SE6770 PRELIMINARY GRADUATE SEMINARS

Wednesday, 9 November 2005, 2.00 – 4.30 p.m.

These presentations by incoming graduate research students are intended to facilitate the development of their thesis topics and proposals. They share their preliminary thoughts and findings with the wider scholarly community in the hope of securing helpful comments and feedback.

SPEAKERS AND TOPICS
1. Mr Chin Chung Ming (PhD candidate)
   Title: Political Economy of Agricultural Policies in Malaysia: A Case Study of the Oil Palm Industry in Johor.
   Abstract: This research aims to show the impacts of government policies on the agricultural sector since the independence, using the oil palm industry in Johor as a case study. The focal point of the study is to assess the outcomes of these policies with a political economy approach.

2. Mr Ahmad Ali Nurdin (PhD candidate)
   Title: Comparative Islamic Political Parties: A Preliminary Study of PAS (Malaysia) and PKS (Indonesia), 1999-2005.
   Abstract: The objective of this study is to examine through a comparative perspective the development of Islamic political parties in Indonesia and Malaysia since 1999. More specifically, it explores the similarities and divergences between the PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera) and PAS (Partai Islam Se Malaysia) in regard to their views on the relationship between Islam and the state.

3. Ms Kanami Namiki (MA candidate)
   Title: Dance and the Filipino Nation: comparing the Bayanihan Philippine National Folkdance Company and the Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group.
   Abstract: The souvenir performance programs of two state folk dance companies will be compared and contrasted through semiotic analysis so as to understand the tensions and dynamics in Philippine folk dance.

4. Mr Danny Tan (MA candidate)
   Title: "Are you what you own?" Iban ethnicity, material culture and ethnic-identity in multi-ethnic Malaysia.
   Abstract: How does material culture contribute to the ethnicity make-up of an ethnic group? This project attempts to uncover the links between "Who you are" and "What you own", with a study of the Iban people as a group within a plural society.
OF PALACES, BAD FOOD AND NUMBERS: STORIES OF FIELDWORK AND METHODOLOGY IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

PANELISTS
Miss Alice Yap, Mr. Suryakenchana Omar, Mr. Effendy Hamid, Mr. Akhmad Bayhaqi and Mr. Henry Xu

Friday, 14 October 2005, 3.00 – 4.30 p.m.

ABSTRACT
In this informal roundtable discussion, five graduate (MA and PhD) students in Southeast Asian Studies will speak of the trails and tribulations of conducting fieldwork. Their presentations revolve around the complexity of personal and social experiences and issues engendered through the methodologies of fieldwork ranging from concerns with ethics and morals, personal reflexivity, gendered identities, “culture shock”, political interactions, funding to an analysis of quantitative data. The panel aims to address issues of method in the practice of Southeast Asian Studies and how to conduct/look at issues pertinent to a multi-disciplinary research agenda. The dialogue is thus especially pertinent to individuals about to embark on fieldwork practice or who are considering the varied ways by which to engage with their post-fieldwork data.

RETHINKING SOCIO-CULTURAL INTERACTION BETWEEN SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: TAMIL MUSLIMS IN THE MALAY WORLD, 16TH – 19TH CENTURIES

Mr. Torsten Tschacher
PhD candidate, South Asian Studies, NUS

Wednesday, 12 October 2005, 3.00 – 4.30 p.m.

ABSTRACT
Most research on the interaction between South Asia and Insular Southeast Asia has focused on two distinct periods and sets of issues. On the one hand, scholars have discussed and contested Indian influence on Southeast Asian statecraft and societies until around the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries. On the other hand, students of contemporary Southeast Asia have focused on South Asian communities that grew as a result of labor in-migration from the late nineteenth century onward. The intervening period of roughly 500 years has seen far less scholarship, most of which deals with commercial rather than socio-cultural exchange.

The aim of this seminar is not so much to present ‘solutions’ regarding the nature of socio-cultural interaction between South and Southeast Asians during this period as to reexamine the ways these encounters have been conceptualized, and the limitations imposed on scholars both by the nature of the sources and the assumptions they have made about these materials. Drawing on recent research regarding one of the South Asian communities involved in those interactions, viz. Tamil-speaking Muslim from the Coromandel Coast, the seminar will explore possible ways of reconceptualizing South Asian-Southeast Asian interactions in a number of domains, such as religion, literature, and inheritance.

THE SPEAKER
Torsten Tschacher is currently a research scholar at the South Asian Studies Programme, NUS, preparing a Ph.D. thesis on religious life and activities among the Tamil Muslims of Singapore. He has received his M.A. degree from the University of Cologne, Germany, for a thesis on a nineteenth century Arabic-Tamil poem. His main research interests are the history of Islam in South India and the cultural and historical development of Tamil-speaking Muslim communities, with a special focus on Islamic religious literature in Tamil.
THE SYNCRETIC SANTO: THE DISCOURSE OF FOLK CATHOLICISM IN THE PHILIPPINE

Dr Julius Bautista
Visiting Fellow, Southeast Asian Studies Programme & Asia Research Institute, NUS

Friday, 30 September 2005, 3.00 – 4.30 pm

ABSTRACT
This paper is an analysis of the discourse of syncretism in relation to the icon of Christ as a child, the Santo Niño. It inquires into how the figure represents, both literally and metaphorically, a “unique” kind of Filipino Catholicism that is thought to synthesise the ‘modern’ and the ‘ancient’, the ‘official’ and the ‘illicit’, the ‘pagan’ and the ‘enlightened’. This is not, however, a paper that seeks to provide an evaluation of the ‘purity’ of the faith. Through an examination of historical sources, church edicts, pastoral letters, media reports and other forms of ethnographic data from Cebu, I shall describe the systematic interconnection of a wide corpus of official and popular statements about the Santo Niño over time. In so doing, I discuss how the validity of certain ‘truths’ about the icon result from strategies of promotion, inculcation or sanitisation that condition the ways Catholicism has been experienced and practiced in “the spiritual capital” of the Philippine nation.

THE SPEAKER
Dr. Julius Bautista is appointed as Joint Visiting Fellow of the Southeast Asian Studies Programme and the Asia Research Institute. He earned his PhD in Southeast Asian Studies from the Australian National University in 2004. Having previously taught in The University of San Carlos in Cebu and The University of Sydney, he currently lectures on approaches to the study of religion at the NUS.

THE DOMINATION OF A FUSSY STRONG MAN IN PROVINCIAL THAILAND: THE CASE OF BANHARN SILPA-ARCHA

Dr. Yoshinori Nishizaki
Postdoctoral Fellow, Southeast Asian Studies Programme

Wednesday, 14 September 2005, 3.00–4.30 p.m.

ABSTRACT
One consequence of democratization in post-1973 Thailand has been the growing political dominance of allegedly corrupt provincial strong men, including violent "godfathers." The literature depicts these strong men uniformly as having established their domination by killing/cowing enemies and also by protecting vulnerable villagers from exploitative outsiders. These provincial bosses typify nakleng (rowdy) - type leaders who are manly, violent, daring, generous, protective, and law - breaking. My study focuses on one provincial boss who does not fit the prevailing description: Banharm Silpa-aracha from Suphanburi province. I spotlight his most salient non-nakleng attribute: his meticulousness. Unlike the prototype of provincial strong men, Banharm pays inordinate attention to small details in the image of a thorough Chinese shop-owner called longju. This nature is reflected in the way he closely monitors local development projects from implementation to completion. Given this surveillance, local civil servants, whom ordinary Suphanburians had perceived as lazy and inefficient, are made to work hard and efficiently in the interest of development. This study suggests that scholars take the variety of leadership types in provincial Thailand more seriously. Different strong men have different ways of maintaining their domination. More broadly, this case suggests that there is more to provincial Thailand than just guns, goon, and gold.
THE SPEAKER
Yoshinori Nishizaki is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Southeast Asian Studies Programme. He received his Ph.D in Political Science from the University of Washington (Seattle) in 2004. Funded by the Ford and Luce Foundations, he spent two years carrying out fieldwork in Suphanburi and Bangkok. Prior to obtaining his Ph.D., he was a Luce Foundation doctoral fellow in the Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University.

SE6770 PRELIMINARY GRADUATE SEMINAR
Friday, 15 April 2005, 2.00-5.30 pm
AS3, Level 6, SEASP Seminar Room

These presentations by incoming graduate research students are intended to facilitate the development of their thesis topics and proposals. They share their preliminary thoughts and findings with the wider scholarly community in the hope of securing helpful comments and feedback.

SPEAKERS AND TOPICS
1. Mr Muhammad Arafat (MA candidate)
   Remembering a Violent Past: Cemeteries in Pattani

2. Mr Mohamed Effendy (MA candidate)
   The Cham Manuscripts: New Perspectives on Champa's History?

3. Mr. Leong Kar Yen (PhD candidate)
   The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation: A Study of the East Timorese Truth Commission

4. Miss Mingkwan Wongsantativanich (PhD candidate)
   Thai Consumption and Perceptions of Japanese Popular Culture

5. Miss Alice Yap Boon Hui (MA candidate)
   The Consumption of Religious Landscape: Case Study of Tourism Development in Borobudur

6. Mr Tadasuke Tanimura (MA candidate)
   Makan Sushi: Authenticating Japanese Gastronomical Experience in Singapore

TOURISTS AND DESTINATIONS: IS IT ALWAYS A UNIQUE RELATIONSHIP

K. Thirumaran
PhD Candidate, Southeast Asian Studies Programme, NUS

6 April 2005, Wednesday, 3.30-5.00 pm

ABSTRACT
Destination marketing always concerns uniquess and differences. Tourism literature is filled with case studies on the uniqueness of cultures and how this is presented to tourists. Tourism impact studies also concentrate on Westerners or visitors from developed countries to ‘exotic’ cultures. However, this subject of tourists who travel the distance to either seek something related to their own culture or destinations they considered akin to their own heritage is less explored. Using the case study of Indian tourists in Bali and the performing arts as a platform, this presentation proposes that the relationship between tourists and destination visits is multidimensional and the use of cultural affinity theory may provide a new paradigm to understand tourists in a more holistic way. An affinity relationship between tourists and destination if recognized, offers policy
makers and the tourism industry new thoughts in marketing strategies and is of benefit to nation-states that have some vestiges of 'cultural assets' similar to the markets they are attempting to attract.

THE SPEAKER
K. Thirumaran is a currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Southeast Asian Studies Programme, National University of Singapore. His thesis topic is "Traditional Performing Arts and Tourism in Singapore."

ROYAL RITUALS AND PUSAKA OF THE SURAKARTA KRATON IN CENTRAL JAVAS

Mr Suryakenchana Omar
MA Candidate, Southeast Asian Studies Programme, NUS

30 March 2005, Wednesday, 3.30-5.00 pm

ABSTRACT
What began as a study of the museum of Surakarta kraton (palace) and its artefacts became an exploration of the Javanese concept of pusaka - aptly referred to as pusoko - and royal rituals in which pusaka has had an integral and fundamental role.

In the past year, I have spent time observing and understanding the role of pusoko in the royal rituals of the Surakarta kraton. I have attended and observed the Kirab Pusaka, Sekaten, Jumenengan and even the funeral proceedings of the late Pakubuwana XII. From these observations, I began to understand pusoko as more than its usual translations as 'heirlooms', 'heritage', 'inheritance', 'royal regalia', or 'objects of power'. The concept of pusoko, and its corresponding process of 'pusaka-isation' possess the ability to ensure the transmission and communication of relevant knowledge through the conservation of rituals, artifacts, manuscripts, choreography, values and even preservation techniques.

Hence, my thesis on "Pusoko: Concept, Context and Continuity" attempts to assert that the Central Javanese concept of pusaka merits a distinction as pusoko and that the continuity of the concept of pusoko and the corresponding process of 'pusaka-isation', will benefit cultural resource management in Indonesia and beyond.

THE SPEAKER
Suryakenchana Omar is currently a Research Scholar at the Southeast Asian Studies Programme completing his M.A. thesis on "Pusoko: Concept, Context and Continuity".

IN SEARCH OF “NAGRALAND”: SINGAPORE’S ORIENTAL WORLD IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Dr Leong Yew
University Scholar Programme, NUS

16 March 2005, Wednesday, 3.30-5.00 pm

ABSTRACT
Regional Southeast Asia, has for a considerable period of time, provided the discourse of Singaporean nation-building and survivalism extremely mixed sources of threat and opportunity. Borrowing the Rafflesian dictate of Singapore's (maritime) exceptionalism, Singapore's leaders have invariably pontificated their nation as "an oasis in the desert" or a "Venice in the Middle Ages." Yet at the same time, the Southeast Asian Other could vacillatingly be cast as a partner, a brother, a collaborator, or a purveyor of unbridled danger. These ambivalent visions of Southeast Asia are quite commonly seen in the popular media, governmental speeches, and some
academic works, but little research has been conducted into the dynamics of Singapore's imagination of its neighbours. In particular, are such views of the region the result of a Colonial Orientalist legacy? Or is the Singapore view embedded in the language of postcolonial ambivalence and resistance? What implications does it then have for Southeast Asian studies conducted in Singapore? This presentation serves as an introduction to my ongoing research in this area. It examines a number of issues, such as the Asian values debate and the "war on terror", and discusses how representations of Southeast Asia might be derived from a residual Orientalist legacy interoperating with Singapore's experiments with nationalism.

THE SPEAKER
Dr Leong Yew is currently teaching at the University Scholar Programme, National University of Singapore. He received a PhD degree from the Department of Politics at the University of Adelaide in 2000. He is the author of The Disjunctive Empire of International Relations (Ashgate: Aldershot, Hants, England, Burlington, VT, 2003).

FARANG AS A SIAMESE OCCIDENTALISM

Dr Pattana Kitiarsa
Postdoctoral Fellow, Asia Research Institute, NUS

2 March 2005, Wednesday, 3.30-5.00 pm

ABSTRACT
My talk will focus on the deconstruction of Thailand's Western other through an identification marker of “farang,” arguably one of many key pan-Orient Occidentalizing projects. I venture to reverse a widely accepted Orientalist discourse and reiterate some historical agencies of an Oriental nation, e.g., Siam or Thailand, in their historical and cultural contacts with the powerful Westerners. In light of Said (1978)'s influential work on Orientalism, I argue in an opposite direction that farang is an Occidentalizing project conceived and ventured through Siam's historical and cultural experiences with/against the West. Some productive ways to understand the discourses of farang in the making of Thai identities are (1) to read farang as a 'Thai production system of power/knowledge concerning the West'; and (2) to take it as a 'reflexively tactical method' to produce the Thai-ized version of the West as superior but suspicious others based on specific historical and cultural encounters with/against them. In short, farang has never been a matter-of-factly representation of the West in the Thai construction of knowledge. It is more an ethnocultural mirror measuring and projecting the hierarchical distance and otherness between the imagined Thai 'We-Self' and the constructed 'Western Others' among many non-Thai 'They-Selves'.

THE SPEAKER
Dr Patthana Kitiarsa is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He obtained a PhD degree from the University of Washington in Seattle, USA, in 1999.