

# 28th ASEASUK Conference, University of Brighton, UK

12–14 September 2014

More than 140 people attended the conference, including a large number of postgraduates, and its vibrancy was also enhanced by a record number of participants from Southeast Asia and other parts of the world. The 20 panels over two days provided a showcase of current scholarship in Southeast Asian Studies, with a wide range of disciplines represented. Whilst everyone was disappointed that artist-in-residence Agus Nur Amal (PM Toh) was unable to attend, delegates were able to engage with his work in a virtual sense as the conference opened on Friday evening with a screening of Leonard Retel Helmrich's documentary film *Promised Paradise*, in which Agus Nur Amal is followed in his search for answers to the vexing question of the rise of religious fundamentalism and violence in Indonesia.

The publishers' exhibition, which featured recent titles from 28 international publishers, was expertly overseen by Gerald Jackson from NIAS Press. It included the launch of Monica Janowski's new book *Tuked Rini, cosmic traveller. Life and legend in the heart of Borneo*, published by NIAS Press and Sarawak Museum. The highlight of the conference came on Saturday evening, which began with a drinks reception at Brighton Dome, followed by a series of Thai classical and folk dances by Phakamas Jirajarupat and her colleagues, Pawinee Boonserm, Krailas Chitkul, Cheerawat Wanta, Manissa Vasinaron and Purita Ruangjirayos. The conference dinner after the dance was held in the opulent Orientalist surroundings of the Royal Banqueting Hall in Brighton's Royal Pavilion, made possible through the generous support of the James Henry Green Charitable Trust.

Dr Sarah Posey, Head of Collections at Royal Pavilion and Museums, Brighton and Hove, gave a welcome address, enabling us to make sense of the colourful history of the Pavilion, as we looked on at George IV's banqueting table, laid as it would have been during his reign. On Sunday there was also a well attended annual Aseasuk general meeting. The conference closed with a memorable performance of Thai dance by workshop participants, who had been taught by Thai dance experts.

The Aseasuk committee offers massive thanks to Becky Elmhirst (University of Brighton), Helen Mears, Keeper of World Art, Royal Pavilion & Museums in Brighton, and the Brighton University Conference Office, particularly Clare Hodgson and Emily Bretnall, for organising this recent conference.

Panel reports below have been provided by the respective convenors unless otherwise stated.

## **Southeast Asian performing arts: tradition in modernity**

Convenors: Margaret Coldiron, University of Essex & Matthew Isaac Cohen, Royal Holloway, University of London

The panel brought together 11 scholars and scholar-practitioners from Indonesia, the UK, Thailand, France, Belgium, the US to examine together past and current developments in the mutual constitution of contemporary and traditional performance practices, institutional arrangements and discursive arrangements.

**Tito Imanda (Goldsmiths, University of London)** showed in his presentation and a preview of his documentary film that the Javanese performance ensemble Tjipta Boedaja is networked with cosmopolitan artists while maintaining the impression of remoteness; its non-commercial ethos and mountain location give exotic cachet. **Jonathan Roberts (University of Oxford)** argued that amateur gamelan players in the Central Javanese city of Solo are motivated by a desire to maintain tradition, validate wealth and access institutions or individuals with power. **Phakamas Jirajarupat (Royal Holloway)** discussed the freezing of Thai dance due to traditionalist ideology and institutional resistances to innovations proposed by younger artists, who are often more travelled and attuned to

modern media and global culture via YouTube than their seniors. **Suppya Hélène Nut (Leiden University)** examined Cambodia's famed Apsara dance as a modern tradition and mytho-historical construction that is a synonym for lost heritage, a symbol of unity and communality, an antidote to the trauma of loss.

**Marie-Pierre Lissor (Free University of Brussels)** showed how the tradition of *khap Tai-Dam* singing in Laos has resisted standardisation—though song lyrics are sometimes collected from elders and written down, these notes are quickly discarded; VCDs are sometimes imitated but never slavishly as verbal creativity and novelty are prioritised. **Jennifer Goodlander (University of Indiana)** analysed an international mask and puppet festival in the West Javanese suburban development Kotabaru Parahyangan as an instantiation of the democratisation of traditional arts and the development of a middle class audience. **Chanya Hetayothin (University of the Arts London)** showed her animated film *NUNUI* (2013) based on the Thai shadow theatre tradition *nang talung*, which she described as both the antithesis of live performance as empty of dialogue and music, as well as respectful of the puppet ontology as it retains joint positions. **Margaret Coldiron** outlined a raft of work by international artists who have interpreted Balinese *topeng* (masked dance-theatre) since the 1970s, attuning and 'translating' the tradition to non-Balinese contexts.

While older generations of cosmopolitan artists who professed to represent Southeast Asia in the public sphere were often very distant from their objects of purported expertise, the 'post-traditional' artists of today often are fully versed in both traditional aesthetics and contemporary codes of artistic practice, as **Matthew Cohen** discussed in his paper. English impresario John Coast, discussed by **Laura Noszlopy (Royal Holloway)**, began his career in promoting Indonesian and other ethnic arts due to a serendipitous encounter with Indo artists in a POW camp during World War II. The panel was concluded by **John Emigh (Brown University)**, who argued that contemporary performance has allowed Balinese artists opportunities to take liberties with the strictures of culture, while non-Balinese artists can reinvent themselves like one does when learning a foreign language. He attended to the ethics of practice: while the spectacular *Bali Agung* (2010) purports to be 'designed to enchant' and support the conservation of wildlife, it has acted to supplant local myths.

## Political ecology and environmental justice

Convenor: Becky Elmhirst, University of Brighton

This panel aimed at exploring tensions and contradictions around environment and development concerns in Southeast Asia in the context of new challenges associated with climate change, corporate investment strategies and the rescaling of environmental governance through political decentralisation. The panel included 12 empirically rich papers of very high quality that covered a diverse but interconnected set of themes such as dispossession and land grabbing associated with crop booms, corporate social responsibility and the development of equitable supply chains, climate change and responses to environmental disasters, land grants and post-conflict development, environmental governance, pre- and post-war landscape dynamics, and urban political ecologies.

Papers by **Bianca Capasso (University of Leeds)** and **SiuSue Mark (International Institute of Social Studies/Erasmus University)** explored dispossession in northern Laos and Chin State (Myanmar) respectively, both arguing that ethnicity and the history of land access and use in each context are critical factors in either heightening or mitigating vulnerability to dispossession by private investors or through 'state simplifications'.

**Petra Mahy (Oxford University)** provided a critical discussion of corporate social responsibility in Indonesia's mining sector, which is a way of controlling communities and quelling unrest, but is subject to the vagaries of local government rent-seeking. She also discussed how this project had developed into her more recent work on the normative effects of formal law norms in other dimensions of Indonesian business.

**Robin Biddulph (University of Gothenburg)** discussed his work on rural-urban links and the difficulties in extending the benefits of tourism to small-scale farmers in Siem Reap in Cambodia, where livelihoods tend to be migration or remittance-based, rather than connected to the tourism economy.

Papers by **Sandra Pandey Modh (Umeå University)** and **Achmad Uzair Fauzan (Flinders University/UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta)** both dealt with the politics of anthropogenic environmental disasters, albeit in different ways. Sandra Pandey Modh's paper looked at the ways in which national and regional measures to implement climate change adaptation strategies (effectively, outsider perspectives) could link better with the (insider) perceptions and experiences of swidden agriculturalists in highland Flores, Indonesia. Achmad Uzair Fauzan's work looked at the political dynamics and personalities involved in discourses around 'natural' disaster and corporate culpability (of Aburizal Bakrie's gas mining company Lapindo Ltd) associated with the mudflow eruption that since 2006 has devastated livelihoods and displaced more than 10,000 families in Sidoarjo, East Java, and the implications of this for compensation to victims.

Compensation to victims was also a theme explored in **Mohamad Shohibuddin's (University of Amsterdam)** paper on land grants for peace building and post-conflict development in Aceh, where eligibility for assistance was controversial and ambiguous, with various kinds of exclusions apparent. A complex picture of exclusions around land grants emerged, shaped by peoples' position in the war, intercommunal exclusions, hostile ecology, and the power of district heads, and the nature of different kinds of cash crops/natural resources (oil palm, sugar cane and forestry).

Post- and pre-war landscapes was the subject of a paper by **Amelie Robert-Charmeteau (UMR CITERES CNRS/Tours University)**, which used aerial photographs and satellite imagery to compare pre- and post-war landscapes to consider the impact of war (both military and civilian practices) on landscape dynamics in Vietnam.

Papers by **Gianluca Bonanno (Kyoto University)** and **David Blake** (independent scholar) took rather different perspectives to look at water governance in mainland Southeast Asia. Bonanno's paper focused primarily on governance experimentation and change adaptation in the context of tensions around regionalisation and natural resources management in the greater Mekong sub-region. This was contrasted with Blake's paper that provided a critique of the ideology of irrigationism in Thailand and Cambodia, seen as 'performing a transformative function in an elite-based project of socio-natural domination'.

Attention then turned to urban contexts, where a paper by **Creighton Connolly (University of Manchester)** explored the intense social conflict over the cultivation and harvesting of edible bird's nests (swiftlet farming) in heritage areas in Georgetown and Melaka, Malaysia, questioning the class and racial dynamics of conflict, along with ideas about the meanings of heritage, conviviality and co-existence. **Elizabeth Rhoades (King's College London)**, also considered the meanings attached to urban spaces with a study of civil society resistance to the privatisation and enclosure of green spaces in Yangon, Myanmar, where notions of heritage are being invoked – to some degree – to challenge formulations of land control and state crime. Throughout, the panel was well-attended, and lively debates ensued, which continued well into the coffee and lunch breaks.

### **Gender, migrations and racialisation in Southeast Asia**

Convenors: Julien Debonneville, University of Geneva, Switzerland; Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot, Catholic University of Louvain, Belgium & Gwenola Ricordeau, University of Lille 1, France

The panel questions how racialisation is framing migration and specifically how social and symbolic boundaries produce races and *Otherness*. The panel points out different ways to understand how supposed and imagined differences are (re)produced during the migration process. The four panellists mobilised various approaches on this theoretical question and different sorts of empirical

data on mobility. Based on different disciplines (sociology, history, psychology, ethnography), the speakers underlined different ways to explain how race is (re)produced through migration in various Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore). The first speaker was **Geetha Reddy (LSE)** who investigated how ethnicity and race are constructed and are significant for Singaporeans and Malaysians from a psychological perspective. Her qualitative research showed that mixed ethnicity individuals face distinctive challenges from structural influences in negotiating their ethnic identities. The second speaker, **Asuncion Fresnoza-Flot**, drew from her sociological research. She explored in her presentation how “mixed” children of Filipino-Belgian and Thai-Belgian families are viewed in the societies of origin of their migrant parents, and how these children react in return. She particularly emphasised how the notion of *whiteness* plays a key role in this experience. The third speaker was **Darinee Alagirisamy (University of Cambridge)** who discussed race in colonial Singapore from 1880 to 1939 by focusing on the racialisation of toddy (a liquor). She explained how toddy had slowly transcended race (it was for long the only alcohol that the Tamil male migrants were allowed to buy) to become the poor man’s champagne. Finally, **Frauke Kandale (Goethe University, Frankfurt)** examined the migration of African Muslim students to West Malaysia which experienced a boom in the post 9-11 context. She showed that although they share the same religious belief as native Malaysians, African Muslim students develop strategies to cope with their being viewed as *awang hitam* (black guys) and stereotyped as involved in illegal activities. The four presentations and the vivid discussions between panellists and participants that followed underscore the numerous research perspectives in the field of gender and racialisation in Southeast Asia.

### **Open panel: Family, migration, and the state I & II**

Report by Christianne Collantes (SOAS)

This panel featured both statistical and qualitative insight into trends on gender, class, the institution of the family, and migration within and from Southeast Asia. **Huong-Ly Chu (City University, London)** commenced the panel with her doctoral fieldwork data that reveal how social inequalities and systems of class are reproduced based on a young person's family background in the Red River Delta Region of Vietnam. **Jem Price (University of Brighton)** shared his research on the social and cultural differences that professional social workers from the Philippines experience after migrating and working in the United Kingdom. The narratives of Price's informants bring newer insight into how practices and expectations of social work are constructed contextually, and change through experiences of migration. **Valentine Becquet from (University Paris Descartes)**, provided demographic insight into the sex ratios between males and females in three Vietnamese provinces and indicate linkages to patriarchal descent systems and patrilineal traditions that have been in place for centuries. Additionally, Becquet's data show disparities in birth masculinities that are impacted by regional context, fertility levels, and differences in prosperity. The second part of the panel featured presentations by **Christianne Collantes** and **Andy West** (independent scholar) who has worked in international organisations in Southeast Asia for more than 15 years. Using Ara Wilson's ‘intimate economies’ as a conceptual framework, Collantes presented an ethnographic case study in a small compound in Cavite (Philippines) and how external remittance arrangements from Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) affected the reproductive decisions (e.g. ligation) of the women in the compound. West discussed research on children's migration within and around Southeast Asia and how these movements challenge discourses and definitions of migration and trafficking, especially among the international organisation communities. Both panels provided new understandings of state policies or activities and their impacts on how families are being reconfigured and redefined in contemporary Southeast Asia.

### **Culture, arts and language in Southeast Asia**

Report by Becky Elmhirst, University of Brighton

Four rich and fascinating presentations comprised the content of this open panel. The first was presented by independent scholar **Denise Heywood**, who spoke about 'Alix Aymé, French artist at the royal palace, Luang Prabang, Laos'. It discussed the life and works of this under-appreciated artist, who created the evocative 'primitive' style murals in the reception hall of the Luang Prabang royal palace, which depict daily life in Luang Prabang. Poorly labelled, the murals' artist is only briefly acknowledged and although the paintings underwent restoration in 2004, they need further conservation. Alix Aymé was influential between the world wars, composing sensual portraits and captivating landscapes that fused exotic Southeast Asian styles with Paris-inspired modernism, sometimes compared to Paul Gauguin. Exhibiting in Saigon, Paris and Florence, she was then commissioned by the Lao royal family to paint the reception hall's murals.

The second paper was by **Sarena Abdullah (Universiti Sains Malaysia)**, who spoke on 'Installation and beyond: alternative art making in Malaysian art'. Sarena Abdullah traced 'alternative practices', such as installation and conceptual art back to the 1970s, and described how such practices had proliferated since the 1990s. Younger artists are engaging in new media, performance art, works that are executed and produced at alternative sites and spaces that require audience participation. The paper discussed how the current 'contemporary art' has influenced the direction of Malaysian artists.

**Mas Rynna Wati Ahmed (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia)**, delivered the third paper on 'Closure: an appropriated technique in Malay Absurd plays'. It described how the period of experimental theatre in the 1970s dealt with different styles and techniques that shared characteristics with absurd theatre techniques. In Malaysia, western techniques were appropriated by presenting a sense of hope through the closures presented at the end of the plays. It looked at the work of Dinsman in his play, 'Protest and the late Anuar Nor Arai's play, Vacuum', where closure is utilised.

The final paper in this panel was presented by **Tom Hoogervorst (Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, Leiden)**, who spoke on 'Peranakan heritage through digitised Sino-Malay texts'. The paper covered the literary heritage of Indonesia's localised Chinese communities, based on recently digitised Sino-Malay novels published from 1880 to the mid 1960s, revealing the mixed culture of this group and its effects on the rich and diverse body of literature they produced. Intriguingly, such literature features lexical and grammatical influence from Dutch, Min Nan (Hokkien) and Javanese, thus uniting the idioms of three ethnicities systematically kept separate in the colonial setting of the Dutch East Indies. The presentation argued that Sino-Malay literature contains valuable insights and perspectives on popular culture in late modern Southeast Asia, from which historians, social scientists, literary scholars, linguists and other researchers can benefit in a variety of ways. The panel was ably chaired by the panel participants as the scheduled chairperson had to withdraw at the last minute.

### **Civil society, governance and the state**

Chair: P.J. Thum, University of Oxford / National University of Singapore

Report by Becky Elmhirst, University of Brighton

Four very rich presentations broadly connected to concepts of civil society, governance and the state were presented. **Pingtjin Thum** presented a paper on 'Democracy, dissent and debate: Nature of governance in independent Singapore', which discussed the longstanding tension within democracy between the desire for efficient and expedient decision-making and the need to consult the people and create consensus among diverse views, and how this tension plays out in Singapore. The paper re-evaluated the nature of Singaporean governance over the course of Singapore's first 50 years, and argued that contrary to official belief, Singapore's success is based upon democracy, debate, and dissent; rooted in an indigenous model of citizenship and participation. Singapore's future success thus depends on a return to Singaporean democracy.

**Vu Cong Giao** presented the second paper in the panel, based on his work with Professor Nguyen Dang Dung (both from **Vietnam National University Hanoi**) on 'Prospects of institutional change in Vietnam, reflection from the 2013 constitution'. The paper introduced the main features of the constitution and how its provisions differ from the 1992 constitution. They suggest that the constitution offers an expansion of reform orientations, rather than a turning point, and many challenges remain for creating institutional change in the country.

Also from Vietnam, **Le Bach Duong** and **Khuat Thu Hong (Institute for Social Development Studies, Hanoi)** spoke on 'HIV/AIDS and social change in Vietnam: historical construction of social movements in the national response to the epidemic'. The paper showed the hidden vulnerabilities of individuals and collectives in tackling the disease, and the rise of civil society organisations to provide social support for needy groups in the context of weakening state capacity. This case allowed the authors to consider broader issues concerning progressive changes in state-society relationship, nature of civil society and social justice in a transitioning Vietnam, and the role of civil society in shaping health policy and practices in post-socialist countries more generally.

Continuing this theme of non-state actors, **Claudia Dolezal's (University of Brighton)** paper was on 'Understanding the meaning and possibilities of empowerment in community-based tourism in Bali', which presented empirical findings from field work that explored community-based tourism (CBT) as a tool for increasing agency, resilience and control for communities in rural Bali. She argued that understanding how far CBT can really 'empower' people and who ends up having more control than others is key insofar as it helps unravel the complex power relations between the various stakeholders as part of tourism systems. This presentation discussed findings of the ethnographically oriented fieldwork, including obstacles to empowerment in Bali, issues of dependency, and relationships with key players such as the government in order to maximise tourism's benefits for host societies and increase control and resilience in times of change.

### **Shan studies: manuscripts, arts, beliefs and current affairs**

Convenors: Susan Conway (SOAS) & Aggasena Lengtai (SOAS)

Report by Jotika Khur-Yearn (SOAS)

This panel received financial support from the Oxford Buddha Vihara and Wat Buddharam London. Six papers were presented and the first was from **Ven. Dr Khammai Dhammasami (Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies and Abbot of the Oxford Buddha Vihara)** whose paper entitled 'Saving the immoral! A paradox in the Shan funeral texts' discussed the variety of Shan rhymed Buddhist writings especially composed for making donations or recitations at Shan Buddhist funerals and memorial services. Ven. Dhammasami illustrated his talk with funeral texts that he brought. His emphasis was that these texts reconcile the self-responsibility of the Buddhist theory of kamma (karma) with saving a ghostly relative through the practice of merit sharing.

**Aggasena Lengtai** delivered the next paper on the Shan word 'death' covering the periods of pre-Buddhist and Buddhist beliefs in relation to Shan words for 'death'. He selected four particular words as examples: *non phe* (literary: sleep in silk), *Lap taa luem moeng* (close the eyes, forget the country), *lap loi nguen loi kham* (beyond the silver and golden mountains) and *khao son mawk hark kham* (enter the golden roots garden).

**Alexandra Green** (British Museum) spoke the on Shan collections in the British Museum which include more than 2,800 objects that are registered as being made or found in Thailand and nearly 4,000 found or made in Burma. Many of these art objects are believed to have Shan origins or connected with Shan regions.

Next, **Jotika Khur-Yearn**, presented a paper on the 'World of Shan manuscripts: creation, practices and preservation', focusing on the centuries-old tradition of producing manuscript books that has

brought about thousands of Shan manuscripts found in monasteries and houses in Shan communities and beyond. A project of cataloging and conservation of these collections is being undertaken and some progress was also reported.

In the absence of **Susan Conway**, Srilaksana Kunjara Na Ayutthaya read her paper on 'Conserving cultural identity in a Shan context' which was on the preservation of material culture. Using individual case histories, the author examined current attempts to conserve some surviving material culture in the Shan States.

The final speaker **Khuensai Jaiyen (Shan Herald Agency for News)** spoke on 'The current changing political situation in Shan State' with special focus on the peacemaking process between the government and the armed groups, as part of ongoing political reforms in Myanmar/ Burma. According to Khuensai, in order to achieve the true peace, a change of mindset from both sides is necessary and that peace is not like war as there are no winners or losers in peace, only winners. The sooner both sides accept the idea, the sooner peace and harmony will be achieved for all those concerned, both at home and abroad.

### **Constitutional politics in Burma/Myanmar**

Convenor: Andrew McLeod, University of Oxford

This panel took three different standpoints to examine the constitutional transition underway in Burma/Myanmar. **Herve Lemahieu (Research Associate, Institute for International and Strategic Studies)** offered an analysis of how constitutional arguments have shaped politics in Myanmar since independence in 1947. He posited the thesis that the current focus on legal aspects of governance reform undermines progress on political settlement. The present constitutional debate, he argues, is not self-contained but rather a continuation of political disputes that stretch back to the colonial period and require political and not necessarily legal solution.

**Andrew McLeod** explored constitutional transition through the decisions and actions of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Union of Myanmar, a new body established in 2011 to adjudicate disputes about constitutional interpretation. His analysis of the work of the Tribunal suggested that its decisions were only a small part of the role it occupies within the political establishment. Members of the Tribunal, he said, are actively avoiding controversial cases in order to secure the place of the Tribunal ahead of the 2015 elections and instead using informal channels to recommend political compromises.

**Matthew Walton (Aung San Suu Kyi Senior Research Fellow in Modern Burmese Studies, University of Oxford)** employed a set of proposed laws regulating Buddhist – Muslim relations to illustrate how religion forms a significant but poorly understood part of Myanmar's constitutional arrangements. Drawing on interviews with Buddhist monks in Myanmar and an historical analysis of previous enactments, he argued that laws touching on religion – and constitutional recognition of the place of Buddhism in Myanmar society – have and will continue to have little impact on the relationship between Myanmar's people and their majority religion. He countered suggestions that the laws currently under consideration mark a departure from the supposed historical separation of religion and state.

### **Religion, ethnicity and politics in Southeast Asia**

Chair: Claudia Dolezal, University of Brighton

Report by Becky Elmhirst, University of Brighton

There were four papers for this panel – three focused on questions around Islam and politics in Indonesia, and one on Islamic leadership in Singapore. The first one, presented by **Tomáš Petrů (Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences)**, was entitled ‘Indonesia’s controversial image (-building): between ostensible pluralism and the harsh realities of intolerance’. It considered competing rhetorics that depict Indonesia either as pluralistic and democratic, or as exhibiting deepening inter-religious tension and intolerance and growing (Islamic) radicalism and ultraconservatism, which leads to intimidation of religious minorities. The paper suggested that the former image is used by the government (SBY government) to keep up the country’s moderate face on the international stage and in dealing with foreign subjects, but that this has the effect of ignoring or even deepening trouble at home.

The second paper by **Syahrul Hidayat (Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, Exeter University)** considered Islam and politics in Indonesia, with a focus on ‘Indonesia’s Islamic parties in the 2014 elections: between ideology and pragmatism’. Syahrul explored the roots of the poor performance of Islamic parties in electoral politics, and in Indonesian democracy more broadly. Part of the issue lies in the Indonesian political system, which requires Islamic parties to support a particular presidential candidate in order to obtain ministerial positions. Thus, Islamic parties, despite their ideological standpoint, tend to make pragmatic political decisions as seen in the power struggle between candidates in building political coalitions prior to the 2014 election.

**Dina Diana (Southeast Asia Studies Passau University, Germany)**, continued with the theme of Islam and politics in Indonesia in her paper on ‘Religious-based violence: tension between freedom of religion and religious doctrine in Indonesia: the case of religious-based violence against the Ahmadiyah sect’. She described how religious-based violence is directed against Ahmadiyah as a deviant sect, and therefore its members do not have the right to claim to be Muslims. This is in contrast to the recognition of freedom of religion guaranteed in the Indonesian constitution, and is emblematic of the problem of interpretation or definition of freedom of religion. From a legal viewpoint, violence against members of Ahmadiyah represents a failure on the part of the state to uphold the constitution.

The next presenter, **Tuty Raihanah Mostarom (King’s College London)**, spoke on ‘Weber’s tripartite classification of legitimate authority on the Islamic religious leadership in Singapore: which type of (religious) authority?’. She explored the sources of authority of religious leaders to help establish a deeper understanding of the nature of this group in Singapore. She presented her findings from text analysis, in-depth interviews and participatory observations, which showed the various religious leaders in Singapore in fact draw legitimacy from different sources and in different configurations, which incorporate all three Weberian types, including the legal-rational.

## **History, heritage and remembering in Southeast Asia**

Chair: P.J. Thum, University of Oxford / National University of Singapore

Report by Becky Elmhirst, University of Brighton

This panel comprised five fascinating papers. The first presentation was by **Nazirah binti Lee, (SOAS)** on ‘“Modern” Malay women through the lens of Malay newspapers, 1930s–1940s’. She showed the response of the Malay Muslim community to the cultural transitions evident in Malaya in the 1930s and 1940s, as women began to detach traditional values and ethics in order to be a part of ‘civilised society’. Scrutiny of Malay newspapers from this period revealed idealised images and characteristics of women that were circulating during this period.

The second paper by **Frances Tay (Manchester University)**, also looked at colonial Malaya, but this time focused on ‘The forgotten war: the Japanese Occupation of Malaya (1941–1945) in contemporary Malaysian historiography’. She argued that despite the enormity of events associated with the Japanese invasion of British Malaya, this has been a ‘forgotten’ war within the annals of

contemporary Malaysian history. This process of forgetting is revealed through consideration of 'sites of memory', including Muzium Negara (National Museum) and Nilai Memorial Park, and within history textbooks and memoirs. Collectively, these sites of memory emphasise that history and historiography are contested landscapes in Malaysia, wherein state-sponsored narratives clash with individual and communal memories.

A similar theme was explored by **Xiaorong Fong (Royal Holloway, University of London)**, in 'Myth and heritage on Singapore's Chinese language television'. Here, the focus was on the role of television productions linked to the National Heritage Board in Singapore, and the selective process of representing 'heritage' in a country made up of immigrants coming from three big traditions (Chinese, Malay, Indian), with a heritage and culture that is full of antagonisms. Ultimately, heritage is a complex performance in which not only media producers and politicians, but also academics and publics are caught up.

The fourth paper by **Tran Kien (University of Glasgow)**, considered 'The copyright law of Vietnam: 1945–1989: a revised history'. The presentation used historical analysis and black letter law to unlock the meanings of regulative and legislative provisions found in law, and finds a unique regime underpinned by both censorship rules and remuneration mechanisms that compromise the exclusive rights of authors to control their literary works. Further analysis using socio-political methods unveils the possibilities that the system reflected conditions in Vietnam during this period, and the influence of Soviet law and socialist ideology.

Finally, **Nazry Bahrawi (Singapore University of Technology and Design and Middle East Institute-National University of Singapore)**, delivered a paper on 'Nusantara translates heritage: imaginings of place and progress in Suratman Markasan's *Penghulu* and Andrea Hirata's *The Rainbow Troops*'. Nazry looked at two novels that centre on 'place-making' in a globalised world: Andrea Hirata's *The Rainbow Troops* (Laskar Pelangi), which pits a group of impoverished Indonesian children against a national tin corporation vying to demolish their makeshift school compound for mining purposes, and Suratman Markasan's *Penghulu*, which imagines the pangs of an island village chief forcefully relocated to a high-rise flat on mainland Singapore. Debates about place-making and progress are used to look at this question in a Nusantara context, and the links this might have with civic discourses on heritage.

## **Framing Southeast Asia: the role of the museum**

Convenor: Helen Mears, Keeper of World Art at Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove

This panel explored the role of the museum collection and the museum institution in promoting the preservation and understanding of Southeast Asian cultural heritage. It sought to address the opportunities created by museum activities such as collecting, documenting, conserving and displaying as well as the limitations.

**Susan Conway (SOAS)** opened the panel with a consideration of the 'Problems of conservation and display: the significance of certain 'soiled' ritual textiles in a Shan and Lan Na context'. Conway's paper concerned cotton cloths used by the Tai people of the Shan States and Lan Na (northern Thailand) during funeral rituals. Powerful talismans, such cloths are often printed with 'supernatural formulae composed of incantations, illustrations and diagrams' and reveal the dual influences of Buddhism and spirit religion.

**Alexandra Green (British Museum)** also addressed the role of religion in the creation and use of material culture in her discussion of curating the British Museum exhibition, 'Pilgrims, healers and wizards, Buddhism and religious practices in Burma and Thailand' (opens 2 October 2014). In her choice of exhibits, which will include popular printed posters and plastic flowers on a re-created shrine, Green noted that she hoped to reflect the diversity of ways in which Buddhism is practised, both canonical and heterodox. In her paper 'Fashioning the nation: Queen Sirikit Museum of Textiles

and Thai National Dress' **Eksuda Singhalampong (University of Sussex)** highlighted the relationship between museums and national identity. The newly-established museum under discussion was created to preserve and promote Queen Sirikit's self-styled forms of national dress as well as her ongoing support of traditional Thai textile manufacturing. In Singhalampong's assessment, the Museum used 'dress to address the nation' and to present a national identity with carefully constructed links to 'an appropriate historical past'. **Gumring Hkangda (Royal Pavilion & Museums)** developed this notion of the museum as

a site of/for national politics in his discussion of the importance of a collection of Kachin material culture at Brighton Museum & Art Gallery to the ongoing political struggles faced by the Kachin community of Burma. In his paper, 'Museums and ethnic struggles' Hkangda suggested that museums can 'offer not just cultural heritage but also social and political resistance'.

**Andy West** (independent scholar) also discussed some of the challenges facing museums with collections of material culture from the borderlands of Southeast Asia, particularly that of reconciling colonially (in)formed collections with modern political contexts. West's paper 'Marking time: museum collections and the north-west periphery of South-East Asia' questioned the 'haphazard' museum collecting practices of the past and speculated on new forms of collecting which might better reflect the changes taking place within the region.

**Monica Janowski (SOAS)** closed the panel with her discussion of a museum exhibition project which sought to build understanding of life in the Kelabit Highlands (Sarawak, Malaysia). In her paper, 'Framing longhouse and landscape: the Cultured Rainforest Exhibition', Janowski talked about the development and realisation of the exhibition (shown at the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge in spring 2013 and at Sarawak Museum in autumn 2014) which developed from an interdisciplinary research project involving archaeologists, anthropologists, botanists and geographers to better understand the relationship between people and environment in the Kelabit Highlands. A highlight of her presentation was the demonstration of a series of online 'Cultured Rainforest Panoramic Tours' (<http://www.z360.com/sara/index.htm>) which offered a literal demonstration of how museums can and do 'frame' perspectives on Southeast Asia.

### **Illiberal pluralism in Southeast Asia's economic reform experience**

Convenor: Thomas Jandl, American University, Washington DC

This panel brought together three papers on Vietnam, one of which also encompassed a comparison of Vietnam's emerging civil society to Singapore's. **Thomas Jandl's** 'Illiberal pluralism: Vietnam's economic reforms and the one-party state' suggested that in a certain, early development stage, economic assistance can do more good when not conditioned on political opening. Using the example of Vietnam, the paper claims that most of the goals of political liberalisation are achieved in Vietnam by an economically developmentalist elite, even in the absence of a liberal political system.

**Veena Nair and Jason Morris-Jung's (ISEAS, Singapore)** 'Othering and re-embedding liberalism in the Southeast Asian context' takes a constructivist angle, arguing that in Singapore (and other Southeast Asian countries), Western liberalism was presented as a concept alien to the values and culture of Southeast Asians – an approach now emulated by Vietnam's leadership. By 'othering' the political aspect of liberalism, while adopting the economic one, the ruling elites attempt to maintain their position in at the top of the political hierarchy.

Also from **ISEAS, Le Thu Huong's** presentation, 'Beyond or within? Vietnam in the Southeast Asia region and its changing identity', discussed the transformation of Vietnamese foreign policy in the context of a Southeast-Asia-focused outlook. The paper refers to a growing influence of regional identity in Vietnam's integration in the regional political and economic architecture. The papers showed, in different contexts, that elite interests and discourses are and remain crucial factors in policy making in Southeast Asia. While forces of globalisation are without any doubt sweeping the

region, elite players continue to contest these forces in what they perceive to be a mix of their own and their economies best interest.

## **Rethinking Gender and Development in Southeast Asia**

Convenor: Becky Elmhirst, University of Brighton

The aim of this panel was to consider the changing context of gender and development studies in Southeast Asia amidst geopolitical tensions, resurgent religious identities and gender 'universalism', not only as topics for research, but as themes that challenge collaborative arrangements between researchers from within and outside the Southeast Asian region. The panel comprised seven papers which explored questions such as empowerment and gender mainstreaming, gender in the workings of Islamic law, and critical reflections on research collaborations and the power dynamics that manifest in research relationships.

**Philippe Doneys and Donna L. Doane (Asian Institute of Technology, Bangkok)** presented their work on empowerment in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, which explored the difficulties in applying a concept that appears steeped in the language of individual autonomy in contexts where interdependence is regarded as positive and where empowerment is given meaning through how people feel in relation to others.

**Bernadette P. Resurreccion (Stockholm Environment Institute, Bangkok)** also provided a critique of the ways gender concepts carry simplifications, with unintended consequences in the case of disaster risk management in the Philippines. She showed how such simplifications cast women as particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable, and in ignoring women's mobility, re-traditionalise gender roles, to the detriment of women's well-being and empowerment.

**Ari Darmastuti (University of Lampung, Indonesia)** presented a study of gender in the development planning of forest and watershed management in West Lampung. She showed how a lack of awareness of the concepts of gender mainstreaming, empowerment and participation was particularly evident in local government institutions, whilst in some community groups, levels of awareness were very strong. Taken together, these three papers prompted a lively discussion of why gender programmes are so disconnected from life on the ground, and how they can inadvertently create further tensions when poorly framed. In the second part of the panel, attention turned to the specific challenges for Muslim women raised by the practice of Islamic law in Malaysia and elsewhere.

Based on her systematic observations and focus group discussions, **Noraida Endut (KANITA, Universiti Sains Malaysia)** presented an analysis of situations where justice may be hindered for Muslim women due to underlying gendered interpretations of Islamic law.

In her paper, **Naoko Kuwahara (Fukuyama City University)**, looked at debates over gender issues in Malaysia and Middle Eastern countries, and how the codifications and applications of shari'ah law are products of negotiations. Discussion centred on the wider implications of this for gender justice for Muslim women, and on gender and Islam elsewhere in Southeast Asia.

The final part of the panel shifted attention towards the practice of research, and in particular, the collaborative arrangements in which researchers engage. **Shanthi Thambiah (University of Malaya)** discussed her long-term work with the hunter-gatherer Bhuket of Sarawak, and her reflections on the inherent difficulties in navigating intersubjective and reciprocal framings of 'gender' as a concept. Also taking a very personal and reflective approach, **Liz Cunningham (University of Brighton)** provided an almost forensic analysis of her experiences working in collaboration with a Cambodian psychology lecturer on the role of psychology in Cambodia. Both of these papers resonated loudly with the audience, as discussion centred on the importance of reflective research practice, the unexpected power dynamics that can reveal themselves in the course of research, and

the ways in which research collaborations are rarely as tidy and smooth as the final products of research seem to suggest. This was a very well attended panel, which engaged with many of the most pressing issues associated with gender and development research and practice in Southeast Asia; and it was a particular pleasure to welcome so many presenters from the region.

### **Digital/ritual: Southeast Asia and the new global media**

Convenor: Deirdre McKay, Keele University

Papers in this panel explored the interface between digital and ritual forms in contemporary Southeast Asia, broadly considered. The premise underlying the panel was that Southeast Asian cultures, both localised and diasporic, have adopted new information and communications technologies, particularly social media and Skype. Panellists took a polymedia approach (Madianou and Miller, 2013), exploring the use of film, mobile phones and social media to map an emergent series of sites where Southeast Asia's now global communities explore their own traditions and rituals, identities and forms of belonging. Panellists noted various forms of innovation and extension, conservation and nostalgia enabled by both digital and analogue technologies. Indeed, where older technologies prevailed, they were expressing important forms of knowledge in ritual life. Thus media technologies map the political and social implications of global mediation and mediatisation for the category of 'tradition' itself.

**Roy Huijsmans (ISS, The Hague)** spoke on 'Digital capitalism and the reconfiguration of belonging: mobile phones, youthfulness and the performativity of belonging in a Lao-Vietnamese borderland.' Roy's paper traced the geopolitical and state-making agendas behind mobile phone networks. He explored the ways networks, their marketing and the everyday use of mobile phone technology create both a sense of youth culture and a sense of national belonging on the border. He found youth nationalism, and an identification with Vietnam, to be an increasingly digitised artefact among Lao youth, with the digital mobilities of young Lao people contributing to the reconfiguration of ethnic belonging.

**Richard MacDonald (Goldsmiths, University of London)** delivered a paper on open-air film performances: 'Screening for the spirits: ritual practice, analogue film projection and the digital transition in Northeast Thailand.' Richard's paper asked the vital question: what does it mean when performances remain analogue in a digitally mediated world? With a close analysis of everyday space and the practices of film screenings, Richard unpacked the ways ritual screenings express religious belief and reinscribe Thai culture through appropriation of global artefacts, like 'Twilight' to particular spiritual ends.

**Deirdre McKay** spoke on 'Weddings, wakes and vehicle blessings: the global, digital mediation of Filipino ritual life.' Deirdre's paper examined social media and the interaction between Facebook and ritual practice. Her research explored various ways rituals are being documented on Facebook within sending and receiving nations in a diasporic community. In some instances, ritual forms are being enhanced or elaborated on in order to produce particular kinds of Facebook postings and comments. Thus media are shifting the meanings attached to rituals at the same time as digital technologies enable people to remake their subjectivities and intimate ties on a global scale.

**Mirca Madianou (Goldsmiths, University of London)** joined the panel by Skype – very fitting, given the theme! Her paper 'Humanitarian technology? A critical assessment of communication environments in the Typhoon Haiyan recovery' returned to mobile phone technology, this time examining the 'digital divide' in a disaster-recovery process. Here, lack of access to a mobile phone, money to pay for call time, or signal meant delays in securing assistance and access to recovery programs. This was particularly acute for the poorest people living in the communities worst affected by Haiyan. Lack of access to mobile phones among the poorest enabled aid to be redirected and distributed in patterns that further marginalized them from recovery efforts. Rather than being of benefit to all, mobile telephony reinforced a pre-existing social geography of economic and cultural exclusion after Typhoon Haiyan. The four presentations all spoke to the idea of tradition in different

ways: national, ritual, social and economic. In each case digital engagements – or the lack thereof – marked an intensification or reworking of local understandings of self and society in a global frame.

### **Contemporary architectural and urban practices in Southeast Asia**

Convenors: Ofita Purwani, University of Edinburgh & Wido Prananing Tyas, University of Sheffield

This panel explored the contemporary architectural and urban practices in Southeast Asia. The papers focused on empirical studies on architecture or urban planning, urban policies, architectural and urban discourses of Southeast Asia. Rully Damayanti (University of Sheffield) presented her PhD research on one kampong in Tunjungan area of the city of Surabaya, Indonesia. Using mental mapping, she concludes that the significances of spaces in the kampong are based on the social activities conducted in them.

**Arif Budi Sholihah (University of Nottingham)** reached a similar conclusion, that activity is the most significant thing in mental map building. She based such a perception on her research into the space attachment of Pecinan street in the city of Magelang, Indonesia, as the street has suffered from changes in its modernisation. The next presenter, **Kristanti Dewi Paramita (University of Sheffield)** spoke on informal space being a result of informal activities. Basing her research on the theory of social space, she argued that informal space consists of layers of collective structures in which there is a practice of space sharing between the informal vendors. **Yohannes Firzal (Newcastle University)** presented his research on the invention of tradition in the architecture of the city of Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia. He highlighted the role of the Board of Culture in defining the architecture of Pekanbaru, which is not based on the history of the city. The role of the Board has been used for power by using architecture as its medium. **Wido Prananing Tyas (Newcastle University)** focused on the development of Home Based Enterprises in Kasongan Village, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The Home Based Enterprises located in the village vary in scale; however, they create mutual relationships instead of competition. The small enterprises present themselves as subordinates of larger enterprises, so creating a network in which the biggest enterprise is responsible mainly for building the market, while the small ones are responsible for producing the crafts.

### **Conceptualising political modernity in Southeast Asia**

Convenor: Carlo Bonura, SOAS

Discussant: Su Lin Lewis, University of Bristol

This panel featured papers analysing contemporary and colonial formations of political modernity in the region. It was intended to examine the utility of the concept of political modernity and encourage a variety of approaches toward its study. **Jonathan Saha (University of Bristol)** presented a paper entitled 'The political modernity of corruption in colonial Burma'. **Chris Chaplin (University of Cambridge)**, delivered 'Cultivating an "Indonesian" Salafism: Wahdah Islamiyah, Islamic modernity and national belonging.' 'Mopping up modernity: domestic workers as modern citizens or fictive kin?' was presented by **Mary Austin (SOAS)**. **Carlo Bonura**, presented the essay 'Comparisons of Islamic political modernity in the Southeast Asian debates over liberal Islam'.

### **Malay/Indonesian manuscript studies**

Convenor: Mulaika Hijjas, SOAS

**Farouk Yahya (SOAS)**, presented a paper on 'The set of eight animals in Malay divination', demonstrating the connection between their representation in the Malay texts and in other South and Southeast Asian traditions. **Liyana Taha**,

(**Centre for Manuscript Studies, University of Hamburg**), gave a paper entitled 'On the brink: the role of scribes at the decline of the Malay manuscript tradition', focusing in particular on the 'master scribes', i.e. Munsyi Abdullah, Husin bin Ismail and Tun Siami. **Mulaika Hijjas** gave a paper on 'Sufism, syncretism and orthodoxy: where to place Hikayat Rabi'ah?', considering the apparent marginalisation of Sufism in current historiography of Islam in Southeast Asia with reference to a little known Malay version of the life of Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya. **Zanariah Noor (Sultan Idris Education University, and SOAS)**, discussed 'Daud al-Fatani's thoughts on marriage in *Idah al-bab li Murid al-Nikah*'. Zanariah explained how these conservative views on the role of women were challenged in modernist Malay periodicals of the early 20th century. **Alex Wain (University of Oxford)**, re-examined 'The date and authorship of Raffles Malay 18', proposing that only the second half of this manuscript, dealing with the rule of Sultan Mahmud Syah, can be regarded as having been written close to that ruler's time, whereas the rest of the text should be dated to the early 17th century. Although a smaller group than in previous conferences, the panel boasted a diverse selection of papers and enjoyed a lively response from audience members. Of note is an emerging focus on manuscripts as art objects (Farouk) within a social and historical context (Liyana), with a continuing interest in manuscripts as texts (Mulaika and Zanariah), along with a promising new perspective on an old philological problem (Alex). Vladimir Braginsky and Uli Kozok, who appear in the published programme, were unable to attend.

## Contemporary politics in Cambodia

Convenor: Jörn Dosch, University of Rostock, Germany

Widespread protests against the Hun Sen government in the aftermath of the 2013 national elections, violent crackdowns on dissent and recent protests in the garment industry have been indicative of a changing political culture in Cambodia. The panel took stock of recent events and developments in the politics and society and delved into the analysis of domestic and international factors which are shaping contemporary Cambodia.

In the first part of the panel, which focused on domestic politics, **Astrid Norén-Nilsson (KITLV Leiden)** explained that practices of gift-giving are an integral part of domestic discourses of democracy. Engaging in such practices has been a key approach for the ruling Cambodian People's Party (CPP) to link to the electorate and receive electoral support in return. Building on her ethnographic research in post-election Cambodia she demonstrated that the July 2013 electoral outcome has been transforming citizen practices of claiming access to state resources and the popular political values that guide such practices.

In his presentation on environmental norm contestation in Cambodia's hydropower sector **Oliver Hensengerth (Northumbria University)** outlined how environmental norms are contested in Cambodia's hydropower sector, using the example of the Kamchay Dam. He painted a complex picture of decision-making procedures, involving several layers of domestic and external actors, which fundamentally challenged the mainstream view that such processes are best described as hierarchical conflicts between local and global norms.

The second part of the panel looked at Cambodia's international relations. **Jörn Dosch** described Cambodia's foreign policy as highly personalised and a tool used by Hun Sen and the CPP to sustain regime legitimacy and existing power structures. At the same time the government has found it difficult to develop a comprehensive approach to unite often conflicting approaches of bilateralism (particularly in Cambodia's relations with China) and multilateralism (ASEAN). **Chu Ta-Wei (University of Leeds)** compared Cambodia's and Indonesia's approaches and contribution to the emerging ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC). He concluded that despite official support,

the Hun Sen regime had not set a good example as it had failed to provide for the Cambodian people's human security needs. Furthermore, according to Chu, the government has constantly opposed the participation of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) in the APSC building process.

### **Engaging with change in Burma and Thailand in the 20th century – panel in honour of Dr Bianca Son (1968–2014)**

Convenor: Thomas Richard Bruce (SOAS)

This panel was put together by the friends and colleagues in the SOAS History Department of Bianca Son who passed away in May of this year. Like the presenters, Bianca was supervised by Dr Michael W. Charney, who was instrumental in bringing the panel to fruition. Bianca's doctoral dissertation had just been accepted and she was about to embark upon a very promising academic career. Her research explored the formation of Zo identity and the relationship between these peoples and surrounding states. Her loss will be keenly felt by those in the field and her people. The papers presented touched upon some of the issues addressed by Bianca in her research: the engaged responses of local actors to the institutional changes as they penetrated the social fabric of Burma and Thailand in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

**Maung Bo Bo** presented a paper on the emergence of a modern literature in Burma under the influence of colonial regimes and in the context of rising anti-colonial nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s. He gave a number of examples of writing and pictorial representations based upon themes from the pre-colonial chronicles, poetry, drama and art contained within the modern context of the mass-produced magazine. Bo Bo highlighted a pervasive inward orientation which was to have implications for the shaping of political nationalism. A discussion followed on the adaptation of traditional Burmese themes to modern ideologies, such as Marxism; that this was a vibrant era for Burmese literature because of the influx of international influences and saw Burmese literature integrated into a global network; and on the conflict between older and younger literary generations.

**Thanyarat Apiwong's** paper examined the Burmese community in Chiang Mai as a variety of geopolitical reconfigurations took place in Northern Siam from the late 19th century. She focused on the indispensable role of Burmese merchants in not only facilitating the Northern Siamese teak trade but in initiating it as well. She showed how the community negotiated access and control of the trade between competing nodes of authority using the various identities accessible to them, from British Burmese subjects, to the less formal client-status of the Lords of Chiang Mai, to subjects of the Siamese state. Relations between the Burmese teak traders and Chiang Mai locals through marriage and religion alongside their knowledge of the teak trade gave them an advantage over other outsiders, such as Western agents. Discussion followed on the relative freedom of labour movement of subjects in British Burma and absolutist Siam and the extent to which the interaction between the Burmese and Siam had been one-way.

Finally, **Thomas Bruce's** paper examined the emergence of the footwear industry in Thailand as a function of ethnic Chinese migration. Whilst an indigenous Thai handicraft shoe making 'industry' existed it could not form the basis for a modern industry due to the nature of the footwear, the limited market and the locally held dim view of the craft. In contrast, the Chinese arrived with a shoe-making and trading tradition and a ready market. With their control of the Siamese tanning industry they were better placed to take over the supply of leather and eventually other types of Western-style shoe demanded by modern institutions. The industry was harmed by attempts from the late 1930s to indigenise it and arguably led to a drag on the industry's long-term development, preventing it from acting as bridge to a capital goods industry. A discussion followed on the use of rubber in shoe production and on the similarities and differences with the experiences of other industries.