

by Emily Donald, PhD
student in history

Emily playing Mak
Khom, a Mancala-style
marble game, while on a
research trip to the town of
Phatthalung in Southern
Thailand.



Reflections on The Lauriston Sharp Prize

The establishment of the Southeast Asia Program's Lauriston Sharp Prize sprang from a SEAP faculty meeting in October 1973, when George McT. Kahin suggested that funds be allocated to establish an internal prize for graduate students in honor of Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology and SEAP founder, Lauriston Sharp (1907-1993).

Sharp had retired from teaching in 1973 after almost four decades at Cornell. With the retirement of its founder falling between the Program's 20th and 25th anniversary, the Sharp Prize formed out of a shared desire to both acknowledge the academic excellence and service of its students, and promote the ongoing projects and flourishing community surrounding Southeast Asian studies at Cornell.

In keeping with these intentions, the Prize has since been awarded annually to the finishing doctoral student (or students) whose dissertation research and community engagement repre-

sent an outstanding contribution to the study of Southeast Asia as well as to the community life of SEAP. As a strikingly interdisciplinary cohort, Sharp Prize awardees exemplify the vibrant, interdisciplinary, and collaborative networks that SEAP has worked to cultivate over its seventy-year history.

When the Sharp Prize was first awarded in 1974-1975, individual

graduate students received the title of "Sharp Scholar" along with a "subvention of \$250 for the purchase of books." Some forty-five years later, the Prize continues to recognize the scholarly excellence, academic service, and community engagement of some of Cornell's most creative thinkers, writers, artists, and educators. As well as producing foundational texts

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in Southeast Asian studies, Sharp Prize winners can now be found working in academia, education, advocacy, and the arts—among other arenas—both in the United States and across Asia.

The 2019 Sharp Prize recognizes two PhDs in History, Matthew Reeder and Matthew Minarchek, for their research on Thailand and Indonesia, respectively. Historians are well represented among the Prize's alumni, including Vicente Rafael (1984), Takashi Shirai-shi (1986), Andrew Abalahin (2003), Chie Ikeya (2005), and the current chair of Cornell's own Department of History, Tamara Loos (1999). Reeder and Minarchek also join recent Sharp Prize historians Claudine Ang (2012), Trais Pearson (2014), Sean Fear (2016), and Jack Meng-Tat Chia (2017) as part of an exciting surge in recognition for scholarship on Southeast Asian pasts.

While most Sharp awardees completed dissertations in the departments of anthropology, history, and government, the award has consistently recognized scholarship that moves beyond these disciplines. The first Sharp Prize went to art historian Barbara Harrison for her thesis on ancient ceramics found in Borneo. The Prize later recognized other art historians, curators, and visual studies scholars, including Astri Wright (1991) and Kaja McGowan (1996) of Cornell's own Department of the History of Art and Visual Studies.

Martin Hatch, founder of the Cornell Gamelan Ensemble and the only awardee from the Department of Music (so far), received the Sharp Prize in 1980 and has gone on to make innumerable contributions to SEAP and the wider Tompkins Country community. Teacher-educator and acclaimed novelist Rosalie Metro (2011) was awarded the Prize for her dissertation in the Department of Education. And Caroline S. Hau (1998) is currently the sole

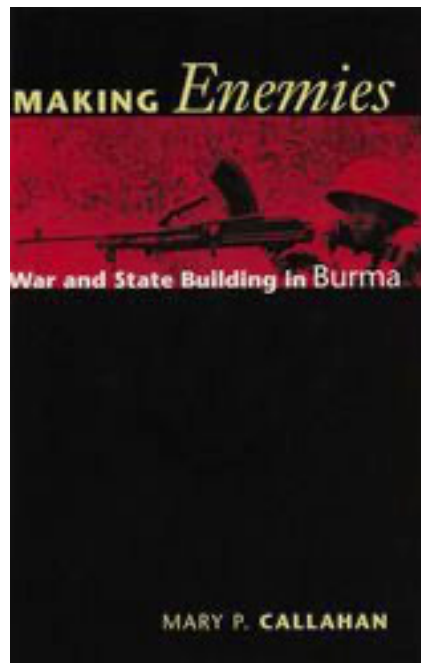


PAST AWARDEES

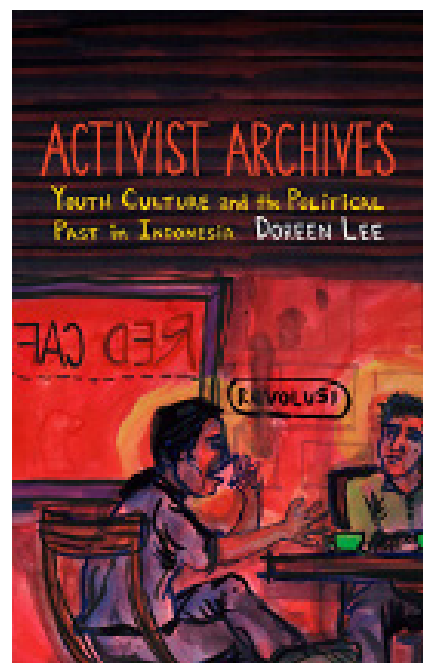
- 1975:** Barbara Harrison, History of Art and Archeology. "Pusaka: Heirloom Jars of Borneo"
- 1980:** Martin Hatch, Music. "Lagu, Laras, Layang: Rethinking Melody in Javanese Music"
- 1985:** Marina Roseman, Anthropology. "Sound in Ceremony: Power and Performance in Temiar Curing Rituals"
- Takashi Shirai-shi, History. "Islam and Communism: An Illumination of the People's Movement in Java, 1912-1926."
- 1990:** Nancy K. Florida, History. "Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: Exile and Prophecy in an Historical Text of Nineteenth Century Java."
- Judy Ledgerwood, Anthropology. "Changing Khmer Conceptions of Gender: Women, Stories, and the Social Order."
- 1995:** John Thayer Sidel, Government. "Coercion, Capital, and the Post-Colonial State: Bossism in the Postwar Philippines."
- 2000:** Teresa Sobieszczyk, Rural Sociology. "Pathways Abroad: Gender and International Labor Migration Institutions in Northern Thailand."
- 2005:** Marc Brunelle, Linguistics. "Register in Eastern Cham: Phonological, Phonetic and Sociolinguistics."
- Chie Ikeya, History. "Gender, History, and Modernity: Representing Women in Twentieth Century Colonial Burma."
- 2010:** D. Christian Lammerts, Asian Studies. "Buddhism and Written Law: Dhammasattha Manuscripts And Texts in Premodern Burma."
- 2015:** Amanda Flaim, Development Sociology. "No Land's Man: Sovereignty, Legal Status, and the Production of Statelessness among Highlanders in Northern Thailand."



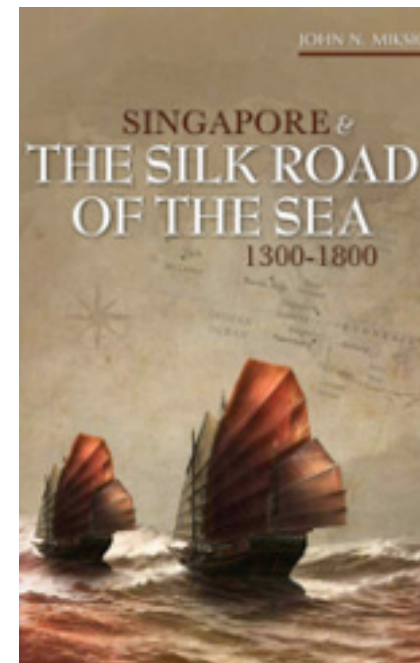
Nancy K. Florida, *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future* (1995).



Mary P. Callahan, *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (2004).



Doreen Lee, *Activist Archives* (2017).



John N. Miksic, *Singapore and the Silk Road of the Sea* (2013).



Sharp recipient from the Department of English. Now a professor of cultural studies at Kyoto University's Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Hau returned to Cornell in 2019 to deliver the 11th Frank H. Golay Memorial Lecture, "For Whom are Southeast Asian Studies?"

Several linguists have received the award, beginning with the Prize's second awardee Anthony Diller (1976), and followed later by Marc Brunelle (2005) and Pittayawat Pittayaporn (2009). The third scholar to be awarded a Sharp Prize was Tsuyoshi Kato (1977) for his sociological study of West Sumatra. Indeed, the Prize has a strong contingent of rural and development sociology scholars, including: Nancy Peluso (1988) for her study on forestry in Java; Filomeno Aguilar's (1992) dissertation on capitalist relations of sugar productions in the colonial Philippines; Teresa Sobieszczyk's (2000) study on the gendered orientations of international labor migrations in Northern Thailand; and Rachel Safman's (2001) work on rural Thai responses to the HIV/AIDS crisis. In more recent years, the Prize has been awarded to two PhDs in development sociology: Amanda Flaim (2015), who also held a

Human Rights Fellowship at the Kenan Institute of Ethics; and Edmund Joo Vin Oh (2016) for his work on the politics of Vietnamese fisheries.

Cornell's interdisciplinary Department of Asian Studies has produced several Sharp Prize winners, most recently D. Christian Lammerts (2010), John Phan (2013) and Chairat Polmuk (2018). The work of these three scholars crosses and connects various regions

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of mainland Southeast Asia and Vietnam, touching upon intellectual, cultural, and legal histories of Buddhism (Lammerts); affective expressions of Cold War memory in film and literature (Chairat), and the historical and religious-cultural evolutions of the Vietnamese lexicon (Phan).

Anthropology makes up roughly a third of the total awardees, which perhaps speaks to trends within area studies in general and Southeast Asian studies in particular, not to mention

Sharp's own disciplinary affiliations and his role as one of Cornell's earliest instructors of anthropology. But while the disciplinary affiliation may seem skewed, a closer look at the kinds of topics explored by anthropological dissertations over almost three decades of awardees demonstrates great breadth in both area and subject.

From among the earliest awardees, such as D. George Sherman (1982),

whose research concerned social organization and beliefs systems in Sumatra, to one of the latest recipients, Jane Ferguson (2008), for her rhythmic study of music and popular culture on the Thai-Burma border, Sharp Prize anthropology dissertations have explored all corners of Southeast Asia, traversing urban megacities, forests, upland communities, borderlands, soundscapes, religious communities, iconography and image technology, youth cultures, historical production and storytelling,

and various socio-political movements.

Sharp Prize anthropologists have also moved into creative collaborations with state institutions, organizations, and communities. Thailand-based scholar Alexandra Denes (2006) is as an accredited UNESCO facilitator, working on projects geared towards the revitalization and protection of cultural spaces and practices across Southeast Asia. The work of dance ethnologist and anthropologist, Toni Samantha Phim (1994), also reaches beyond academic circles, combining an attention to the historical and cultural contexts of the arts with matters of social jus-

tice, migration, and political violence, particularly in the Cambodian experience. Two Sharp Prize anthropologists have won John Simon Guggenheim Foundation Fellowships. Scholar of music and anthropology, Marina Roseman (1986), was the 1996 Guggenheim Fellow for her research on the connections between history, song, and politics in the Malaysian rainforest. And Tyrell Haberkorn (2007) was recently named the 2020 Guggenheim Fellow to conduct research on the individual, social, and legal impacts of Thailand's 2014 coup d'état and extended period of military rule, which will culminate in Haberkorn's third book project, *Dictatorship on Trial in Thailand*.

A number of Sharp Prize recipients have gone on to publish award-winning monographs, including one of the Prize's earliest recipients, archaeologist John N. Miksic (1979), who was recently awarded the inaugural Singapore History Prize for his 2013 book *Singapore And The Silk Road Of the Sea, 1300-1800*. The prestigious Harry J. Benda Prize, which honors newer works of scholarship in Southeast Asian studies, has been awarded to three Sharp Prize

alumni: historian Nancy K. Florida (1990) for *Writing the Past, Inscribing the Future: History as Prophecy in Colonial Java* (1995); Mary Callahan (1996) from the Department of Government for *Making Enemies: War and State Building in Burma* (2004); and, most recently, anthropologist Doreen Lee (2008) for *Activist Archives: Youth Culture and the Political Past in Indonesia* (2017).

Finally, the academic service and community leadership of awardees is demonstrated by the fact that an overwhelming majority of Sharp awardees once served as co-chairs on the graduate student committee, a role that entails the organization of the long-running weekly "brown bag" lecture series, the annual graduate student conference, the program's Spring Banquet, and the utterly indispensable SEAP Halloween party. Graduate student co-chairs contribute exponentially to facilitating an internal exchange of ideas among Southeast Asianists at Cornell, while also bringing scholars from around the US and across the world to contribute to and share in SEAP's intellectual community. ✨

THE ABOVE HIGHLIGHTS ONLY A SMALL SAMPLE of the various achievements and contributions that may be traced back to the Southeast Asia Program's Lauriston Sharp Prize. With its interdisciplinary and cross-cultural networks, the Sharp Prize has identified researchers, educators, artists, and writers who have played key roles in shaping and promoting the study of Southeast Asia for over forty-five years. The recipients make up a dynamic cohort whose creative thinking, energetic collaborations, and commitment to education speak to SEAP's own institutional and community values. The Sharp Prize will continue to recognize individuals' academic excellence as well as the contributions they make to the networks, friendships, and exchanges that are so central to the SEAP community.