The global impact of COVID-19 is enormous, and the world of Asian Studies has not gone unscathed. We cannot but ask ourselves if the pre-pandemic way of working is future-proof. Taking the meeting side of Asian Studies (workshops, lectures, conferences, etc.) into consideration it is clear that we will have to scale down the number of physical gatherings. Although disruptive to the advantages of personal contact, there are potentially several benefits to this as well. Firstly, less air travel means a reduction in CO2 levels. Secondly, virtual meetings open up new possibilities to those colleagues and institutes hitherto unable to shoulder the costs of travel and accommodation involved in face-to-face meetings. With the improvement in quality of online meetings, these have become both feasible and bearable.

The ICAS vibe

I might be prejudiced, but I believe that (small) gatherings of specialists can more easily become virtual, since they aim to consolidate and expand their acumen within a certain discipline, and do not expect to transcend borders of disciplines and regions. They tend to work within their own well-defined areas of expertise. However, anyone who has ever attended one of the ICAS biennial meetings knows that 'the ICAS vibe' is the result of the multiple interactions between participants, who are open to engage with others beyond their own discipline or region, and also to interact with the (human and natural) environment of the particular location in which that year's conference is being held.

Virtual elements are not something completely new to ICAS, since we have streamed opening sessions before. But, future editions of ICAS will aim to incorporate many more virtual and hybrid elements (combining in-person and online characteristics). At this very moment the ICAS team is studying the various ways in which to ensure a vivid and highly interactive hybrid conference format for ICAS 12. My hope for the future is that the lines between physical and virtual presence will increasingly blur, to the extent that presenters, participants and organisers will not remember a time we did things any differently.

The Olympics of Asian Studies

Nevertheless, currently people still have the desire to meet in person; this was made abundantly clear when we closed our submission lines for ICAS 12 at the beginning of October, and were blown away by the sheer numbers: nearly 1200 proposals were submitted, involving around 2000 potential participants. We had definitely not expected this level of optimism and enthusiasm in the current state of the world! Of course, we will have to see what is possible come the summer of 2021, hopefully many travel restrictions will have been lifted by then, but we do intend for ICAS 12 in Kyoto to be the first post-pandemic large Asian Studies conference!

The results of the submission reviews will be communicated to all relevant parties per email before the end of 2020. Since the registration fee for both physical and virtual attendance will be the same (hybridism comes with a price tag) you can decide whether to participate in person or online at a later stage.

Shamsul A.B., the local host of ICAS 5 in Kuala Lumpur (2007), unforgettably referred to ICAS as the 'The Olympics of Asian Studies'. And now, by chance, ICAS 12 will coincide with the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, which was postponed by one year. ICAS certainly does not convene to break records, but we definitely aim to create an event that facilitates as many human interactions as possible, across disciplines and regions, so as to inspire border-transcending interdisciplinary ideas. ICAS never only involves academics, but also other practitioners such as artists, artisans, musicians, museum curators, librarians, civil society representatives, advocates, and many more. Additionally, ICAS always connects with the citizenry of the place in which it is held, with the aim to share the knowledge on Asia with the local community, but also to benefit from the local knowledge on Asia. For ICAS 12 in Kyoto, this knowledge abundantly resides in its great culinary, garden and craft traditions, just to name a few. The motto of ICAS 12, 'Crafting a Global Future', was not casually chosen!

Stay updated

As preparations for ICAS 12 advance, and as we observe the developments of the pandemic, we will be continuously adjusting our programme, accommodating any and all possibilities and global restrictions. To stay informed, please make sure to add yourself to our mailing list and receive our 'ICAS Matters' updates. You can subscribe here: https://icas.asia/forms/mailinglist

Paul van der Velde, ICAS Secretary and IBP General Secretary

The ICAS Book Prize 2021

Alongside the astonishing number of submissions for ICAS 12, we have also been observing another record-breaking interest in the ICAS Book Prize (IBP). Each year the number of titles rise!

The IBP was originally launched to bring a focus to academic publications on Asia; to increase their worldwide visibility, and to encourage a further interest in the world of Asian Studies. Organised every two years, together with the ICAS conference, the IBP has grown from a small experiment, to one of the largest book prizes of its kind. Along the way, we expanded to include, in addition to the English Book and Dissertation prizes, prizes for publications in Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

The English language edition is the most mature, and naturally receives a substantially larger number of submissions. But the other language editions, still in their infancy, are proving to be worthy contenders. Each language edition has its own secretariat and sponsor. The intention is to create sustainable and lasting partnerships with secretariats and sponsors who make the prize 'their own'. You can find all details on their respective pages online: https://icas.asia/icas-book-prize-2021.

This year we have added yet one more prize to the group. Organised and sponsored by the Society for Hong Kong Studies (SHKS), the newest addition to the ICAS Book Prize family is the IBP for Best Article on Global Hong Kong Studies. According to the prize's description, scholarly articles in any social science or humanity discipline are eligible as long as they take Hong Kong as the primary subject of inquiry. SHKS particularly welcomes articles that place Hong Kong in global, comparative and theoretical perspectives. Although an entirely new format for us, we find this to be a timely and exciting category. We have no doubt it will attract a large number of article submissions in the coming months.

We feel strongly that the various language editions can grow into substantial Book Prizes, just as the English edition has done. For that to happen we encourage our readers to take part, spread the news, motivate colleagues and peers to submit their publications! Winners receive not only substantial cash prizes, but also invaluable exposure and credibility, and potentially a trip to the winners' stage at the ICAS conference. Please join us in strengthening and developing the various IBP language editions, as you have successfully done in the past for the English instalment.

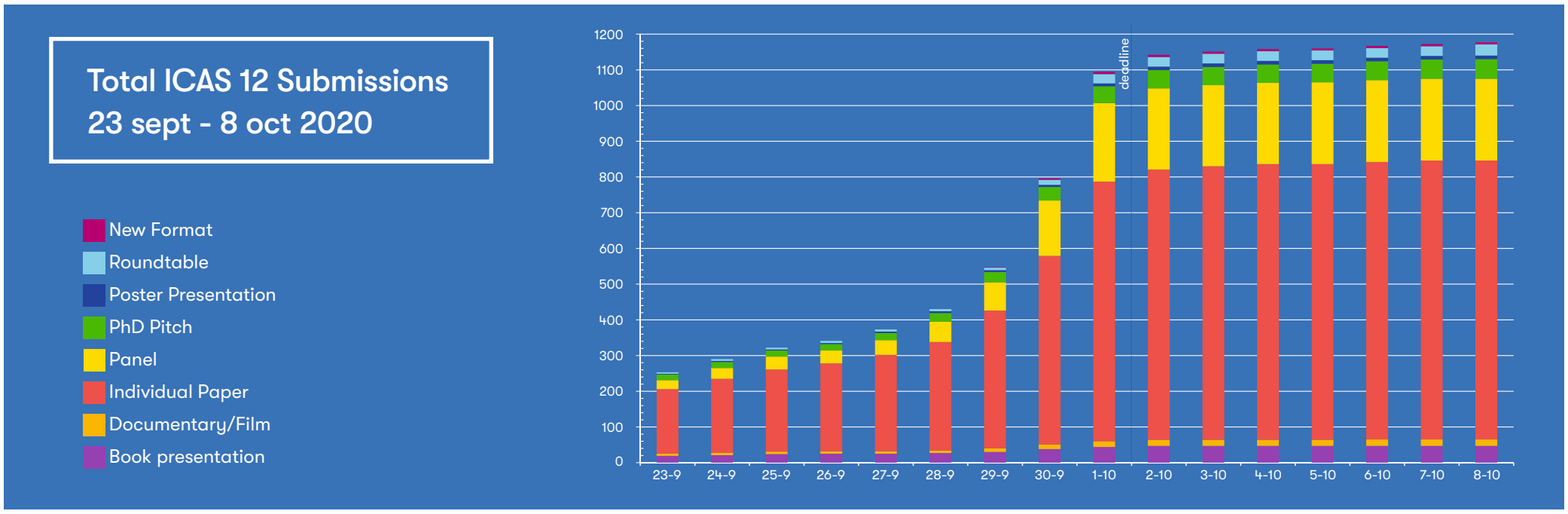
We look forward to seeing you all in August 2021, whether at the live opening of ICAS 12 in Kyoto, or online in our ICAS 12 virtual environment.

Sonja Zweegers,
Secretary of the IBP English language edition and Editor of The Newsletter.

The deadline to submit your books or dissertations to the English language edition of the IBP has passed. **However, you are still able to take part in the other language editions.**

The deadlines are:
1 Dec 2020: French language edition
1 Feb 2021: Chinese, German, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish/Portuguese language editions
1 Feb 2021: Hong Kong article prize

Submission instructions:
1. Go to https://icas.asia/icas-book-prize-2021 for the guidelines.
2. Create an account here https://icas.asia/user/login
3. Log in to your account.
4. Select 'your' language
5. Click on the button 'Submit publication'.
6. Fill in the form and click on 'Save'.

The secretariat will follow up per email with instructions for shipping hard copies.

Questions can be sent to ibp@iias.nl or to the relevant language secretariat (find contact details online).