



Study of Phnom Penh waste pickers wins ASAA prize

Posted 9 December 21015

A researcher who has spent some years studying waste pickers in Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh has been awarded the 2015 [ASAA Presidents' prize](#) for the best thesis on Asia submitted in 2014.

Dr Cindy Bryson, from the Australian National University's Archaeology and *Anthropology* Department, has been awarded the prize for her dissertation entitled 'A valuable life: seeing transformative practice among Phnom Penh's waste pickers'.

The thesis—described as a visual and textual ethnography—dispels common assumptions that waste picking is a last resort for the poverty stricken.

'Bryson shows the value created through the material act of recycling objects extends from the economic to the social—waste picking is a culturally meaningful action that gives purpose and pride to the waste pickers regardless of the disdain or pity with which they are frequently regarded,' said ASAA president Professor Louise Edwards, who announced the prize.

The award consists of \$2,000 and a \$500 book voucher from [DK Book Agency](#).

The second prize of \$1,000 was awarded to Dr Stephanie Chok, of Murdoch University, for her thesis on low-paid labour migration in Singapore.

Her dissertation entitled 'Labour justice and political responsibility: an ethics-centred approach to temporary low-paid labour migration in Singapore' used an activist ethnographic approach to work with migrant worker advocacy groups to develop theories and practices for labour justice.

'Chok's research provides insights into pressing problems of global labour migration and charts a path to enhanced understandings of the precarious world of work for millions of people who move for employment around the world,' said Professor Edwards.