Cultural Platform on 20 August, which was meant to evoke the city of Kyoto itself. Participants would enter a beautifully designed Kyoto-style floorplan with different buildings to explore [Fig. 1]. Although we could not wander around Kyoto and the conference venue itself, the multiple 3D art galleries on the platform effectively approximated the experience of being at an exhibition. Entering the first exhibition space

(Visual Arts Meets Research), participants could walk around and explore two projects lead by faculty members of Kyoto Seika University – namely, *WADAKO: Stories of Japanese Kites and Washi: From Mulberry to Manga, the Art of Paper in Japan*. The second exhibition space featured graduation works by students of Kyoto Seika University, which were produced in the faculties of Japanese Painting, Sculpture, Ceramics, Textile, Printmaking, Video & Media Arts, Illustration, Graphic Design, Digital Creation, Product Communication, Interior Goods and Design, Fashion, Architecture, Cartoon Art, Comic Art, and Character Design. Beyond these virtual exhibitions, the platform also included the ICAS 12 Hidden Talent Gallery, a special space in which colleagues could showcase other talents beyond their academic field. The result was a rich variety of music, dance, fashion, poetry, manga, food, arts and crafts, and other performances.

There was so much going on in the Cultural Platform that it was difficult to discover all of it. Think, for example, about the vast selection of 32 documentaries included in the ICAS 12 Film Festival, which was curated by Dr. Mario Lopez

of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. Titles ranged from *Ambon: A Return to Peace to Golek Garwo*, from *Mlabri in the Woods* to *The Father I Knew 2020*.¹ This film festival edition also showcased a selection of short animated films bringing out issues of social relevance, which were created by students of the Graduate School of Film and New Media, Department of Animation, Tokyo University of Arts.

The publishers and institutes of our *Asian Studies Exhibitor Gallery* also found a place in our Cultural Platform. Several booths could be visited to learn about the latest books, products, and activities in Asian Studies. Participants could also gain more insight about publishing during two *How to Get Published* sessions, which were led by editors from Brill. Other features of the Cultural Platform included the *Poster Gallery*, where participants presented their latest research as a poster of which some were also accompanied by a short explanatory video; the *Networking* space, where participants could virtually gather with the Kamo river in the background; the *Photo Booth*, where participants could take a selfie to add to the *Crafting a Global*

Picture mosaic; and the *Explore Kyoto! Bus*, where participants could explore and learn more about Kyoto. Not to be missed was also the *Catch-Up Cinema*, where one could view recordings of the live events that one had missed earlier in the conference, and which also presented a rich collection of short video clips of (Japanese) cultural performances and activities. The selection ranged from *noh* play (Japanese original dance with drama) to *sado* (tea ceremonies), from *zazen* (meditation with temple chief priests) to *kamishibai* (“paper play” stories) specially created for ICAS 12.

The *Live Events Stage* featured a range of events and performances during the breaks. It started with the official opening speeches. Following this, a keynote symposium occurred, in which Prof. Oussouby Sacko (President of Kyoto Seika University), Prof. Juichi Yamagiwa, and Prof. Shoichi Inoue discussed the importance of locality and crafting a global future based on the diversity of nature and culture. Besides live performances, the *Live Events Stage* was also a space where experience was shared. There were several interviews: the rapper Moment Joon shared his experience as a Korean immigrant in Japan

“Everything was so well organized, the participants having the opportunity to alternate between watching pre-recorded presentations, participating in the discussions, witnessing live events, taking time to “visit” Kyoto. I have no words to thank the organizers, as well as the participants for the effort of producing presentations on such a variety of topics related to Asia.”

“For an online conference, the pre-recorded talks worked wonderfully. It meant that regardless of time zones, I could watch whichever talks I wanted to ahead of time, and it left more time for discussion.”

“Given this year's exceptional circumstances, there was nothing the organisers could have done better. ICAS 12 online was very well organised and I enjoyed it very much. However, I would like to see a return of fully in person ICAS conferences in the future.”

and how it influences his music. Cameroon-born, Japan-raised cartoonist René Hoshino discussed his manga work; and Marty Gross enlightened us about his Mingei Film Archive Project, which aims to restore, enhance, and preserve films and recordings documenting the history of Japan's Mingei Movement and its ongoing legacy in the world of contemporary ceramics. Participants could also enjoy a variety of performances, which even brought some people in Kyoto on the dancefloor during the opening concert by Millogo Benoit, who has been working between Japan and Burkina Faso since 2007. One could also relax and appreciate the beautiful sounds of the piano during a concert by Dr. Masafumi Komatsu.

Another essential element of ICAS is the ICAS Book Prize.² This edition honoured publications in Chinese, English,³ French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish, and it also included a prize for the Best Article on Global Hong Kong Studies. With nearly 1000 submissions, the Reading Committees did a tremendous job singling out the winners. During the ceremony, we made a trip around the world to hear from Secretaries of the various languages, each of whom introduced the recipient(s) of their respective edition's IBP Award [Figure 2].

Winners happily reacted in a short video clip to this wonderful news. The ICAS Secretariat would like to thank the IBP Secretaries, Reading Committees, and the IBP sponsors and partnering institutes for supporting the nine language editions and article prize. Perhaps the most important building in the Cultural Platform was, of course, the Live Sessions space. By entering this room, you would be taken to the Academic Platform, where on 24 August we finally kicked off five days of live sessions. 1500 participants from all over the world gathered online in more than 300 sessions, structured along 13 main themes, to exchange and discuss their latest research [Figure 3]. We were also happy to work with *Engaging for Vietnam* for the second time,⁴ which included a large number of Vietnam-related panels in the ICAS 12 programme. The one-hour live sessions were programmed in a 12-hour/day schedule to cross the different time zones. The sessions consisted of short recaps of each presentation, followed by a longer period of lively discussion, exchange, collaboration, and Q&A. The International Academic Forum (IAFOR) in Japan coordinated all sessions in Zoom and arranged for each session to be supported by a technical moderator to assist the participants as needed.

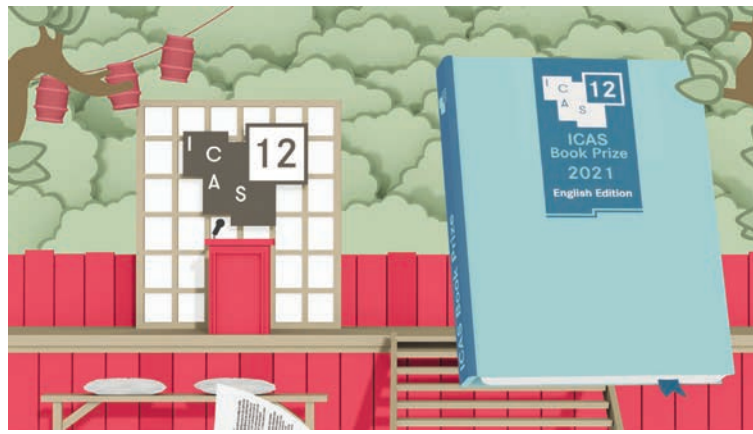


Fig. 2: Virtual presentation of the ICAS Book Prize 2021 Awards Ceremony.

If more time was needed for further discussion after the allotted hour passed, we were happy to offer break-out rooms in which participants could talk in a more informal setting.

Our conference format – pre-recorded presentations made available before the official ICAS 12 conference dates, coupled with live sessions focused more on discussion and exchange – aimed to break through the online fatigue of sitting in hours-long sessions. We hoped to create opportunities for a more in-depth discussion of research. Also, participants who were unable to attend the live sessions would still have the opportunity to view the presentations, as these would be available until 15 October, long after the formal conference concluded.

The five days of live sessions and other activities flew by. Before we knew it, we had reached the last event of ICAS 12 on Saturday, 28 August. It was time to sit back and enjoy *kyogen* – traditional Japanese comic theatre. For the closing speeches, we joined two different parts of the world again, Japan and the Netherlands. With great enthusiasm, Prof. Oussouby Sacko expressed his insights from Kyoto on the intensive and wonderful week full of fruitful exchanges, discussions, making new connections, and reconnecting to new and old friends. After his inspirational talk, we moved to Leiden, the home base of the ICAS Secretariat.

Colleagues, partnerships, and gratitude

This ICAS 12 was the last edition in which Dr. Paul van der Velde acted as ICAS Secretary and General Secretary of the ICAS Book

Prize, as he will be retiring on 1 November 2021. Because the ICAS Secretariat team also had to stay in Leiden given the impossibility of traveling to Japan, we experienced ICAS 12 from our computers, just as our participants did [Figure 4]. Nevertheless, we became aware that, even online, we could bring the ICAS community together and bridge research across different regions, disciplines, and time zones. We successfully brought together junior and senior scholars from more than 70 different countries. Our warm thanks go to Paul, founder of the ICAS spirit. His creative, imaginative mind and his way of lifting barriers made ICAS 12 into what all participants experienced this August. Although this was Paul's last ICAS in his official position, he will continue to be connected to IAS, notably by becoming a Senior Fellow. Martina van den Haak, who intensively worked together with Paul on six ICAS editions, will be succeeding him as ICAS Secretary and ICAS Book Prize General Secretary. It has been a wonderful ICAS journey together, and we at the ICAS Secretariat will keep the ICAS spirit alive. Thank you Paul!

Special thanks also to our ICAS 12 partner, Kyoto Seika University, and all of their partnering institutes. We are grateful for the rich, varied programme they created. Thanks in particular to Prof. Oussouby Sacko, Dr. Shuzo Ueda, Dr. Manabu Kitawaki, Ms. Hiroko Iguchi, the Academic and Cultural Committee, and all supporting staff for their hard work in bringing Kyoto to the ICAS 12 participants. During our weekly online meetings, we together crafted the ICAS 12 experience, and we appreciate them taking on the adventure with us. Even though the experience was virtual, we hope that the participants got a touch of the Kyoto vibe by navigating the Academic and Cultural Platforms. We do hope that, someday soon, there will be an opportunity for all to visit this wonderful city in person.

Feedback and the future

The richness and diversity of the different researches presented at ICAS 12 have not gone unnoticed. We are therefore happy to announce a new ICAS project. Amsterdam University Press (AUP)⁵ has approached us to participate in their new Open Access Conference Proceedings Series. ICAS 12 participants will be invited to submit their paper to be considered for the ICAS Proceedings. In this experimental phase, a maximum of 50 papers will be selected. This offers participants the opportunity to publish their work in an accessible and widely distributed forum.

After ICAS 12 concluded, we invited the participants to provide us with their feedback in a survey. Hearing back from participants is always important to see how things can be improved in future. As this was the first-ever online ICAS, the firsthand experiences of our ICAS 12 participants are even more important for us, as these give us an understanding of

what worked and did not work and thereby help us plan for the future. For example, should we continue ICAS online, or is there still a need to meet each other in person when possible? Nearly 1/3 of our participants made the effort to submit the survey. In general, the responses were very positive. The overall ICAS 12 experience was rated with a 7.7/10. With so many participants, there are of course different opinions and needs. Most appreciated the format, but there were also those who prefer the more traditional in-person format of longer sessions with full presentations and a short Q&A. Suggestions were also made to improve the online format further. Although the online ICAS 12 experience was much appreciated, there are also some downsides to an online format. Some participants mentioned that they were unable to fully engage themselves in the conference. Because they were not physically attending the conference, many participants were thus not free from their other obligations at home (e.g., teaching, meetings, family care, etc.). Also, the different time zones made it difficult to attend all sessions one might have liked to join. Despite this, 65 percent indicated that they would be interested in a future online edition of ICAS. However, there also exists a large desire for in situ meetings. 90 percent mentioned that they would prefer the next ICAS to be an in-person conference. With this online ICAS 12 adventure and the feedback sinking in, we will keep a close watch on different developments worldwide regarding the pandemic effects, but also new evolutions in the field of (online) conference organisation. The time has come for us to think about the next ICAS. The future will show us how, where, and when ICAS 13 will take place.

For an impression of ICAS 12, please see our aftermovie at www.icas.asia

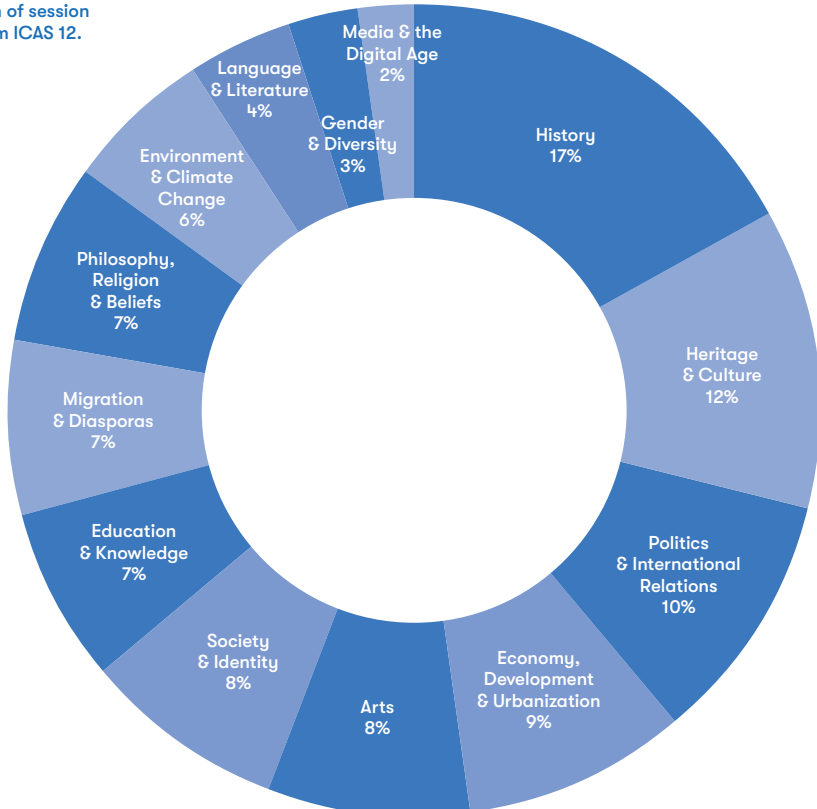
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Notes

- 1 Aye Chan, the young Burmese filmmaker behind *The Father I Knew 2020*, passed away in an accident after granting us permission to screen her work. The ICAS 12 Film Festival was thus dedicated to her.
- 2 See article ICAS Book Prize The Newsletter 89 Summer 2021: <https://www.icas.asia/the-newsletter/article/nearly-1000-submissions-nine-languages-ninth-2021-icas-book-prize-edition>
- 3 The English edition also included a dissertation prize.
- 4 In 2019, *Engaging With Vietnam* organized their EWW 11 conference in conjunction with ICAS 11.
- 5 The three IAS Publications Series – Asian Cities, Global Asia, and Asian Heritages – are also published by Amsterdam University Press, as is the forthcoming methodologies series from Humanities Across Borders (HAB).

Fig. 3: Distribution of session themes from ICAS 12.



"The live sessions and ability to watch pre-recorded presentations on our own time was nice. So many great sessions to choose from. All the cultural and art offerings and films were fantastic!"

"It was really well organized and interactive. The event platform's design was exquisite and engaging. I was impressed by the amount of films, online exhibitions, and activities offered in a remote format. It felt like a real experience."

"I really appreciate the wide variety of disciplines and topics that are showcased as it opens one's mind in wider ways."