

Introduction

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Conference Keynote Presentations

In this first issue of Volume 5, we have chosen to begin with two keynote presentations from the fourth IAAPS Annual Conference, held in November 2013 at De La Salle University in Manila. By doing so, we hope to extend our readers' interest—and, hopefully, their desire—to become a member of our parent organization, the *International Association for Asia Pacific Studies*. The first of these keynotes was delivered by the former Philippines President, H. E. Fidel Ramos, now involved with the organization he founded post-presidency: the Ramos Peace and Development Foundation. In his presentation, President Ramos considers the changing balance of power in the world, in part due to the rise of China and India, and what it will mean for the Asia Pacific, including Japan and the United States. He asserts that the challenge for the Asia Pacific is to replace the *Pax Americana* that has enforced stability in the region since 1945 with a *Pax Asia Pacifica*, founded on a balance of mutual benefit, as opposed to a balance of power. In his view, the basic task must be to organize a concert of nations to manage military rivalries, and avoid arms build-ups in the Asia Pacific region through deepened bonds with each other. He further contends that military budgets should be regulated to create savings and investments for the alleviation of poverty and the improvement of the quality of life for the region's peoples. President Ramos believes that only through total commitment to such a principled and responsible way of living and working together can all the peoples of the region achieve the peaceful, harmonious and bountiful future they all desire—for themselves and the younger generations.

The second presentation is from Dr. Jon S.T. Quah, a retired professor of political science from the National University of Singapore and now an anti-corruption consultant based in Singapore. Dr. Quah demonstrates that corruption remains a serious problem in the Asia Pacific region, noting the performance of the 28 Asia Pacific countries on Transparency International's 2013 Corruption Perceptions Index, in which 18 of these countries scored below 50 on a scale from 0 ("highly corrupt") to 100 ("very clean"). In his presentation, he outlines the six best practices for curbing corruption, which are based on the experiences of the four least-corrupt Asia Pacific countries (New Zealand, Singapore, Australia and Hong Kong SAR). Successes in these nations were analyzed in order to provide lessons for those Asia Pacific countries where corruption is rampant. Dr. Quah



stresses that the political leaders of those Asia Pacific countries concerned with curbing corruption must have the political will to implement these six best practices in order to make corruption a “high risk, low reward” activity.

We have included one more IAAPS conference keynote speech—this one presented at an earlier conference by H. E. Kak-soo Shin, then Ambassador of the Republic of Korea in Japan. Ambassador Shin provides his assessment of the prospects for regional cooperation among the nations of Northeast Asia. This is an important commentary from a key player, and complements President Ramos’ call for unity and the emergence of a *Pax Asia Pacifica* founded on a balance of mutual benefit. Ambassador Shin notes that Northeast Asia has made solid progress in diversifying and intensifying regional cooperation, and then proceeds to identify four areas in which he believes that progress can be made in the short term. In his talk, which was delivered at an IAAPS conference held in the period immediately before the current territorial disputes, he stresses that building a spirit of solidarity and finding common interests are essential for attaining a higher level of regional integration, which will be necessary to offset any such problems.

General Articles

Another form of social transformation is the subject of our first research article in this issue. Dipesh Kharel’s article is a sympathetic and informative look at how the lives of the Thami people in Alampu, Nepal, have been transformed since slate mining began in the area. He shows that, although there have been difficulties, lives have been dramatically improving at the individual, family and village levels, opening up new choices and opportunities, and allowing the residents to change their social roles and statuses. Kharel lived with the Thami people in their village for three months, documenting their stories through a variety of methods, including film. In the article he tells a rich and full story of the Thami people, tied into their everyday activities of slate production and distribution. The article argues that the Thami have exercised meaningful agency in improving their socio-economic condition.

Continuing the emphasis in this issue of the journal on textual social and cultural analysis, the next article, by Rie Askew, analyzes the 1966 historical novel *Chinmoku* (*Silence*), and the views of its author, Japanese novelist Endo Shusaku. *Silence* is based on a true story of Christian persecution in seventeenth century Japan, which resulted in the apostasy of two Jesuits priests. While some have viewed these men as weak renegades who betrayed the church, Askew notes that Endo treats them more sympathetically in his novel, allowing us to understand their thoughts. She asserts that Endo views these men as having betrayed the Church because they wanted to remain humane and, ironically, Christian-like. Furthermore, Askew helps us understand the complexity of Endo’s views on Christianity, views which are influenced by his unique position of having to balance his chosen religious beliefs with the conflicting beliefs of the culture in which he was

brought up. In her thoughtful article, Askew impels us to consider the question, “What is the essence of Christianity?”

The third research article is by Yufu Iguchi, who presents an in-depth analysis of the seminal 1950s works of Malay culture and language by Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (commonly known as Za’ba). These works, entitled “Bahasa Melayu, Kelebihan dan Kekurangannya” (The Malay Language: Its Excesses and Shortages) were written at a time when the national discourse of multi-ethnic Malaya was being formed, and were highly influential in the development of the Malaysian national identity, now being generally recognized as canon concerning the Malay language and culture. In the article, Iguchi illustrates how the image of Malaysia as a multi-ethnic society was constructed in relation to colonialism. She then analyzes ambiguities in Za’ba’s texts, which could be used to radically question the Za’ba-influenced national discourse. She asserts that Za’ba’s articles can be read in two contradicting ways: on one hand constructing the dominant national discourse based on colonialism, and on the other hand questioning this dominant national discourse.

We are able to provide a very informative commentary on one of Ang Lee’s more important films in our final article, by Mo Tian. In his analysis of *The Wedding Banquet*, Tian finds that the film is a work that explores the interplay of power relations in the dynamics of gender, ethnic and sexual identities among its characters. The story is of a homosexual man who goes to great lengths to conceal his sexual orientation from his parents, entering into a marriage with a heterosexual woman. According to Tian, in the course of conflict development, the film turns symbolic representations into spheres of contrasted power dynamics. By employing both iconographical and textual analysis, Tian explores how the discourse of power is constructed through negotiation, conflict and reconciliation in the film, and argues that the film’s representation of power between heterosexuality and homosexuality enhances the extent to which sexuality is utilized as a politicalized tool in the expression of identity.

The issue concludes with a number of book reviews. Good and informative reading, all. And please send us your manuscripts!

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