



*2019 and 2020 Asialink Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Asia Medals
Awarded to Mr Carrillo Gantner AC and Mrs Ziyin Wang Gantner*

Weary Dunlop Award Citation – Carrillo Gantner and Ziyin Wang Gantner

It is often the case that the worthiest people – the quiet achievers – are overlooked when the accolades are handed out.

Harry S. Truman – a modest achiever himself – once said: “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

Nowadays, it can be hard to even get credit for modesty. Ronald Reagan, that somewhat forgetful US president, later purloined Truman’s quote and claimed it was his. Thank goodness Ronnie didn’t have a Twitter account.

But when it comes to quiet achievers in Australia’s engagement with Asia and the Asialink story, there are none worthier of recognition than this year’s joint recipients of the Weary Dunlop Award: Carrillo Gantner and Ziyin Wang Gantner.

Carrillo’s persistent and unflinching dedication to building Australia’s relations with Asia follows in the tradition of Weary Dunlop. Asialink owes its existence to Carrillo’s inspiration and insight.

On a tour of the region in 1988, Carrillo was struck by the negative images of Australia at a time when we were engaged in one of our periodic, and self-defeating, debates about immigration and its ethnic composition.

Carrillo returned with a commitment to do something about it. That resulted in conversations within the Myer Foundation and a circle of Asia specialists, including Asialink’s first CEO Jenny McGregor, that resulted in the founding of Asialink in 1989-90 and the subsequent establishment of its permanent home within the University of Melbourne.

China, and the rich opportunities it presented for cultural collaboration, has been at the heart of Carrillo’s passion for the region. Ever since his first visit to China in 1977, he has been dreaming up ways for expanding two-way cultural exchanges, cajoling arts bureaucrats on both sides, and fighting to expand the horizons of Australian and Chinese audiences.

The list of productions that Carrillo has aided in traveling back and forth is truly head-spinning and too numerous to list. To give you just a flavor of that, as early as 1978 Carrillo led the first professional theatre tour from the West to end the self-imposed isolation of the



Cultural Revolution. He followed up by hosting Chinese puppet, acrobatic, and opera companies on tours of Australia.

In return, he directed the Shanghai Theatre Company's run of the Australian play *Stretch of the Imagination* by Jack Hibberd in 1986. This is an idiosyncratically Australian one-man show about the travails of aging loner, Monk O'Neill, seeing out his last years on One Tree Hill. It was famously performed for television by Max Gillies.

For Carrillo to have this work of distinctly Aussie humor translated into Chinese, and then to direct performances for Chinese audiences in the mid 1980s, is worthy of an award in itself.

In the midst of our current difficulties with China, Carrillo's work is a reminder of how cultural exchanges can narrow the differences and demonstrates that we have more in common than is sometimes assumed.

Carrillo always understood the connection between culture and politics. And he took this with him to his appointment as cultural counsellor at the Australian embassy in Beijing between 1985 and 1987 – an inspired choice for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Carrillo was typically modest when he said: "I am essentially an artist and an arts administrator with a practical bent. I like to do things and am not so good at thinking about what they mean. Others do this much better than me."

But his cultural connections proved just as valuable for the Embassy to its understanding of political trends in China as they were for a blossoming of Australia-China artistic exchange.

In Australia, Carrillo has left his mark on arts administration and as an actor, in which his love of Asian cultures has been an abiding companion. When you look at the list of appointments Carrillo has juggled – from artistic director of Playbox Theatre to chairman of the Australia Council's performing arts board, initiator of the Asian Triennial of Performing Arts, chairman of Asialink, and chairman of the Sydney Myer Fund to name just a few – it lends truth to the line attributed to William Hazlitt that "the more we do, the more we can do".

In 2019, Carrillo was a deserving recipient of the Companion of the Order of Australia for professional and philanthropic contributions to the performing and visual arts and Australia-Asia cultural exchange.

For much of this Odyssey of art and Asian travel, Carrillo has had the like-spirit of his wife Ziyin Wang Gantner by his side.

Ziyin was born into a family of artists and intellectuals. She knew her calling early in life – from age five she was acting in both film and theatre in China.

But she also suffered through the political convulsions that wracked China during much of Mao's rule. During the Cultural Revolution, her family was broken up, her parents were sent to labor camp, and Ziyin went to live with relatives. At 16, she was required to work as a welder in a Beijing chemical plant as part of the regime's 're-education through labor' policy.

Through all this, Ziyin personally experienced the hardship, determination to overcome adversity, and the dignity under duress that we associate with the memory of Weary Dunlop.

Despite a childhood of privation, Ziyin went on to the prestigious Beijing Film Academy in 1978 after the Cultural Revolution ended and graduated with a BA in film direction in 1982.

Since coming to Australia in 1985 to start post-graduate studies at Swinburne Film and Television School, Ziyin has been a diminutive powerhouse in the worlds of film, television and theatre production in Australia and China.

Whether producing or directing nature and social affairs documentaries, children's shows for theatre and television, or stage plays, Ziyin has helped build deeper understanding between Australia and China over the past 35 years and demonstrated that audiences in both countries have more in common than divides us.

The life's work of Carrillo and Ziyin are a reminder of the power of culture as a bridge between the peoples of Australia and Asia. The arts give us another form of communication when words often fail.

Ziyin eloquently expressed that sentiment in a newspaper interview some years ago, when she said the cause of conflict usually springs from simple miscommunication "because people either don't talk to each other or they are not understanding each other".

Carrillo and Ziyin have opened up fresh avenues of communication between Australia and Asia – and more than ever we value it now.

I commend to you our joint Weary Dunlop Award winners for 2020 – Carrillo Gantner and Ziyin Wang Gantner.