

**Interpretative Methodologies and Methods Group @ APSA  
2021 Charles Taylor Book Award**

**Honorable Mention**

Diana S. Kim, Georgetown University, for *Empires of Vice: The Rise of Opium Prohibition across Southeast Asia* (Princeton University Press)

In this meticulously researched book, Diana Kim asks: why did Western colonial powers, which had long profited from the Southeast Asian trade in opium, opt to shut it down? She argues that it was the everyday work of local administrators who, far from being the weak bureaucrats they are often thought to be, undermined the practice of taxing opium, thereby making major anti-opium reforms possible. As she writes so elegantly, “the recursive nature of bureaucratic work and incremental processes of knowledge accumulation generated taken-for-granted sensibilities among administrators about official problems relating to opium consumption worth solving through state intervention, which served to justify the role of European colonial states (or lack thereof) in non-European societies. The invention of grandiose claims to legitimate rule over others as such emerges from concrete tasks of governance” (218). Combining remarkable archival research with insights from both interpretive social science and comparative historical institutionalism, *Empires of Vice* is an illuminating account of imperial history, the dynamics of bureaucracy and bureaucrats, the power and limitations of the state, and the politics of everyday administration. Kim’s attention to the quotidian workings of bureaucracy and the concrete labor of petty bureaucrats helps us navigate the complex relationships between structure and agency so central to our interpretations of political life.

Award committee: Lisa Wedeen, chair (University of Chicago); Phillip Ayoub (Occidental College); and Juliet Williams (UCLA)