Kyoto Seika University, our local partner in Leiden worked together intensively with us to organize ICAS 12 live in Kyoto as originally planned. However, 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 could 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 Odekk Gran, from Miabri in the Woods to The Father I Knew 2020. 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 Zone, 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. Dassouyui Sacké (President of Kyoto Seika University), Prof. Juichi Yamagaku, 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.

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.

ICAS 12: A Retrospective

Martina van den Haak and Paul van der Velde

“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 organisations 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 Hashino discussed his manga work; and Marty Gross, born, Japan-raised cartoonist René Hoshino enlightened us about his Mingei Film Archive Project, which aims to restore, enhance, and preserve films and reconsecrate documenting the history of Japan’s Mingei Movement and its ongoing legacy in the world of contemporary ceramics.

Perhaps the most important building in the Cultural Platform was, of course, the Live Sessions. By engaging with the world, you could be taken to the Academic Platform, to exchange and discuss their latest research across different parts of the world again, Japan and 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].

“Perhaps the most important building in the Cultural Platform was, of course, the Live Sessions.”

Participants could also play a role 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. This edition honored publications in Chinese, English, 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].

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

Winners happily reacted in a short video clip to this wonderful news. The ICAS Secretariat would like to thank the IBP, IAS, and Faculty, who so generously supported the Reading Committees, and the IBP sponsors and partnering institutes for supporting the nine ICAS editions, 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 receipts of each part followed by a longer period of lively discussion, exchange, collaboration, and QA. 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.

“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) has partnered 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 format.

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 first-hand 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 for each other to meet in person? 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 on the online format, but there were also those who prefer the more traditional in-person format of longer sessions with full presentations and 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 conversation. 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-person meetings. 90 percent mentioned that they would prefer the next ICAS to be an in-person conference.

Notes
1. Aapo, the young Burnese 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.
3. In 2015, Engaging With Vietnam organized their EWV 11 conference in conjunction with ICAS 11.
4. The ICAS Publications Series – Asian Cities, Global Asia, and Asian Heritages – are also published by Amsterdam University Press, as is the forthcoming Cities, Global Asia, and Asian Heritages of Cities Edition.
6. The ICAS Secretariat Team Leiden, rendered in manga-style illustration (Image courtesy of the artist Koos Aas).