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Digital Access

Due to the impacts of the global COVID-19 virus, we have proactively opted to move our conference to a primarily-online format. Participants are welcome to join us from anywhere in the world through Zoom, a free online service you can download from zoom.us/. The following links will provide you with access to the conference’s Zoom channels, through which you can view presentations, submit questions via chat and join your fellow participants in small breakout sessions.

Opening remarks and keynote:
https://cornell.zoom.us/j/336720218?pwd=NGxoRnBVNXV3ZG5LMTRUcUVncTRyQT09

Saturday panels:
https://cornell.zoom.us/j/250579273?pwd=RGMwcGViZEtCMDRoU3FzaEhERk5vQT09

Sunday morning panel:
https://cornell.zoom.us/j/870852560?pwd=cDBzNVA4WU11VjhGQWc5TFMyc1Vdz09

Participants should have received a password by email allowing you to log in to these sessions. If you have not received a password, please contact seapgatty@cornell.edu.

*** Please note that recording of any of the conference proceedings is strictly prohibited. ***
Engendering Migrations: Southeast Asia

Cornell University recently launched a Global Grand Challenge across departments and programs on the theme of Migrations: Researching, Teaching and Building for a World on the Move. For the 22nd annual Southeast Asia Program Graduate Student Conference, we selected submissions that speak broadly and creatively to this theme, and to the engendering of migrations across time and space. The Graduate Student Conference will highlight dynamic research on Southeast Asia carried out by graduate students across disciplines and the globe, united by this common theme.

In its narrowest sense, “migrations” refers to the movement of people and animals between places, we encourage submissions that also explore the movement of ideas, practices, material objects, or even disciplinary boundaries, within, beyond, or relating to Southeast Asia.

We particularly encourage reflection on how these migrations are “engendered,” in the dual sense employed in Ashley Thompson’s Engendering the Buddhist State (2016). Thompson considers both the general use of “engendering” - to originate, cause or give rise - and how “gender” itself may play a role in that origination. For Thompson, historical events are fundamentally intertwined with their aesthetic representations, social constructions, and gendered dynamics. In the 22nd Annual Graduate Student Conference, we hope participants will similarly consider how gender, or other previously-obscured categories, may be intertwined with and engender the Southeast Asian migrations we study.

The Graduate Student Conference will be held March 13-15, 2020 at the George McT. Kahin Center for Advanced Research on Southeast Asia, located on Cornell University’s campus in Ithaca, New York.
“Rising Tides and Wet Feet: Where to Go From Here?”
Lindy Williams, Professor of Development Sociology

Friday, March 13, 4:30pm

Lindy Williams is a professor in the Department of Global Development at Cornell University. Her academic interests fit under the general headings of family sociology and demography. Her most recent research engages human migration in several ways.

She and Amanda Flaim and Daniel Ahlquist have recently completed analysis of the ways in which returns to migration vary according to the legal status of both out-migrants and their parents in the highlands of Thailand. That research focuses on migration and statelessness, as some members of highland communities cannot document where they were born and thus are effectively stateless in their own country.

Her recently published collaborative work with Katie Rainwater examines historical trends in labor migration from Thailand – with the emergence of migration flows from Thailand to the Middle East and the eventual collapse of that system and the subsequent rise and decline of migration flows to East Asia.

She and Marie Joy Arguillas and Florio Arguillas have assessed how trailing husbands of nurse-migrants who leave the Philippines for Ireland take on care-giving roles and responsibility for domestic labor when their wives become primary breadwinners. With colleagues, Hyeonk Lee and Florio Arguillas, she has examined international marriage migration flows from Vietnam to South Korea. She and Joy Arguillas have written about overseas labor migration from the Philippines and effects on the children who stay behind when one or both parents leave, often on multi-year contracts.

Professor Williams is currently focusing on flood risk and adaptation, including possible displacement, in the Philippines (with colleagues, Joy Arguillas and Florio Arguillas). She is doing related work on adaptation along the Hudson River (with Jack Zinda, David Kay, Robin Blakely-Armitage, and Sarah Alexander).
‘This state owed much to the Jaffna Tamil’: Migration and the social mobility of Tamils between Jaffna and Malaya, 1914-1934.
Kristina Hodelin, Radboud University Nijmegen.

Keywords: Migration, civil service, Tamil, Ceylon, Malaya, Indian Ocean

Abstract: In her 2012 work, Subaltern Lives, Clare Anderson paints a nuanced picture on how to read the institutional boarders of the archive. By doing this, she claims our attention can turn “towards people who have been absent from history” while she “opens up new ways of thinking about Empire.” It is in this way that the story of Jaffna Tamil migration is unique during the co-lonial period. Over the course of the late nineteenth into mid-twentieth century there was small scale migration between two locales of the British empire: migration between Jaffna and the frontier colony of Malaya. The Jaffnese Tamils were a white-collar migrant group working in the civil service of the frontier colony. At first glance, their position of privilege compared to other groups evokes the image of positive relations between colonizer and colonized, however, by re-viewing letters between British officials and prominent Jaffna Tamils, as well as, civil service records, government gazettes, and cartoons we can get a more complex account of how the Brit-ish saw Jaffna Tamils vis-à-vis other groups in the colony. How did this affect subsequent migra-tion between the old colony of Ceylon and the new colony of Malaya? How did Jaffnese Tamils respond to challenges against their favorable status and how did this color the British view of the group? Interaction between the British and Jaffna Tamils had a long history over the course of the late eighteenth to nineteenth century. This led the British to target the community to serve as agents of their Indian Ocean empire. By analyzing the outcomes of this interaction, we can come to understand that colonial rule was a dynamic project encompassing the agency of both colonial officials and those inhabiting their colonies.
Labor at the Margins
Saturday, March 14, 9:00am - 10:30am
Discussant: Andrew Wilford, Professor of Anthropology.
Moderator: Astara Light.

Destined for Domestic Service: The Pre-colonial Traffic of ‘Little Sisters’ in the Tai-Lao World
Lisa Phongsvath, Freie Universität Berlin / Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

Keywords: Gender, debt bondage, domestic servants, ethnic identity, girlhood, Thai, Lao

Abstract: This project analyses the pre-colonial trade of female domestic debt slaves in the Middle Mekong Basin from the eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century. In times of hardship and persecution, it was common practice that rural and peasant families, predominantly from the upland peripheries, sold female family members to be debt-bonded as domestic servants to lowland Tai households. Young, pre-pubescent girls were most valued in this trade, and they could be bought back once their debt was repaid. Although widespread, this practice has yet to be investigated comprehensively in studies of slavery and bondage in central mainland Southeast Asia. I explore how this traffic of mostly ethnic-minority girls engages and intersects with wider power dynamics of gender, generation and ethnicity in premodern Tai-Lao society and domestic space. Such transactional migrations of women and girls, often involving extreme degrees of exploitation and subordination, complicate the characteristic ‘high status’ of non-elite women in early-modern Southeast Asia. I also seek to find correlations with this practice to the parallel mui tsai (‘little sister’) trade in Chinese societies (pei nu and ya tou in mandarin-speaking regions).

Looking at the local vocabularies and adaptations of this trade of domestic slave girls in the pre-colonial Tai-Lao world, I make new considerations towards their transcultural exchanges and resemblances. The project challenges the typical divergences made between gender relations in Southeast and East Asia, and, more broadly, aims to enrich and complicate the current typographies of Asian slavery with respect to gender, age, migration, ethnicity and domestic space.
"The "Perfect Map" of Widow Hiamtse: Female Entrepreneur and the Engendering of Plantation Space for Migrant Labourers in Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1685-1710

Guanmian Xu, Leiden University

Keywords: Gender, Space, Plantation, Migrant Labour, Borderland

Abstract: On 19 May 1685, a Chinese widow, Tan Hiamtse, showed up in the Dutch rural administration council in Batavia (present-day Jakarta), requesting a “perfect map” (perfecte caarte) for a huge piece of land outside the city wall. Hosting several sugar plantations, this space was toiled by hundreds of Javanese and Chinese migrant labourers. It was also a violent borderland confronting indigenous Bantenese people, whose armed resistance had already claimed the life of Hiamtse’s husband, a Chinese called Li Tsöeko. Preserved in the long ignored rural archives of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in Jakarta, the case of Widow Hiamtse shows the, previously unknown, proactive role played by non-western female entrepreneurs in shaping one of the earliest plantation economies in Southeast Asia, which employed tens of thousands of Javanese and Chinese migrant labourers from the end of the seventeenth century onwards. By requesting the so-called perfect map, Hiamtse tended to manipulate the Dutch colonial cadastral system, which was recently migrated from the polder area of the Low Countries. As the first request like such, this case stirred a series of debates and surveys within the Dutch system, disclosing a colonial rural society where people, ideas and things of the entire early modern world encountered and entangled. It also shows how the “perfect map” of Hiamtse eventually led to the reconfiguration of landownership in rural Batavia and the engendering of a distinctive plantation space for migrant labourers, legally and cartographically demarcated from the surrounding indigenous and hybrid settlement society.
Labor at the Margins
Saturday, March 14, 9:00am - 10:30am
Discussant: Andrew Wilford, Professor of Anthropology.
Moderator: Astara Light.

“A Chinese Vice”: Medicine, Migration, and Modernity in Making, 1875-1947
Kelvin Ng, Yale University

Keywords: British Malaya; Malaysia; Singapore; Chinese migration; history of sexuality; labor history; history of science; science and technology studies

Abstract: Focusing on colonial medicine in British Malaya in the late nineteenth century, this paper examines the emergence of “sodomy” as a distinctly racialized affliction, specifically organized around the figure of the Chinese labor migrant in mining and trading-port cities. Moving beyond an earlier historiographical focus on legal repression, this paper draws on a variety of primary sources—recently-declassified reports, memoranda, proceedings, and correspondence collected in the British Colonial Office; Chinese, Malay, and English newspapers, journals and gazettes; as well as diasporic Chinese revolutionary and nationalist writings—to emphasize the production of the sodomitical and syphilitic Chinese male body in various operations of colonial medicine, including the collection of demographic and health statistics, the identification of contagious and epidemic diseases, the accelerated incorporation of certain colonial subjects in the medical service, and the targeted development of public health, sanitation, and health education programs. Such colonial anxieties over Chinese sodomy, I further argue, were situated within an emergent global complex of international hygiene and immigration restriction, functioning to manage and constrain transoceanic Chinese migration across various British settler dominions and franchise colonies. Putting Foucault’s notion of productive biopower in conversation with Deleuze and Guattari’s framework of assemblages, this paper charts a new mode of theorizing sexuality as assemblage: the differentials of race, class, and migrant sociability, rather than sexuality qua sexuality, were indexed the determining factor in assessing sodomy; sodomy, in other words, is and had always been adjudicated as a racialized act, wherein the act itself is already read through the race of the actors even as it accords race to those very actors.
Buddhist Circulations
Saturday, March 14, 10:45am - 12:00pm
Discussant: Sara Ann Swenson, PhD Candidate in Religion, Syracuse University.
Moderator: Ornwarra Tritrakarn.

Histories of Eighteenth-Century Buddhist Lineage Transmission in Modern Thailand
Tyler A. Lehrer, UW Madison

Keywords: Thailand, Sri Lanka, Prince Damrong, Buddhist lineage, religious migrations

Abstract: Recent decades have been marked by intense debate in parts of Southeast and South Asia about the utility of Buddhist histories for marking categories of belonging and difference, constituting political allegiance, and engendering moments of interreligious and interethnic acrimony and violence. My paper sheds light on how a number of understudied nineteenth and early twentieth-century popular histories of Buddhist migration in the eighteenth-century Indian Ocean region have become operationalized as sources of religious and state power. I focus on the historical writings of Thai Crown Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943 CE), specifically his 1914 popular history of Siamese–Sri Lankan Buddhist connection in the 1750s (which I am rendering as On the Establishment of the Siamese Sangha on the Lankan Continent), that narrates the ways in which the religious migrations of Lankan and Siamese Buddhist monastics, monarchs, and ministers have been engendered by the commercial ambition of the Dutch East India Company.

I consider the ways in which Damrong’s narrative of early modern religious connection worked to fashion ethical and politicized subjects by inculcating them into a historical subjectivity defined by the actions of Buddhist monastics and virtuous monarchs in the past. I demonstrate how Damrong’s narrative has/continues to inflect(ed) popular memory of the monastic lineage transmission in both modern and contemporary Thai as well as Lankan representations of a dynamic early-modern maritime world in which the fortunes of late medieval modes of Buddhist kingship were increasingly mediated by contact with Europeans and their commercial, political, and diplomatic ambitions.
Buddhist Circulations
Saturday, March 14, 10:45am - 12:00pm
Discussant: Sara Ann Swenson, PhD Candidate in Religion, Syracuse University.
Moderator: Ornwara Tritrakarn.

From LanNa to Lanka: Regional Bhikkhuni Identities and Transnational Buddhist Politics
Claire Poggi Elliot, Cornell University

Keywords: Bhikkhuni, Lan Na, Lanka, Ordination, Chronicles, Ethnography, Theravada

Abstract: In 1996 the first public ordination of Theravada Bhikkhuni took place in India, spurring the creation of the first new lineage of female Theravada monastics in a millennium. Despite debates about their legitimacy, this new lineage spread quickly within Sri Lanka, and then to Thailand in 2001. As ordaining women remains illegal in Thailand, new Bhikkhuni fly to Sri Lanka for their upasampada ritual, resulting in a strong and continuing international network. This does not mean, however, that the Bhikkhuni movement is a homogeneous and entirely harmonious one. Within Thailand, there is a clear distinction between the two largest Bhikkhuni lineages, one centered in Bangkok and the other in Chiang Mai.

I propose to use the history of lineage establishment and monastic interaction between Lan Na and Sri Lanka as a frame to understand how the current bhikkhuni in Chiang Mai interpret and make claims about their roles as Bhikkhuni and their place in local or trans-local Buddhist networks.

Using data gathered from ethnographic fieldwork, interviews, and publications by Bhikkhuni in Panadura, Sri Lanka, and Nakhon Pathom, Bangkok, and Chiang Mai, Thailand, I examine how the nuns are participating the creation of new chronicles, and the processes by which they localize their practice. This work will explore what it means to be a Thai Monastic, the self-consciously struggle to define the term Theravada, and how regional Buddhist projects may develop differently as a result of regional specificities.
Buddhist Circulations
Saturday, March 14, 10:45am - 12:00pm
Discussant: Sara Ann Swenson, PhD Candidate in Religion, Syracuse University.
Moderator: Ornwaradit Tiritrakarn.

From “Burmese Marble” to “Burmese White Jade”: The Cultural Repertoires Behind the Trade of Marble Buddhist Images from Myanmar to China
Beiyin Deng, Arizona State University

Keywords: Buddhist image; marble; white jade; border trade; jade trade; Myanmar; China

Abstract: This paper explores the transnational migration of marble Buddhist images from Myanmar to China since the late 1980s. It first delineates the transnational trade network where Burmese marble quarry owners and artisans in Sagaing, Myanmar, and Chinese workshop owners in Ruili, China, collaborate to produce marble Buddhist images and facilitate their circulation across the Sino-Burmese border. It highlights the Chinese translation of “Burmese marble” (b. sagaing kyauk) to “Burmese white jade” (c. miandian baiyu) and the jade-trade terminologies that are widely used by Chinese workshop owners when selling these images to clients. Through an analysis of the physical qualities of the Burmese marble extracted from quarries in Sagaing and the Chinese perceptions of marble and the Han white jade (c. han baiyu), it reveals the unique features of Burmese marble that justify its terminological transformation into “Burmese white jade.” Furthermore, this paper investigates how this misleading, yet not uncommon, translation, along with the jade-trade terminologies used in the image trade, draws on the cultural repertoire that is historically informed by the Chinese jade culture and the history of the jade trade between Myanmar and China. It proposes that these cultural factors play an important role in motivating the Chinese demand for Burmese marble images, despite the abundant availability of Buddhist images made of other materials and more familiar styles in China.
Postcolonial Cultural Production
Saturday, March 14, 1:00pm - 2:15pm
Discussant: Christina Bacareza Balance, Associate Professor of Performing & Media Arts and Asian-American Studies.
Moderator: Anna Koshcheeva.

Vietnamese Cinema and the Vietnam War: Countering the Hollywood Zipperhead
Long Hoàng Trân, University of Washington

Keywords: Vietnamese cinema, media studies, history, diaspora, Vietnam War

Abstract: This paper juxtaposes depictions of the Vietnamese body in U.S. produced Vietnam War films against North and South Vietnamese productions and elucidates the emergence of Vietnamese-American productions. U.S. produced films like John Wayne’s The Green Berets (1968) and Francis Ford Coppola’s Apocalypse Now (1979) dehumanize Vietnamese characters by killing them in excessively violent ways, stripping them of individuality and reducing them to Orientalized tropes, specifically to “Zipperheads.” The term emerged in U.S. discourse during the war years as a slur to describe Vietnamese soldiers whose heads had been shot by high-powered guns, or whose lifeless bodies were marked with tire patterns from military vehicles. Conversely, Vietnamese and Vietnamese-American cinema has shaped a counter-hegemonic, Vietnamese sensibility and a body-in-motion that, to date, has received little visibility. This paper thus excavates and examines pre-1975 films such as Nguyễn Hồng Nghi and Phạm Hiểu Dân’s Along the Same River (1959) and Hoàng Vinh Lộc’s Warrior: Who Are You? (1971), respectively. Beyond a purely cinematic critique, this paper confronts the deep history of an American popular discourse that prioritizes the over 58,000 U.S. lives lost during the war but overlooks the millions of Southeast Asians who also perished. Moreover, this paper decenters U.S. representations of Vietnam as a site of tragedy that excludes the Vietnamese people’s perspective and introduces the post-war, transpacific contributions of Vietnamese-Americans and other diasporic filmmakers who seek to rewrite the history of the Vietnam War.
### Postcolonial Cultural Production

**Saturday, March 14, 1:00pm - 2:15pm**

**Discussant:** Christina Bacareza Balance, Associate Professor of Performing & Media Arts and Asian-American Studies.

**Moderator:** Anna Koshcheeva.

**Dubbing/Undubbing: Migrancy, language and queer embodiment in Singapore through the film 881**

Xinyu Guan, Cornell University

**Keywords:** embodiment, gender, language policy, migrancy, queerness, Singapore, sound in film

Abstract: My paper situates present-day discourses around queerness in Singapore within a larger historical framework of transnational migrancy from the 19th century to the present day. By analyzing the Singapore musical film 881 (2007), I explore how language, music and on-screen choreographies of voices and bodies help one think critically about queerness in relation to race, class and migrancy in Singapore. My discussion draws on Boellstorff’s (2005) metaphor of “dubbing” in describing queer self-making in Southeast Asia as a transnational practice of collaging, of keeping image, body and voice in tension with one another. I examine literally how the practice of dubbing on Singapore television governs bodies, voices and languages: since 1981, all television programming in Hokkien, Cantonese and other “dialects” of Chinese have been mandatorily dubbed in Mandarin, erasing subaltern historical memories of migrancy associated with “dialect” communities. My paper discusses how 881, a film on a yearly Hokkien song festival in Singapore, parodies the political aesthetics of dubbing of on-screen bodies. Instead of lamenting the loss of heritage and “dialects” through dubbing and modernization, the film breaks with such heteronormative anxieties over heritage and tradition, and juggles between Hokkien, Mandarin and English as alternative contemporaneous modes of embodiment. In campy song sequences, flashy costumes and the broad smiles on the characters’ faces when they sing “pity me,” singing in Hokkien becomes a mode of excessive queer embodiment, a position of critique that one can assume, especially with regard to the political appropriation of historical memories of migrancy in Singapore.
From Imperial Subjugation to Postcolonial Self-Expression: The Politics of Gendered Identity in Filipiniana Fashion
Isabelle Squires, Northern Illinois University

Keywords: Gender, Women’s History, The Philippines, Fashion, Material Culture, Postcolonialism, Nationalism

Abstract: The Philippines has a rich history of fashion having been influenced by two imperial powers, a postcolonial dictatorship, and finally its emergence into contemporary times where neocolonialism and globalization continue to shape the nation’s trajectory. These narratives, marked temporally by which colonizer was in power, represents only one interpretation of Filipino history and in turn, expression of the nation-state from its beginnings into “modernity.” In the Philippines imperial context, dress has been coded with conformity to Western standards of etiquette and indications of social status. Women in Southeast Asia have generally been regarded as the “bearers and wearers of tradition.” My methodology consists of finding changes and continuities in women’s fashion over time, comparing and contrasting the gendered relationship to dress found in images and advertisements found in the Philippines Free Press magazine. Because this is a Manila publication, this leads to the question: Who are these ads intended for? What does this say about gender, class, and regional/national identities throughout changing realities in Philippine history? This study challenges notions of women as the sole gatekeepers of traditional culture, while empowering them and representing the multi-faceted aspects of women’s representation in the media. The binary of men and women as modern or traditional, simplifies a complicated process of constructing identity through the messages encoded through fashion. The Philippines, an incredibly diverse archipelago, has struggled with constructing a national identity, however, one of the most enduring constructions of Filipino national culture has been articulated through its national dress.
Roundtable: From “Graduate Student” to “Professional Scholar”
Saturday, March 14, 2:30pm - 3:30pm

What distinguishes a professional scholar from a student? How can graduate students best manage that transition? What can graduate students do, even early in their studies, to prepare for the world of professional academia? In this roundtable discussion, three early-career academics reflect on how their own graduate student careers helped them to become professional scholars, and share some advice they wish they’d been told as students themselves.

Andrew Campana, Assistant Professor of Asian Studies.

Anna A. Golovkova, SAP Visiting Fellow.

Mesrob Vartavarian, SEAP Visiting Fellow.

Moderator: Sarah R. Meiners, Co-chair of the SEAP Graduate Student Committee.
Race Back to Diversity: Mapping Genetic History and National Identities in Southeast Asian National Genome Projects
Tiến Dung Hà, Cornell University

Keywords: genetic history, migration history, national identity, national genome projects, sovereign science, political sovereignty

Abstract: The use of race as a scientific and biological category is regaining prominence in genomic medicine and genetic ancestry testing. Singapore and Vietnam both recently launched various population genomic projects to study ancestral origins and population migration history through genome variations across their populations and their genetic relationships across different ethnic groups and within Asia. These scientific studies capture a deep-rooted interest in racial difference and ancestral migration that can reflect on the human origins. My project examines the politics of migration, more particularly population ancestral migration, through the lens of racial and ethnic diversity manifested in genomic variations data. I will also attend to the movements as well as the immobility of people, expertise, ideas, materials and capital that shape the knowledge making of these national genome projects. I conducted multi-sited ethnography to examine the growing intersections between genomic science, ethnic narratives, national politics and transnational capital in the construction of population diversity and racial difference. My presentation will compare the scientific cultures embedded in these nationalized, yet highly transnational, genome projects in order to explore how science and medicine, historically-imperial tools of control and colonization, have taken on a new role in these two postcolonial states as a tool to build national science, aid economic development, and construct national identities. To this end, my project will unveil how genomic sciences become co-opted into nationalist projects to produce knowledge claims on population ancestry, migration history, and body politics, and political sovereignty in Vietnam and Singapore.
The Two Tales of Việt Kiều: Voices of Struggle and Political Contestation of the Overseas Vietnamese in Thailand between 1955 and 1975

Morragotwong Pumplab, NUS

Keywords: Việt Kiều, Overseas Vietnamese, gender, political contestation, Thailand, the Republic of Vietnam, Cold War

Abstract: The emergence of the Cold War initially relocated the geo-politics and had a profound impact not only on foreign relations but also on people from the ground. Between 1955 and 1975, the Overseas Vietnamese (Việt Kiều) significantly determined diplomatic relations between Thailand and the Two Vietnamese Republics. Vietnamese refugees were classified in two groups, the old Overseas Vietnamese (Yuan Kao or Việt Kiều Cũ) who migrated to Thailand before World War II and the new Vietnamese (Yuan Mai or Việt Kiều Mới) who migrated to Thailand after 1946. The conventional history of the Overseas Vietnamese based how Thailand was a significant location for the Vietnamese communist movement and how the Thai authority considered Vietnamese refugees as a threat of national security. However, the new archival documents from the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) show the fragmentation and competition among the Overseas Vietnamese. Nationalist Overseas Vietnamese or Pro-RVN Overseas Vietnamese (Việt kiều Quốc gia), was another group that competed with the pro-Communist Overseas Vietnamese. Furthermore, Oversea Vietnamese women played a vital role in their political movement. Thailand, therefore, became a space of political contestation of the two Vietnamese Republics in Vietnamese communities. Based on Vietnamese and Thai archival sources as well as oral history, this paper examines: 1) the political contestation between the Two Vietnamese Republic in the Vietnamese communities in Thailand; 2) the influence of the Overseas Vietnamese towards Thailand and Vietnam diplomatic relations; and 3) a role of Vietnamese women in negotiating and struggling with Thai state and society.
Oily Arguments: Institutional Disputes and Native Property Rights in Colonial Burma
Chao Ren, University of Michigan

Keywords: Burma, Petroleum, Property Rights, Corporation, Colonialism

Abstract: In September 1908, the Government of India summoned a committee of scientists and administrators to investigate the productive conditions of the Yenangyaung oilfields in British Burma. The central issue in question was the fire and flooding hazards in the oilfield area because of the congestion of oil derricks due to a quick influx of British oil companies in the previous years. Despite its thorough and meticulous efforts, the investigation failed to come to any major constructive solution to the problems, largely due to the disagreements between the various colonial institutions involved: large oil company, smaller companies, and the colonial government. Particularly significant throughout this investigation process was that most parties involved, constantly invoked the rhetoric of native property rights to defend their own mutually conflicting positions. Native property rights, in this case the ownership over oil reserves by the Burmese twinzayos (well owners), proved to be a crucial battleground for institutional claim-making. These colonial institutions used legalized native property rights (customary rights transformed by colonial administrative legislation) as an alibi for themselves, making a defense for their own positions to demarcate their responsibilities. Meanwhile, native property rights got legally consolidated through such institutional disputes and claim-makings. Native twinzayos also took advantage of such consolidations to their benefit. This project challenges previous scholarship on colonial mining and multinational corporations, often highlighting the racial hierarchies embedded in colonial corporate mining practices, with the natives subject to racialized deprivation. In this case, the global and colonial migration of legal categories and mining practices created conditions for the legal recognition of native property rights in colonial Burma.
Art on the Move
Saturday, March 14, 5:15pm - 6:30pm
Discussant: Lily H. Chi, Associate Professor of Architecture.
Moderator: Sireemas Maspong.

Tipos de Etnografía: An Analysis of Stephanie Syjuco’s Photography
Christina Ayson-Plank, UC Santa Cruz

Keywords: ethnographic photography, tipos del pais, representations of women, patronage, nationalism, contemporary photography

Abstract: This paper analyzes the tipos del pais, a mid-nineteenth century artform, through Stephanie Syjuco’s contemporary photographic series Cargo Cults and her critique on ethnographic representation. I argue that the tipos del pais circulated imperial ideologies that rendered women as objects, thereby mirroring the function and aesthetics of colonial ethnographic photography in the Philippines. The juxtaposition of colonial photography and watercolor painting complicates our understanding of class during the Spanish and American revolution through a visual analysis of gender.

In the mid-1800s, mestizo artists of Chinese and Filipino descent such as Damián Domingo and Jose Honorato Lozano made watercolor portraits of Filipinos known as tipos del pais. These widely circulated images were sold to European and Filipino tourists. They depicted Filipinos of differential class statuses dressed in traditional garb attending to their occupations for the eyes of wealthy colonizers and Filipinos. They served as souvenirs and records of the colony’s resources which included these colorful fabrics and the women that wore them. Fifty years later, American colonizers hired scientists to document the newly acquired colony and its resources. I argue that these paintings prefigure colonial ethnographic photography taken during American colonization. I do not seek to diminish this form of artmaking or the violence of colonization, rather I point to the complicated nexus of power during Spanish and American colonization that forces us to rethink the nation. Syjuco appropriates this mode of representation to point to an aesthetics of imperialism that circulates to render the Filipina as object.
Gender and the Rantau: Minangkabau Migration, a Collective Spirit, and the Growth of a Contemporary Arts Ecosystem
Katherine Bruhn, UC Berkeley

Keywords: contemporary visual art, collective activity, arts ecosystem, creative networks

Abstract: The Minangkabau of West Sumatra are known for a number of unique characteristics. Amongst these are their position as the world’s largest matrilineal Muslim society that, coupled with a tradition of male-dominated outward migration known as merantau has throughout history been attributed to the disproportionate contribution by Minangkabau to Indonesia’s intellectual, political, and cultural history. In the contemporary era the effects of merantau are especially marked in the realm of visual arts, exemplified by two art communities based in Yogyakarta. Formed in the mid-1990s by individuals who were at that time students at Yogyakarta’s art academy these groups include the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group. Today, Sakato purports a membership of approximately 150, making it the largest visual arts community active in Indonesia and Jendela’s five members are amongst the highest grossing contemporary artists in Indonesia. Through an examination of the history and current activities of both groups this paper considers what in the last two decades has been the growth of a Minangkabau arts ecosystem in Yogyakarta that is dominated almost exclusively by the labor of male artists. In doing so it asks how cultural expectations associated with the act of merantau have gendered the shape of Minangkabau creative activity in Yogyakarta and West Sumatra where, in comparison, there is a consistently higher number of especially young, unmarried females with creative aspirations. Ultimately, this paper contributes to an understanding of how the relationship between traditional cultural norms and gender, effect migratory patterns in the contemporary era.
Art on the Move
Saturday, March 14, 5:15pm - 6:30pm
Discussant: Lily H. Chi, Associate Professor of Architecture.
Moderator: Sireemas Maspong.

Iconoclasm or Localization? Figural Images in Javanese Mosques
Catherine Ries, UC Santa Cruz

Keywords: Islam, Java, mosques, iconoclasm, localization, syncretism, visual culture

Abstract: Migration is not only the movement of people from place to place but also ideas. The entry, acceptance, and continued growth of the Islamic faith in Indonesia engendered new artistic traditions and the building of mosques. It is a common presumption that the depiction of both animals and humans is highly discouraged in Islamic art, especially in mosques. On the contrary, there has been a long tradition of representational art within Islamic cultures. This paper looks at depictions of both animals and humans found in three mosques built during the sixteenth century in Java, Indonesia: The Mosque of Demak, the Mantingan Mosque, and Sendang Duwur Mosque. I investigate whether the presence of human and animal imageries on these Javanese mosques contradict “orthodox” Islamic perspectives. Using the theoretical framework of alternative forms of iconoclasm, such as Rambelli and Reinders who defines iconoclasm beyond the destruction of an image to include all instances when a sacred object suffers damage to either its materiality or its meaning, I look into if and how representational art contributed negatively to cultural redefinition or a destruction of sacred meaning. I point out the importance of considering local factors and syncretic influences that contributed to the evolution of mosque ornamentation in Java while subverting the rigidity of Islamic reformist ideology. I argue that a historicized understanding of how Indonesian Muslims constructed and imagined their sacred space provides insight into the development of Islamic religious traditions as well as artistic practices in Java.
Art on the Move
Saturday, March 14, 5:15pm - 6:30pm
Discussant: Lily H. Chi, Associate Professor of Architecture.
Moderator: Sireemas Maspong.

Migrating Technology Imposing Typology:
Problematising the cross-appropriation of building practice in Java, Indonesia in 1870-1942.
David Hutama Setiadi, Architectural Association (AA) School of Architecture

Keywords: Appropriation, Dutch East Indies, Building practice, Typology

Abstract: The enactment of the 1870 Agrarian Act and, followed by the 1901 Ethical Policy in the Dutch East Indies urged not only migration of people but also the migration of systems from the Netherlands, as the metropole, to the archipelago, as its colony. This migration engendered unprecedented industrial privatisations.

One noticeable shift was the increasing demands of technology and technical skills. The proliferation of plantations and other industries increased the needs of having more expert technicians who were able to comply with the Dutch regulations and standards from the Javanese people. That said, Dutch initiated three endeavours to overcome the challenges; 1. educating and training the Javanese the necessary technical knowledge and skill, 2. Re-inventing Javanese tradition and crafts, and 3. setting the Hygienic standard for housing.

The study discusses this dynamic through three sections. The first section discusses the establishment of technical and crafts schools in the Dutch Indies. The second section scrutinises how C.P. Wolff Schoemaker, Maclaine Pont, and Thomas Karsten appropriated Javanese craft to establish a new typology of building practice, and the third elaborates H.F. Tillema's endeavour promoted the hygienic dwelling for the Dutch East Indies.

This study aims to argue that this migration of systems has transformed the Javanese craft and building practice. The appropriation of the Javanese culture as the primary source to establish a new typology did not change the fact that the objectification and the re-invention of the Javanese tradition is a form of displacement for the interest of Dutch industry.
Labor Between Two Places
Sunday, March 15, 9:30am - 10:45am
Discussant: Hilary Oliva Faxon, PhD Candidate in Development Sociology.
Moderator: Bruno M. Shirley.

The Agile Perantau & The Perpetual Gig Economy
Onat Kibaroğlu, NUS

Keywords: Merantau; Indonesia; Gig Economy; Platform Capitalism; Digital Labor; Precariat

Abstract: A discourse on the ‘gig economy’ has been gaining significant traction in the Global North, most vividly since the 2008 Global Economic Crisis, which caused the decomposition of many formal jobs that only came back as piece-meal ones, or now in common parlance, ‘gigs’. The advent of ‘Uber’ and its numerous derivatives around the world such as ‘Grab’ and ‘Gojek’ in Southeast Asia, have been essentially built upon a particular class of workers, the precariat. This research exposes the genealogy of a particular precarious class in Indonesia: the ‘perantau’, demonstrating how the notion of a ‘gig economy’ has long been embedded within the socioeconomic composition of the Indonesian archipelago; unlike many other settings in the Global North that are only recently experiencing this form of perpetual informal labor. Illustrating the lifestyle, common vision and the labor patterns of the ‘perantau’, the research reveals vivid stories of informal workers who have been resiliently striving within a ‘gig economy’ since generations. The ritual of ‘merantau’, which entails a particular form of circular migration of West Sumatran Minangkabau people, pushes young men to venture out for opportunities in other Indonesian provinces (typically the Riau, Java and Bali islands) or ideally, foreign countries. Indeed, to embark on ‘merantau’ and hence becoming a ‘perantau’ is symbolic of passage to adulthood for young men, most of whom, now become ‘pengojek’ (motorcycle taxi drivers) through their recruitment onto the platforms ‘Grab’ and ‘Gojek’. It can be observed hence, the social infrastructure that platform capitalism thrives upon in Indonesia is a remarkably ‘gendered’ one, opening up many lucrative territories for debates about the ways in which ‘labor’, ‘technology’, ‘gender’ and ‘migration’ interplay.
Labor Between Two Places
Sunday, March 15, 9:30am - 10:45am
Discussant: Hilary Oliva Faxon, PhD Candidate in Development Sociology.
Moderator: Bruno M. Shirley.

“I’m only a worker”: Rural to rural migration narratives of returning Thai farmworkers in Israel
Shahar Shoham, Humboldt University of Berlin

Keywords: Thailand, Israel, farmworkers, return migration, ethnography, labor rights, imaginaries of mobilities

Abstract: Thais have been migrating to Israel to work in Israeli farms for the last three decades. Among them are the people of Ban Phak Khad village from Isaan region, at the Northeast of Thailand. Many of them have been engaged in multiple cycles of migration to two or more destinations, Israel among them. Isaan is Thailand’s central sending internal and international migration region, placed in the bottom of Thailand’s socio-economic hierarchies, constructed as the ‘rural others’ and ‘backwards villagers’, in opposition to the ‘developed modern’ urban Bangkok elite (Mills 2012, Keyes 2014). While working in rural communities in Israel, Thais are under the control of highly restrictive State regulated policy. At its core is the structure of ‘contract labor’, which bonds migrant workers to a specific work sector. It further includes heavy restrictions on the possibility to migrate with family members, aiming to prevent migrants from settling down permanently in Israel. This paper is based on ethnographic research with return men and women migrants from Ban Phak Khad and their families. It analysis the transmitted knowledge, stories and memories, whether verbal, through photos, or objects which came back to the village. I show how they all contribute to the imagination of Israel as mainly a place which render the participants’ life to their economical role as laborer, living “only as workers”. These return narratives demonstrate how their experiences in Israel were mostly connected to the realm of work, emphasizing high levels of social and physical segregation, separation and exploitation.
Labor Between Two Places

Sunday, March 15, 9:30am - 10:45am

Discussant: Hilary Oliva Faxon, PhD Candidate in Development Sociology.
Moderator: Bruno M. Shirley.

Migration Is Not the Real Answer for Rural Development: A Case Study of Myanmar Migrant Workers in Bangkok

Khine Zin Yu Aung, Chulalongkorn University

Abstract: Migration is a global phenomenon defined in different ways by different perspectives. There are a lot of studies about migration and drivers to it and its impacts. This paper will explore three parts; the pros and cons of migration in rural areas of Myanmar, the challenges the migrant workers are facing, and the possible ways for better livelihood opportunities in rural areas from the perspectives of local people and migrant workers.

According to International Labor Organization, there were more than two millions of Myanmar citizens who migrated to foreign countries in 2014. About 70% of migrants went abroad to Thailand and others to Malaysia, China, Singapore, Korea and Japan. Myanmar government is also trying to promote migration through signing MOU with some countries, e.g. Thailand. Nowadays, in Myanmar, migration is seen as an opportunity and a good income source for most of the people especially for those in rural areas.

For this ongoing study, I have been still collecting the data and information through the interviews with migrant workers in Thailand and the communities in the villages of Kalay Myo in Sagaing Region. As far as I found out, the villagers migrate especially because of push factors like the lack of livelihood opportunities in their region, the lack of regular income and the undeveloped conditions of agricultural sector. There are also some pull factors like the expectation of better work condition, high salary and better living standard. However, pull factors are stronger than the push factors. Despite of migration being a better income source, it also been found out that there are some negative impacts on the lives of migrants working in other countries and also on the communities left in the villages. Then, I will do some in-depth interviews with those who come back the home country to know their successful or unsuccessful stories of migration.
Gender and the Rantau: Minangkabau Migration, a Collective Spirit, and the Growth of a Contemporary Arts Ecosystem

Katherine Bruhn, UC Berkeley

Keywords: contemporary visual art, collective activity, arts ecosystem, creative networks

Abstract: The Minangkabau of West Sumatra are known for a number of unique characteristics. Amongst these are their position as the world's largest matrilineal Muslim society that, coupled with a tradition of male-dominated outward migration known as merantau has throughout history been attributed to the disproportionate contribution by Minangkabau to Indonesia's intellectual, political, and cultural history. In the contemporary era the effects of merantau are especially marked in the realm of visual arts, exemplified by two art communities based in Yogyakarta. Formed in the mid-1990s by individuals who were at that time students at Yogyakarta's art academy these groups include the Sakato Art Community and the Jendela Art Group. Today, Sakato purports a membership of approximately 150, making it the largest visual arts community active in Indonesia and Jendela's five members are amongst the highest grossing contemporary artists in Indonesia. Through an examination of the history and current activities of both groups this paper considers what in the last two decades has been the growth of a Minangkabau arts ecosystem in Yogyakarta that is dominated almost exclusively by the labor of male artists. In doing so it asks how cultural expectations associated with the act of merantau have gendered the shape of Minangkabau creative activity in Yogyakarta and West Sumatra where, in comparison, there is a consistently higher number of especially young, unmarried females with creative aspirations. Ultimately, this paper contributes to an understanding of how the relationship between traditional cultural norms and gender, effect migratory patterns in the contemporary era.

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