

ICAS 11: Eleventh International Convention of Asia Scholars

Leiden, the Netherlands, July 15–19, 2019

Report by Johanna von Pezold

The Eleventh International Convention of Asia Scholars (ICAS 11) took place in the Dutch city of Leiden, where it had its first instalment in 1998. The large-scale conference was co-organized by the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden University, and GIS Asie (the French Academic Network for Asian Studies). Starting with the pre-conference “Asia and Europe: Histories of Entanglement” in The Hague on July 15, ICAS 11 brought together more than 2,200 Asia specialists and representatives of civil society, all under this year’s theme “Asia and Europe. Asia in Europe”.

The official opening of the conference started with a festive parade from the conference venues to Hooglandse Kerk on the evening of July 16. There, the participants were welcomed by musical performances and short speeches by Paul van der Velde (ICAS 11 Secretary), Henri Lenferink (Mayor of Leiden), Stef Blok (Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, via video), Judi Mesman (Leiden University), Aurélie Varrel (Director of GIS-Asie), and Philippe Peycam (Director of IIAS). This was followed by the presentation of the ICAS Book Prize 2019 awards, honoring outstanding works and dissertations on Asia in not only English but also Chinese, French, German, Korean, Portuguese and Spanish. After the opening ceremony, participants had the opportunity to mingle during the welcome reception while also enjoying a cultural fashion show presenting a collection of Vietnamese *Ao Dai*.

In four days, more than 500 panel sessions covered an impressively wide range of themes, such as arts and culture, environment, migration and diasporas, welfare and health, and history, all related to Asia. A strikingly recurring topic was the New Silk Road or Belt and Road Initiative and its impacts on communities all over the world. Several sessions were also dedicated to “Vietnam in Europe, Europe in Vietnam”, a sub-conference organized by the “Engaging with Vietnam” network. By supplementing the panels with keynote speeches, roundtable discussions, a film festival, an Asian studies book fair and the “IIAS Academic Freedom Space”, the organizing committee successfully created a global space that allowed Asia scholars from all backgrounds to interact and to exchange views, further contributing to a decentering of Asian studies.

Additionally, Leiden University cooperated with the city, local museums and research institutions to offer a large variety of interesting side-events and activities under the “Leiden Asia Week”, such as art and photo exhibitions, guided tours, cultural performances, and library visits. The participants were also welcome to discover the beautiful historic city center by foot or boat and to enjoy Dutch and international food at the ICAS Food and Cultural Market. The remarkably well-

organized and diverse conference ended with a closing party at Leiden City Auditorium on July 19. Kyoto University will be hosting the next installment of ICAS in 2021.

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