

What's next in Asian Studies?
Report from the Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA)
Conference 2018

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It has been four weeks since I returned from the 2018 Asian Studies Association of Australia (ASAA) Conference, which I thoroughly enjoyed! It was the southern hemisphere's biggest ever Conference of academics working on Asia.



The Conference was held at the Abercrombie Business School, University of Sydney. I was very impressed by the building that comprises re-used and recycled timber. Ninety-eight percent of the building's construction waste was recycled.



The advances in technology made this Conference a completely paper-free conference. All attendees were invited to download the conference app via email, which included the whole conference program and abstract booklet. The conference updated event schedules in real time. My feeling was that it will soon be 'Say "Bye bye" to business cards' in the next conference as the technology will allow delegates to connect over social platforms during and after the conference.



The ASAA conference kicked off with the postgraduate workshop on networking and getting a job in academia. The workshop provided an excellent forum to bring together expertise on Southeast Asia to the postgraduate community. Over 70 PhD students from a diverse range of institutions, geographical focuses and disciplinary backgrounds participated. In particular, the second part of the workshop comprising mock interviews provided the PhD students with an opportunity to practice for an interview in the real world and receive feedback from the academic panel.



My presentation at the postgraduate workshop was to raise the awareness of the [2019 Asia Study Grants](#) at the National Library. It was a great interaction and connection. I appreciated that the organisers provided us with an additional slot in the program so we could talk to the PhD students and scholars about the Grants.



The actual conference began with an opening plenary session '**Why it's a Great Time to be an Asianist**' chaired by Dr Thushara Dibley of the University of Sydney. The speakers were Dr Jacqui Baker of Murdoch University, Dr Thomas Baudinette of Macquarie University, and Dr Tanya Jakimow of UNSW Sydney. The panel reflected on some of the unique advantages of being an Asianist in Australia and you can watch the opening plenary session online [Why it's a Great Time to be an Asianist](#).



Over 200 panels and 800 papers were presented at the Conference. Here is a snapshot of the Panels by Discipline/Theme. Integrating knowledge and methods from different disciplines is the current research trend that we have noticed over the last few years – e.g. Movies as Resources for Social and Historical Inquiry.

Panels by Discipline/Theme

Discipline/Theme	Panels	Discipline/Theme	Panels
Anthropology	14	History	31
Architecture/Urban Studies	7	History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine	2
Art History	12	International Relations	10
Business and Labour	17	Legal Studies	9
Cultural Studies	36	Linguistics and Language	3
Development Studies/Geography	27	Literature	8
Diaspora	9	Migration	10
Digital/Communications Studies	5	Politics	26
Disability Studies	4	Professional Development (e.g.	5
Education	5	Public Health	7
Environmental Studies	14	Religion and Philosophy	10
Film and Performance Studies	9	Social Movements	10
Gender Studies	23		
Geography	5		

There were so many fantastic sessions on offer. I went to a session on ‘Trade Unionism in Southeast Asia’ and learnt about trade unions in Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand from strong, smart, articulate women scholars researching on different Southeast Asian labour movements. The discussion panel explored the drivers and limitations of different forms of labour activism in Southeast Asia and debated the future of trade unionism in the region.



When I came back, my colleagues asked me ‘What valuable information have you picked up from the conference?’ Well, certainly the New Books in Southeast Asian Studies, a channel of the New Books Network (<http://newbooksnetwork.com/>). Dr Nick Cheesman hosted the discussion with three authors who reflected on their experiences of researching and writing academic work, and responded to

questions about publishing important books on Southeast Asia’s culture, history and politics. This website features recent academic publications in Southeast Asian Studies, authors’ interviews and book reviews <http://newbooksnetwork.com/category/southeast-asian-studies/>



My colleague Heather Walsh gave a presentation at the ‘Australia and Indonesia’s Cultural, Literary and Artistic Linkages’ panel session, where she talked about the National Library’s Indonesian Acquisitions Program. In the same panel, Alexandra who is a senior lecturer at UTS and Luke, who is an interdisciplinary artist, presented the “‘Hacking’ and ‘Futuring’ Cultural Exchanges between Indonesia and Australia: C2O and Frontyard”. I was so touched by their stories, their passion and their commitment to the possible frameworks for understanding the significance of the role of informal exchanges between cultural activists in Indonesia and Australia.



The Library Panel session was on the second day. In this roundtable discussion, we invited researchers and librarians to discuss the topic ‘Beyond Asian Studies and its research material’. I was particularly interested to hear from Professor Robert Cribb who pointed out the challenges for libraries and librarians on short-term and long-term collection strategies. I am passionate about building new bridges with our researchers, exploring new formats for knowledge and new approaches to scholarship.



At the librarians gathering night, I was able to renew friendships with old colleagues and make a few new ones at the dinner. It was a pleasure to hear what other colleagues are doing, to experience something out of the norm and to bring new ideas back to work.



It has been so positive! Seeing so many keen peers who are passionate about Asia has been a real positive encouragement! I left the conference feeling inspired and energised. Not only by the size of the conference, the environmentally-friendly building, the fact that it was paper free, and the quality of the papers presented, but also the number of dedicated and passionate scholars who are working on Asia. Last but not least, one thing is for sure, the need for Asian resources is **STRONG!**