

DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIA STUDIES CONFERENCE

INTERNATIONAL

ABSTRACT BOOK

JULY 17-19, 2025

RCSD, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Chiang Mai University, Thailand

 HENRY
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 The Regional Center for Social Science
and Sustainable Development
Chiang Mai University



Center for Southeast
Asian Studies
University Wisconsin -
Madison

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

About the Conference

The international conference **“Decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies”**, to be held from **17–19 July 2025 at UNISERV, Chiang Mai University**, is a collaborative initiative between the **Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison** and the **Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University**, with generous support from the **Henry Luce Foundation**.

This conference seeks to advance theoretical and critical discussions on the decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies by exploring the multiple ways in which decolonization is conceptualized, framed, and practiced. Recognizing that decolonization is not a singular or uniform process, the event brings together diverse intellectual traditions, epistemologies, and critical perspectives. By challenging dominant frameworks and rethinking existing paradigms, the conference aims to foster interdisciplinary dialogue and contribute to the evolving discourse on decolonial thought in the region.

The program features **80 presentations across 21 sessions**, delivered by scholars working on Southeast Asia from a wide range of countries, including the **United States, the Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and India**. Approximately **150 participants** are expected to attend and share their insights and research experiences on the decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies.

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions whose contributions have made this conference possible. Special thanks go to the **Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison** and the **Regional Center for Social Science and Sustainable Development (RCSD), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University**, for their collaboration and commitment in organizing this international gathering. We are particularly grateful to the **Henry Luce Foundation** for its generous support, which has enabled us to bring together scholars from across the globe for meaningful and critical dialogue.

Lastly, we thank all presenters, participants, and members of the organizing committee for their enthusiasm, insights, and contributions—each of which is essential to the success of this conference.

Organizing Committee

Ian Baird, University of Wisconsin–Madison
Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, Chiang Mai University
Chusak Wittayapak, Chiang Mai University
Wasan Panyagaew, Chiang Mai University

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Adrian Tan.....	5
Ahmad Sabirin	6
Antonette Arogo.....	7
Areerat Worawongwasu	8
Ariff Hafizi Radzi.....	9
Arpita Mitra	10
Budi Hernawan	11
Christopher Choong.....	12
Cindy Anh Nguyen.....	13
Darlene Machell España.....	14
Etienne Wain	15
Ballerina Chong	15
Eustaquio III Barbin	16
Fachri Aidulsyah	17
Fahadz Mannan Lulu	18
Fathun Karib Ph.D	19
Fionnuala Hughes	20
Hamtha Mukholee	21
Huy Tran Phuoc Lam	22
Ian Baird	23
Ivan Small.....	24
Jasper Christian Gambito	25
Jay Mok.....	26
Jeffery Lin	26
Jay Mok.....	27
Moe Nwe Nwe.....	27
jelena golubović.....	28
Jiraporn Laocharoenwong	29
João Paulo Doblón Reginaldo	30
Jochem van den Boogert	31
John Paul Diciembre	32

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Jonathan Yong Tienxhi	33
Jose Santos Ardivilla	34
Joseph Ruanto-Ramirez	35
JPaul Manzanilla	36
Jules Yim	37
Samuel Chua	37
Justin Quang Nguyễn Phan	38
Kanjana Thepboriruk	39
Khathaleeya Liamdee.....	40
Kymberley Chu	41
Lili, Chen	42
Lina Chhun	43
Luis Zuriel P. Domingo.....	44
Madzween Joy K. De Asis-Omar	45
Meng VONG.....	46
Mia Angeline	47
Micah F. Morton	48
Morragotwong Phumplab	49
Nabila Yasmin	50
Nikolai Russegger.....	51
Nor Ismah.....	52
Nora Taylor	53
Nuttawat Unjitlerd	54
Ofita Purwani.....	55
Patrick Joshua Villegas	56
Pin-Hua Chou	57
Ponpavi Sangsuradej.....	58
Phước Lâm Huy, Trần	59
Phuc Van, Nguyen.....	60
Ponpavi Sangsuradej.....	61
Quyen Nguyen	62
Riswadi bin Azmi	63
Roland Macawili	64
Rommel Curaming.....	65

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Sandy Nur Ikfal Raharjo	66
Sara Niner	67
Sarena Abdullah	68
Serena Autiero	69
Thundorn Kulkliang	69
Siao-Yun Chen	70
Simon Layton	71
Simon Rowedder	72
Sinae Hyun	73
Sujane Kanparit	74
Taylor Easum	75
Teuku Reza, Fadeli	76
Thiti Jamkajornkeiat	77
Tümüzo Katiry	78
tyrell haberkorn	79
Van Phuc Nguyen	80
Vanna Nauk	81
Wasan Panyagaew	82
Wen Di Sia	83
Willem van Schendel	84
Yi-Chin Wu	85
Zardas Lee	86

Panels

Outside Looking Across the Scholarly Borderlands: Perspectives from the Field of Southeast Asian American Studies	87
On Decoloniality/Epistemic Reconstruction: Languages, Concepts and Praxis	88

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Reframing Singapore: Decolonising Narratives from the National Museum Art Gallery and Singapore Art Museum (1976 to 1996)

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of Singapore’s art institutions in shaping Southeast Asian art discourse, focusing on the National Museum Art Gallery (NMAG, 1976) and the Singapore Art Museum (SAM, 1996). These two decades serve as bookends in the city-state’s evolving project of collecting and exhibiting contemporary Southeast Asian art. More critically, the paper interrogates Singapore’s role in the theorisation, centralisation, cultural colonisation, and representation of regional art within a globalised, westernised framework.

The establishment of NMAG marked Singapore’s first institutional venture into art collecting, positioning it as a key platform for national and regional artistic exchange—exemplified by exhibitions such as the ASEAN Travelling Art Exhibition (1981). Yet, I argue that these efforts were constrained by postcolonial identity politics and an emergent art market shaped by Western paradigms. The founding of SAM in 1996 expanded this trajectory, with exhibitions such as *Modernity and Beyond: Themes in Southeast Asian Art* (1996), curated by T. K. Sabapathy, attempting to engage with Southeast Asian identity, modernity, and cultural complexity.

Drawing on archival research from my 2025 fellowship at the National Archives and National Library Board Singapore, this paper critically analyses curatorial strategies of state-run institutions and their impact on the regional cultural landscape. It calls for a decolonial rethinking of how Southeast Asian art is collected, framed, and narrated—foregrounding Singapore’s dual role as both a platform and a cultural coloniser in the region.

Keywords: Singapore, Museums, Archives, Contemporary Art, Southeast Asian Art

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“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Beyond the Colonial Lens: Restoring Indigenous Wisdom in Indonesian Scholarship

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Abstract

This research explores the profound influence of colonial heritage in the Indonesian academic world, which has marginalized local wisdom and indigenous peoples' epistemology in the production and dissemination of knowledge. Although Indonesia has been politically independent since 1945, the dominance of Western perspectives and theories is still very strong in the curriculum of higher education and scientific research, thus forming a biased understanding of Indonesia's history, culture, and social reality. Through a postcolonial theoretical approach and epistemic justice, this study highlights how today's education systems and knowledge structures continue to marginalize local narratives, ignore community-based learning methods, and dwarf indigenous peoples' cultural values and practices. In the midst of various institutional and structural challenges, there are promising initiatives in the form of integrating local values in teaching, participatory research collaboration with indigenous communities, and the use of digital technology to expand access to culture-based learning materials. The results of this study affirm the urgency of building a framework for decolonization of Indonesian studies, which includes curriculum reform, educator training, policy strengthening, and formal recognition of indigenous peoples. By restoring the position of local wisdom as the main source of knowledge, Indonesia can build a more equitable, contextual, and sovereign academic system. This research makes an important contribution to the discourse on the decolonization of education and offers a strategic direction to shape more inclusive policies, strengthen national identity, and encourage epistemic justice in nation-building in the global era.

Keywords: Colonial Lens, Indigenous Wisdom, and Indonesian Scholarship

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“**DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES**”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Theses on Southeast Asian Theory

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Abstract

The urgency of decolonization arises from the recognition that the enduring effects of colonization materialize in the domain of knowledge production, and its reflection and constitution of mentalities as well as lifeworlds. The conceptual categories and theoretical frameworks with which we think about and act upon our postcolonial present are forms of worlding, opening up possibilities of and for the kind of future available to us in the Global South. The university is implicated in intellectual imperialism as seen in institutional priorities, particularly global rankings; the continuing dominance of Northern epistemologies across disciplines; linguistic hegemony; and the existing structures of scholarly output and academic exchange, all part of colonial afterlives. As Filipino critic Caroline S. Hau advances, area studies such as Southeast Asian Studies, even when undertaken by the researcher who belongs to the community of investigation, must grapple with the politics of representation in which European and American scholars are more visible and exercise greater influence in research directions and disciplinary methodologies. In this context, theorizing from Southeast Asia is a movement against the coloniality of knowledge in the spirit of critical consciousness.

This paper aims to study selected works of Filipino historian Reynaldo C. Ileto, Malaysian sociologist Syed Farid Alatas, and Indonesian philosopher Ferry Hidayat as representative thinkers in the project of decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies, particularly Southeast Asian theory. It will look at key concepts and major arguments of each thinker and, through a comparative analysis, formulate extended statements in the manner of Karl Marx's *Theses on Feuerbach* on what Southeast Asian theory is and does. Thus, this paper is aligned with how decolonial critics such as Indian political theorist Aditya Nigam engage with Marx's thesis on philosophy or theory as a material practice.

Keywords: decolonization, autonomous knowledge, praxi-theory

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“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Generative Refusals: A Reflection On Southeast Asian Studies From The University Of Hawai‘i At Mānoa

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Abstract

The U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia during the Cold War was driven by the imperialist agenda to spread capitalism and contain communism, which significantly influenced research on the region. Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies necessitates that we contend with this imperialist legacy. I reflect on my experiences as a PhD student pursuing Indigenous Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. The U.S. occupation of Hawai‘i is a base of operations for the further militarization of Southeast Asia. Through organizing and scholarship, I endeavour to build Indigenous solidarity with Kanaka ‘Ōiwi in demilitarizing our homelands. This solidarity extends beyond my time in Hawai‘i. I argue that doing Indigenous Southeast Asian studies in U.S.-occupied lands should include building good relations with Indigenous peoples whose homelands we work in. The fields of Indigenous Studies and Southeast Asian Studies are by no means mutually exclusive but are often segmented in academia. Within Southeast Asian Studies, there is a need to “Asianize” the field, as elucidated in Ariel Heryanto’s “Can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?” and Carolyn S. Hau’s “For Whom Are Southeast Asian Studies?” (Hau 2020). I build upon Heryanto and Hau’s analysis to ask: “Can there be Indigenous Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?” and “For Whom Are Indigenous Southeast Asian Studies?”. I elucidate how trans-Indigenous scholarship can be nurtured through reciprocal learning between Kanaka ‘Ōiwi and Indigenous Asian peoples. This underscores the importance of Indigenous language revitalization and reclamation. This paper envisions the potential of decolonizing Southeast Asian studies through Indigenous exchanges and solidarities. I focus on the case of the movement for Mon language reclamation and revitalization, which I argue is a movement with the potential to decolonize Southeast Asian Studies.

Keywords: Indigeneity, Cold War, University of Hawai‘i, Hawai‘i, Thailand

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“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Provincializing the Universal: Reflecting on Conceptual History and the Epistemic Decolonisation of Southeast Asia

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After the Cold War, the globalisation of higher education has led many Southeast Asians to study their societies through Western epistemologies and ontologies. This reliance risks reinforcing a universality paradigm that marginalises alternative knowledges rooted in local histories, cosmologies, and social realities. Decolonising Southeast Asian studies requires confronting the discipline’s coloniality, not only in the uncritical application of Western theories, but also in research ethics, methodologies, and power relations.

This paper argues for the need to ‘decentre and theorise back’ by foregrounding emic perspectives and developing conceptual tools grounded in Southeast Asian contexts. However, such efforts should not remain insular. New knowledge produced in and from Southeast Asia must engage broader global debates, offering theoretical insights capable of challenging dominant narratives in the Global North. Instead of positioning Southeast Asian lifeworlds as mere case studies for Western theory, this approach calls for them to reshape the terms of theoretical discourse itself.

To this end, I propose conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte) as one of a critical method in the attempt to decolonise Southeast Asian studies. While rooted in German intellectual traditions, conceptual history offers a means to historicise and provincialise dominant Western concepts, showing them to be contingent rather than universal. It opens space for alternative conceptual genealogies and fosters epistemic plurality. Used reflexively, this approach not only critiques the dominance of Western vocabularies but also enables the emergence of new frameworks grounded in Southeast Asia’s intellectual and cultural specificities.

Keywords: conceptual history, concepts, epistemic decolonisation, linguistic turn

Panel: On Decoloniality/Epistemic Reconstruction: Languages, Concepts and Praxis

Rethinking Epistemologies: Exploring Alternative Knowledge Practices

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Abstract

Southeast Asia (referred as Subarnabhumi in ancient Indian texts) is quite a vast and complex region with equally vast area of studies. Most of the Western and Southeast Asian nations still continue to follow the Western ideas and thus decolonization has actually turned into an empty signifier or an extended form of colonialism. In fact, Southeast Asian epistemology still mirrors the ideologies of the West and is dominated by the theories and methodologies of Western scholars or Western-educated elite. Southeast Asians must recognize the fact that Western theorists have treated Southeast Asia as a site of data extraction rather than as a theoretical home. The task of making Southeast Asia as a theoretical home of Southeast Asian studies should be the focus of Southeast Asian educational research institutions and curricula and pedagogy must be reconstructed accordingly. To establish a truly decolonized framework, it is necessary to “decolonize the mind” (Ngugi Wa Thiong’o) and to find a “alternative horizon” (Chen) of knowledge that is locally based. Repatriation is expected to be flourishing through reassertion of indigenous forms of knowledge, revisiting the native traditions and retrieval of Asian values. Colonial rule managed successfully to marginalize the indigenous knowledge practices and the native traditions pervaded the art forms, literature, mythology and folklores which used to carry the essential Southeast Asian spirit. Southeast Asians must have a sense of nationalistic pride regarding their art and vernacular literatures which insist on the inclusion of all forms of life (the anima or life in all things) and joyous acceptance of life in general. They depict a world that is unique: a mixture of reality and fantasy, earthly yet divine. So, postcolonial endeavors should be directed to the rediscovery of the divinity present in earthly forms and to promote diversity, equity and inclusion. More presence of non-elite scholars, underprivileged and minority people (across gender, ethnicity and class) must be felt in academia. When the Southeast Asian scholars themselves would take charge of knowledge production the paradigm shift in the decolonization process of Southeast Asian studies would be accomplished.

Keywords: decolonization, epistemology, theoretical home, indigenous, native traditions, inclusion, knowledge production, paradigm shift

Re-visiting the production of postcolonial citizenships of Indonesia and West Papua

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Abstract

Drawing on Achille Mbembe's concept of "postcolony" and long-term field research in West Papua since 1997, this paper argues that the production and re-production of citizenships of Indonesia and West Papua should be revisited under "the logic of conviviality" whereby the Indonesian state, the Papuans and the Indonesians co-exist and share space of the postcolony. Over the last six decades, the colonial nature of the Indonesian state power has produced and re-produced West Papua as the colonised, rather than citizens, in two ways. First, it exerts control and domination over the land and the indigenous Papuans through "private indirect governance" that operates through extractive industry, land grabbing and coercive military power.

Second, the Indonesian state power infuses the mindset of inferiority of the indigenous Papuans to the whole nation so that the Papuans are construed as under-developed and even savage and labelled with animality. The mindset of inferiority is also embedded in the development policy and production of knowledge, notably the Special Autonomy Policy for West Papua, where it has reduced Papuan subjectivity to the level of 'target', 'indicator,' or 'project beneficiary', rather than 'actor,' 'project designer,' and/or 'decision makers'. As a result, the Papuan social body believes that they are inherently inferior and backward, thus, incapable of producing their own knowledge and history.

Nevertheless, grounded in the Papuan *memoria passionis* (collective memory of suffering), the Papuan social body produced their own citizenship not only to resist the colonial and the colonised relations with Indonesia but more importantly, to envision a new liberated West Papua.

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Revisiting the Anticolonial/Identity Politics of the Malay Left

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Abstract

In Southeast Asia, identity politics is often associated with narrow nativist and ethno-nationalist populism. While this form of identity politics is sometimes traced to the region’s variegated colonial histories, decolonization seldom goes beyond uncovering the colonial foundations of racial construction. In this paper, I look at the case of Malaysia to provoke new discourse on identity politics and decolonization. Identity politics in Malaysia is commonly associated with racial supremacy and right-wing religiosity, framed within the dichotomy of an essentialist racial/religious identity confronting an inclusive national identity. Liberal ideas lurking behind foreground multiracialism and tolerance, but risk throwing out race-based affirmative action without confronting the capitalist impetus of identity politics. In this framing, decolonization is articulated as a hegemonic discourse captured and embodied by identity politics, not seen as an emancipatory endeavor. To challenge these perspectives, my paper reestablishes the dominant form of identity politics within a raced/gendered developmental state project seeking to reverse colonial racial oppression through capital accumulation. In emplacing this version of identity politics within the contradictions of raced/gendered capitalism, I intend to recover decolonization as an emancipatory project that aims to recover (not abolish) identity politics, striving to decouple the latter from capitalist imaginaries. To do this, I revisit the anticolonial politics of the Malay left in Malaya/Malaysia and critically interrogate their entanglements and engagements with questions of identities—in search of an alternative and hopefully transformative vision of identity politics.

Keywords: identity politics, decolonization, malay left

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Shifting from Nation-State Teleologies Towards Cultural Studies of Vernacular Life: K-12 Vietnamese American Curricula and Digital Humanities

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This paper examines how public facing scholarship and new methodological experiments in digital humanities can invite alternative narratives of Southeast Asian vernacular life as dynamic, plural, historically situated, and meaningful for contemporary Southeast Asian and diasporic communities. Exploring two case studies, I first showcase how my work in the K-12 Vietnamese American curricula, providing a *longue durée* history of Vietnam that offers plural and contested historical understandings of nation-state, can undermine notions of a teleologically defined, singular ethno-centric nation-state of Vietnam. I then showcase my global south digital humanities research focused on an early twentieth century encyclopedia of vernacular Vietnamese life which offers a framework for examining orality, visual communication, and cultural practice. (The Vietnamese American Model Curriculum project is part of the California Department of Education K-12 public and open access curriculum project focused on Hmong, Cambodian, and Vietnamese American studies curricula.)

Keywords: Vietnam, curriculum, digital humanities, vernacular

Panel: Outside Looking Across the Scholarly Borderlands: Perspectives from the Field of Southeast Asian American Studies

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Co-producing Southeast Asia: Cinema, Decolonization and the Origins of a Region, 1950s-1960s

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Abstract

Heralding that ‘Southeast Asia’ is a work-in-progress, this paper advances the significance of examining intraregional cinematic productions in reframing our spatial and temporal imaginations about Southeast Asia as a region. While the technology of cinema was a colonial product, it became a crucial instrument in the region’s anti-colonial and nationalist movements. Cinema was radically transformed and employed by Southeast Asians to further their causes and served as a fertile ground for the portrayals of images and narratives constructing the region, challenging colonial knowledge and legacies. In cinema, thoughts of the past and the imperatives of the present are imbricated with a desire to open up a representational arena where the cultural and ideological foundation of the region can be scrutinized and the tapestry of its cultural diversity accentuated. Focusing on key Southeast Asian co-productions such as Rodrigo de Villa (1952), Leilani (1953), Sergeant Hassan (1958), Krus na Kawayan (Let Us Live, 1956), and Holiday in Bali (1962), this paper examines how the transnational and intraregional nature of these co-productions reflects a decolonial praxis, where we find indexed representations and contestations on nascent Southeast Asian regionalism.

In particular, cinematic co-productions reflect and intervene in the critical production and examination of what constitutes Southeast Asia and the negotiation of regional identity and solidarity. They perform the cultural work of privileging and foregrounding stories that reveal the dynamism, diversity, and complexity of Southeast Asia. Based on the premise that cinematic co-productions are an embodiment of multivocal expressions, they entail a collective and communal effort to depict reality through Southeast Asian perspectives. They serve as a testament to the capacity of cultural materials to feed a shared imagination of what the region could be beyond the self-reflexivity of the nation. Ultimately, Southeast Asian co-productions chart a way of looking at the region from within.

Keywords: Southeast Asian co-productions, intraregional film history, ASEAN, regional identity, regionalism

Beyond Settler-Colonial Migration in Aotearoa New Zealand: Reorienting Towards Tangata Whenua (Indigenous Peoples) as Southeast Asian Migrants

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Abstract

Southeast Asian (SEA) migrants to Aotearoa New Zealand face racism and systemic discrimination when negotiating the settler-colonial state's immigration system. This discrimination is mirrored through enduring assimilative and racist pressures faced by SEA migrants long after their immigration documentation is approved.

At the same time, SEA migrants have historically benefitted, and continue to benefit, from the settler-colonial dispossession of Māori, the Tangata Whenua (Indigenous Peoples) of Aotearoa, from their lands in violation of Tikanga Māori (Indigenous law) and Te Tiriti o Waitangi (a treaty made in 1840 between Māori leaders and the British Crown, guaranteeing Indigenous sovereignty over Indigenous lands). SEA migrant complicity arises from our ongoing participation in the settler-colonial project, e.g., through perpetuating anti-Indigenous racism, acquiring Indigenous land, and assimilating into (and thereby upholding) white settler society.

Writing as SEA (Malaysian-Chinese) settlers/migrants, we survey the colonial myth-making currently underpinning SEA migration to Aotearoa New Zealand. We then argue that SEA migrants should reorient away from settler-colonialism and towards building solidarities with Tangata Whenua, given our "incommensurable but not incompatible" political aspirations (Snelgrove et al., 2014). We contend that the Indigenous reclamation of sovereignty is "not incompatible" with SEA migrant aspirations (e.g., for a non-assimilative future). We explore the following unsettling questions: how might we as SEA migrants divest from settler-colonialism and contribute to Indigenous-led decolonial efforts? And how can we as SEA migrants relate to Indigenous Peoples in a manner that is both decolonial and distinctly SEA?

If SEA migrants reorient our aspirations beyond the confines of the settler-colonial state, we can co-imagine and co-realize a collective future with Tangata Whenua and our fellow migrant communities. In the migration context, this could begin with SEA migrants embracing decolonial understandings of migrant integration and belonging, rooted in tikanga Māori and Te Tiriti. We envision this reorientation as a step towards disestablishing the settler-colonial immigration system and (re)establishing decolonial migration pathway(s) grounded in Indigenous law.

Keywords: Settler-Colonial Studies; Migration; Southeast Asia; New Zealand.

Decolonization Through Language Policies? Philippines and Indonesia

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Abstract

The Philippines and Indonesia are two of the most linguistically diverse modern nation-states in Southeast Asia. These two archipelagos are home to around 185 (Mandane, 2015) and over 700 (Rasman, 2018) (Juanda [et.al.](#), 2022) ethno-languages respectively. In achieving post-colonial unification, these two nations sought the benefits of establishing national languages for use in policymaking and education – a standardized language, a *lingua franca* that the diversity of people can understand, and perhaps identify with – thereby building the national identity (Dressel & Wesley, 2014). The expeditious selection and promotion of a common national language was therefore crucial in the cases of the two nascent nation-states mentioned, with both countries acknowledging its importance in securing internal (Setyabudi, 2017) (Gonzalez, 2003) and external recognition. Some recent scholars claim that in this pursuit of nation-building after colonization, Indonesia’s language policy (LP) was more effective than that of the Philippines (Susanto, 2017) (Rahmi, 2015). Hence, this study attempts to identify the historical differences in the development of the LPs of the two countries. It explores coalitional politics during crucial language policy selection and implementation in the 20th century. This includes language unification efforts by governments and organizations like the Indonesian Youth Congress, the various revolutionary and transitional governments in the Philippines, the LPs implemented by the Japanese in the region during the Second World War, and LP developments in the 21st century. After reviewing their histories, the paper will argue that the primary divergence is rooted in the difference in the *linguistic ideologies* behind the LPs, as defined by Zeng and Li (2023), and in the perceived *language functions* as categorized by Pauuw (2009). Ultimately, these differences will be apparent in their *language policy ideologies*, as one country generally advocated for monolingualism and the other for bilingualism.

Keywords: Philippines, Indonesia, language policy, linguistic ideology, language function

Decoloniality as Praxis (?): (De) colonisation in West Papua and Timor Leste

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Abstract:

This paper investigates relational praxis and the historical continuities of (de)colonial politics during the respective periods of independence in Timor-Leste and special autonomy in West Papua. This research seeks to address the following key questions: How the decolonization process in Timor-Leste and West Papua have fueled various phases of political generations of Papuans and Timorese to do the act of “resistance” to the state? How does the counter-state movements in new independence country and in the city that has given the special autonomy status contribute to broader theories of political change and resistance, particularly in post-colonial contexts? This paper begins with a brief theoretical framework, before focusing on democracy, developmentalism, and political generation between 2000 and present—a critical period that reveals the dynamics and contradictions of (de)colonized statehood in Timor-Leste and West Papua region.

Keywords: (De)coloniality, political generation, resistance, Timor-Leste, West Papua

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“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Reclaiming Historical Identity: Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies through Tausug Narratives

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Abstract

This paper, entitled “Reclaiming Historical Identity: Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies through Tausug Narratives,” is research that focuses on the voices and lived experiences of Tausug who are in the southern part of the Philippines in an attempt to challenge and raise questions about the existing studies and frameworks of Southeast Asian studies. To mitigate the consequences of colonial conversation, which traditionally concealed their identity, this study positioned the cultural, historical, and political narratives of the Tausug people at the center of the discourse. This study gives insights into how the Tausug people remained resilient despite colonization, national integration, and globalization. Using analysis of historical documents, oral traditions, and current and personal stories. Through a decolonial approach, this research aims to rewrite Southeast Asian studies from a local, indigenous perspective while criticizing European views that dominate the narrative about Tausug. It looks at how Tausug stories negate the effects of colonialism, restore indigenous independence, and advance a broader comprehension of Southeast Asian history and culture. At the end of this study, it highlights the urgent need to give voices and social platforms to indigenous people in an academic avenue, and stresses the necessity and importance of rewriting Southeast Asian studies through the lens of regional theories of knowledge and historical facts.

Keywords: decolonizing, historical identity, indigenous, Southeast Asian studies, Tausug.

“I have nothing, although I have a name” : Gender Perspectives in Interwar Vietnam’s Anti-Colonial Narratives, 1918-1939

Bumantara: The Emergence of Multiple Geological bodies in Decolonizing Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This paper explores the disassemblage process, which entails dismantling the components of previous socio-ecological arrangements, including knowledge, in the formation of Southeast Asia as a regional entity. It highlights the role of geological materials and geological knowledge in the American empire’s construction of the regional category of “Southeast Asia” (Karib and Listiana, forthcoming). The paper poses the question: How do we decolonize the post-1945 naturalized regional category of “Southeast Asia”? It examines two concepts from Southeast Asian thinkers: Thongchai Winichakul’s “geo-body” and Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana’s concept of *Bumantara*. Firstly, the aim is to revisit Winichakul’s concept of a geo-body, which refers to the Thai nation, by transforming a geographical understanding to a geological one. Furthermore, the geological body is not limited to a single nation-state but encompasses a broader scope than the Southeast Asian regional geological body. Secondly, as we start to acknowledge Southeast Asia as a geological entity, we adopt Alisjahbana’s idea of *Bumantara* as an alternative regional concept. The term *Bumantara* comes from the words Bumi (earth) and Antara (in between) and signifies the area between two oceans and continents. In this context, our decolonial strategy further evolves so that Bumi can be interpreted similarly to “geo” both representing the “earth.” Consequently, *Bumantara* emerged as the new geological identity of Southeast Asia, decolonizing our understanding from the dominant narrative of the American Empire’s colonial image of the region.

Keywords: geological assemblage, geo-body, geological body, *Bumantara*, American empire, decolonial Southeast Asia.

**“I have nothing, although I have a name” : Gender Perspectives in
Interwar Vietnam’s Anti-Colonial Narratives, 1918-1939**

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Abstract

Although comprehensive accounts of the Second French Empire often portray the interwar years as its zenith, this period was vital in the development of Vietnamese Marxist and nationalist movements. The emergence of patriotic slogans such as, “blood is boiling in your hearts, countrymen,” illustrates the nationalistic spirit and collective resistance against French colonial rule in Vietnam. At the same time, the emphasis on emboldening men to consolidate themselves as political actors in the struggle for liberation becomes apparent.

Despite Nguyễn Ái Quốc’s 1922 acknowledgement that colonial violence is, “most odious when it is exercised upon children and women”, the lack of dedicated attention to the plight of women within anti-colonial discourse implies that Vietnamese women were viewed as passive victims of colonisation rather than potential – or already existing – agents of change. Nevertheless, through an examination of Vietnamese and French-language publications and literature from 1918 to 1939, this paper reveals that Vietnamese women played significant and diverse roles in anti-colonial resistance. However, in spite of their contributions, they have been overlooked and marginalised by their male counterparts. This neglect is reflected in the limited focus within Western scholarship on the role of Vietnamese women as political actors during this tumultuous period of Vietnamese history. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to the development of a more inclusive and accurate understanding of political agency within the broader experience of Vietnamese anti-colonialism.

Keywords: Vietnam, Indochina, Feminism, Anticolonialism

Decolonizing Borders: The Indo-Myanmar Divide and Indigenous Rights in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

The Indo-Myanmar border serves as a significant case for exploring the decolonization process in Southeast Asia, particularly regarding the rights and identities of indigenous communities like the Konyak people of Longwa Village. Established after independence, this border continues to reflect colonial legacies that overlooked the traditional territories and governance structures of indigenous populations. This paper investigates how the imposition of this border disrupts the socio-economic practices, cultural identity, and political autonomy of the Konyak community.

Utilizing Constructivist theory and postcolonial discourse, the study analyses the socio-political implications of the Indo-Myanmar border, emphasizing how arbitrary territorial divisions fracture indigenous identities and governance. The forced placement of border pillars without community consultation has exacerbated divisions among families and communities, underscoring the necessity for decolonization efforts to prioritize indigenous voices and rights. The research incorporates primary data from field observations and interviews, offering insights into the Konyak people's experiences regarding the border's impact on their lives.

The paper argues that decolonization in Longwa must extend beyond political sovereignty to address the fundamental rights of indigenous communities. It advocates for a reimagined governance framework that incorporates indigenous knowledge and practices into border management decisions. Additionally, the study highlights the importance of regional cooperation between India and Myanmar, promoting transboundary governance that actively involves indigenous communities.

By examining the challenges posed by the Indo-Myanmar border, this paper contributes to broader discussions on decolonization in Southeast Asia, emphasizing the need for inclusive frameworks that recognize the complexities of indigenous identities and rights. Ultimately, this research aims to illuminate pathways for meaningful engagement with indigenous communities, fostering equitable solutions that address historical injustices and support their aspirations for autonomy and cultural preservation.

Keywords: Indo-Myanmar Border, Decolonization, Konyak Community, Indigenous Rights

Bahnar youth’s decolonial aspiration: engaging with the church, troubling the village and comparing with the Kinh (the Vietnam ethnic majority)

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Abstract

Two hundred years ago, the Central Highlanders of Vietnam were independent indigenous groups living in tribes. Today, they have undergone institutional influences (missionary, Indochina wars, internal colonization). In governmental discourses, the ethnic cultures are over-simplified as being “backwards” and anti-education. While colonization usually refers to Western imperialism, for the case of Vietnam Central Highlanders, it is the mass migration of the Kinh (the Vietnam ethnic majority) after 1975, making the Central Highlanders minorities in their own land. Modern Central Highlanders express their resistance to the “internal colonialism” project of the Vietnam government through isolation and Christianity conversion (Grant, 1992; Saleminck, 2015)

Bahnar people - my focus research community - is a Catholic indigenous, ethnic minority group situated mostly in Kon Tum province of Vietnam Central Highland. This article is drawn from ethnographic data living in a Bahnar village and in-depth interviews with the Bahnar students, parents, church sisters and fathers. During the fieldwork, I travel between Bahnar villages, participate in Church’s youth initiatives and engage in village daily activities. Living in a contested space between indigenous village, public school and Catholic church, Bahnar youth express their aspiration by producing decolonial imaginaries.

By engaging with the Catholic spaces, Bahnar youth are empowered to create decolonial aspirations. One that reimagines their identity as indigenous Central Highlanders or as an ethnic minority group. Bahnar youth’s decolonial aspirations is not to relive the indigenous life of two hundred years ago. Sometimes, they trouble older generations in the village for keeping the tradition and not adapting to the societal transformation. They actively engage with Church initiatives in seeking for economic, social and cultural capital to actualize aspirations. They aspire for revitalization of dignity to prove to the Kinh that they are equal. At the core of Bahnar youth’s decolonial imaginary is the desire for upward social mobility.

Keywords: Southeast Asia Massif, aspiration, decolonial imaginary, youth

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Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies: Different Perspectives and Approaches

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Abstract

There is a long history of efforts to decolonize Southeast Asian Studies. However, the positionalities and geographical locations of scholars has variously influenced perspectives and approaches. In the United States, for example, the emphasis has often been on increasing the representation of scholars from Southeast Asia in faculty positions associated with Southeast Asian Studies. However, in parts of Asia, the boundaries between the countries included in the region and those not included has sometimes been more of the focus. For example, West Papua is included in Southeast Asia because it is in the nation state of Indonesia, while Papua New Guinea, which is directly adjacent to it, is not considered to be in Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia, there are also those who advocate for more emphasis on increasing the voices of Indigenous Peoples and other marginalized minorities regarding Southeast Asian Studies, as an emphasis on nation states has tended to marginalize various groups. There are also those who question the national, provincial and district boundaries in the region, since they were often manufactured during a time of European colonial occupation or were emphasized by majority ethnic groups. There are also those who focus on interrogating how those in Southeast Asian Studies produce and privilege certain forms of knowledge over others. For example, historians tend to prioritize written texts produced by the elite over oral accounts from more marginalized groups. Still, there are some who focus on using translation to decolonize Southeast Asian Studies, while others work on finding ways to represent the voices of marginalized people in archival collections and in public museum displays. Still, some are focused on promoting Indigenous language revitalization and teaching, while others have questioned the languages used to produce knowledge regarding Southeast Asian Studies. Indeed, there are a wide range of perspectives and approaches to thinking about and addressing the decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies. In this paper, I review some of these, with the goal of illuminating the landscape of possibilities associated with the decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies. I ultimately argue that there are a wide range of ways that scholars can contribute to the decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies, and that it is important to adopt a variety of approaches and perspectives to effectively do so.

Keywords: Decolonization; Southeast Asia; diversity

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Discombobulation and Dispersion: Settlement Models and Responses in 20th Century Asian America

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Abstract

This paper examines continuities in etic approaches to resettlement policies dealing with Asian American communities in 20th century America. It examines the logic behind the resettlement of formerly interned Japanese Americans after World War II and its replication when sponsoring Southeast Asians out of refugee camps in the United States following the Vietnam War. I then examine emic responses to such policies, with a focus on Vietnamese American secondary migration and community formations, triangulating domestic and transnational mobilities and networks. I argue that Asian American subjectivities have been in part shaped by spectral histories and experiences of exclusion and displacement. This unmoored and comparative lens offers new insight into the complex trajectories and orientations of Asian American aspirations and adaptations.

Keywords: Mobility, Asian America, Refugees, Resettlement, Dispersion

Panel: Outside Looking Across the Scholarly Borderlands: Perspectives from the Field of Southeast Asian American Studies

Samuel K. Tan and His Role in Decolonizing Philippine Muslim Historiography

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Abstract

For centuries, Filipino Muslims were depicted as villains in Philippine historiography. It is of no wonder since most of the sources produced during the Spanish colonial period were written either by friar-missionaries or civil authorities who viewed the Muslims either as antithetic to Christianity or as opponents to the Spanish domination of the Philippine Archipelago. Piles of chronicles, government reports, and other colonial narratives equivocally condemn the Muslims in the Philippines as bloodthirsty individuals whose main goal is to wreak havoc on Spanish colonial coastal communities in Luzon and Visayas. While the trend of vilifying the Muslims in the Philippines continued during the early years of American occupation of the archipelago, attempts were made by scholars to offer new perspectives on Muslim historiography. Among its trailblazers was Najeeb Saleeby, who utilized the tarsilas in understanding the history of Sulu. Meanwhile, post-independence scholars like Cesar Adib Majul offered a new perspective aligning the struggles of the Muslims in the Philippines to the wider fight of the Muslims in Southeast Asia against the grip of colonialism. While many historians took part in rewriting Filipino Muslim history, Samuel K. Tan’s corpus of works offers a distinct outlook on how to reinterpret their history. As an attempt to decolonize Philippine Muslim historiography, Tan embarked on the challenge of understanding indigenous sources like Jawi—the native script used by the major ethnic groups in Muslim Mindanao—as well as their oral literature to have a better awareness and appreciation of their culture, tradition, and point of view. His ‘tri-sectoral paradigm’ approach to writing Philippine history is an attempt to showcase how the three major groups in the country—the Christians, the Muslims, and the Lumads—worked hand in hand in shaping the destiny of the country’s shared history.

Keywords: Filipino Muslim History, Philippine Historiography, Decolonization of Philippine History

The Paradox of Decolonizing Art History in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This paper explores the complex dynamics of decolonizing art history in Southeast Asia, a region where rich indigenous artistic traditions intersect with profound colonial legacies. While efforts to reclaim pre-colonial narratives and aesthetic practices have gained momentum, the process remains fraught with contradictions. The paradox lies in the inherent tension between reclaiming pre-colonial cultural identities and acknowledging the lasting influence of colonial frameworks on contemporary art discourse. This paper provides a theorizing framework that considers decolonization as an inherently difficult task, due to the inescapable presence of colonial histories and elements embedded in the region's artistic and cultural landscape. It argues that completely disentangling these influences is virtually impossible, as both the past and the present are intertwined with colonial legacies that shape the ways in which art is perceived, produced, and studied.

By examining case studies from across Southeast Asia, this paper highlights how regional art history navigates between resisting Western-centric models and the challenge of constructing a cohesive regional identity that reflects both indigenous traditions and colonial residues. Furthermore, it critically examines the role of museums, academia, and cultural institutions in shaping and perpetuating postcolonial hierarchies, often unintentionally reinforcing the very structures they seek to deconstruct.

Ultimately, this paper calls for a nuanced approach to decolonization, one that embraces the complexities and contradictions inherent in the process. Rather than attempting to erase or ignore colonial influences, it advocates for a reinterpreted history that acknowledges the region's diverse and evolving artistic landscape while carefully engaging with the unresolved legacies of colonialism. The path forward, therefore, involves both reclaiming indigenous histories and critically examining how colonial pasts continue to shape contemporary art and cultural practices. *(275 words)*

Keywords: art history, Southeast Asia, art making, decoloniality, eurocentricity

Excavating Silences: Myanmar Archaeology through a Gender-Conscious Approach

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Abstract

This paper examines the challenges of recovering the voices of Myanmar women archaeologists, and argues that this task is central to the broader project of decolonizing Myanmar archaeology. Existing histories of the field focus almost exclusively on foreign, male scholars. During the colonial period, figures working under the British administration and later members of the École française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO) shaped the study of Myanmar's past through colonial frameworks. These scholars prioritized imperial interests, often neglecting the contributions of local practitioners and systematically excluding women from the historical record. This erasure is not simply a matter of missing data but reflects the intersection of colonial knowledge production and gendered social hierarchies within Myanmar. The scarcity of documentation on women's involvement in archaeology before the twenty-first century illustrates how colonialism and patriarchy have jointly shaped whose voices are preserved and valued. In this paper, we draw from Burmese, French, and English-language scholarship to critically examine how colonial and gendered dynamics have structured the historiography of Myanmar archaeology. While recent studies have addressed the colonial legacies of the discipline, few have interrogated how these legacies intersect with gender to determine whose contributions are remembered. By bringing together sources across languages and traditions, this study addresses a significant gap in the literature. We argue that tracing Myanmar women archaeologists' contributions is not a peripheral concern but a necessary intervention for decolonizing the field. This work shows how recovering marginalized voices reveals deeper structures of exclusion and challenges dominant narratives about Myanmar's archaeological past. Ultimately, this paper advocates for a gender-conscious, decolonial methodology that offers a more inclusive and accurate understanding of Myanmar's archaeological history.

Keywords:

Gender-conscious approach, voicescape, Myanmar archaeology, decolonization

Before Film, Beyond Language: Setan Jawa and the Limits of Categories

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Abstract

This article studies the film *Setan Jawa* (Nugroho, 2017), which draws from *wayang kulit*, Javanese dance traditions, and early German silent film, as a site that unsettles linear and evolutionary frameworks in which language and film are typically placed. Rather than understanding it as a "silent movie," the film is approached as a ground of non-verbal embodied expressive practice. Based on scene-specific analysis and interviews/conversations with dance practitioners—both contributors to the film, as well as members of the broader community of dance practitioners and educators unaffiliated with the production—this study posits non-verbal expression as a form of situated epistemic practice. It foregrounds how *Setan Jawa* resists logocentric models of knowledge and disrupts colonial, technocentric film history, not through didactic critique, but through the deliberate assemblage of expressive traditions that speak *other-wise*. The discussion emerges from the film itself, allowing its structural logic to inform analysis. By doing so, this article contributes to broader conversations and efforts in decolonial and pluriversal approaches, emphasizing practice as a source of knowledge that precedes and exceeds dominant categories.

Keywords: *Setan Jawa*, Southeast Asian film, nonverbal expression

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

**Animals don't look at maps: how cattle mobility and
sanitary purity define an area**

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Abstract

Challenging, first, the notion of Southeast Asia as a fixed geographical or political unit, this paper examines the region as a dynamic space, an assemblage co-constituted by flows of humans, animals, commodities, and ecological interactions. Taking 'hot-fresh meat' areas, where cultural practices and tastes prioritize the consumption of freshly slaughtered ('hot fresh') beef, as a case study, the paper follows live cattle journeys to explore how cross border livestock movements constitute and shape these 'area' dynamics. This includes the infrastructure and material conditions required to sustain the animals' lives, as well as multi species interactions revolving around health regulations, protection, and care. Secondly, while veterinary health researchers have been mapping cattle flows across the region, this paper challenges the utilitarian use of such maps and encourages anthropological inquiry beyond the map. It engages with the immediate human counterparts of the cattle, including traders, veterinarians, hay providers, truck drivers, local officials, and owners of fattening stations. Such inquiry moves beyond static maps to interrogate the socio-political and ecological processes that create and transform these routes. By centering human-animal interactions during these long journeys, the study brings attention to relational dynamics often overlooked. These narratives, it argues, emphasize Southeast Asia as a shared, multispecies space shaped by intersecting flows and relations rather than as a discrete, human-defined area.

Unveiling the ‘Footnotes in History’: How History Courses¹ Act as Catalysts for Decentering and Decolonization

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Abstract

This paper foregrounds the andragogical significance of two niche courses of University of the Philippines Baguio: History 3 (History of Philippine Ethnic Minorities) and History 119 (Comparative History of Ethnic Minorities in Southeast Asia) as critical interventions within the academic curriculum of the university. These courses continuously serve as intellectual and ethical commitments to rethinking the place of ethnic minorities and Indigenous Peoples within Philippine and Southeast Asian histories. Situated within the periphery and located in the northern Philippine highlands, an area long inhabited by Indigenous communities, these courses constitute avenues for critically engaging the multi-layered histories, contemporary struggles, and enduring contributions of these often-marginalized groups.

Through the exploration of collective identities, socio-political formations, and historical encounters with colonial and postcolonial state-making projects, both courses interrogate how ethnic minorities and Indigenous communities have navigated pressures of assimilation, integration, and the violence of so-called ‘development.’ By unsettling dominant historical narratives, often written from the vantage point of land-based and urban-centric perspectives, the curriculum fosters a decolonial lens that re-centers the interconnectedness of peoples, Indigenous agency and everyday acts/forms of resistances, and contemporary knowledge systems and practices.

This paper contends that the inclusion and sustained development of these courses are vital for reshaping historical scholarship within the national university and beyond. They constitute acts of epistemic resistance which challenges Anglo-American theoretical dominance and the internal coloniality perpetuated by majority groups’ historiographical traditions. In embracing an andragogy grounded in Indigenous perspectives, these courses not only enrich our historical understanding but also contribute to building a more pluralistic, critically engaged, and socially responsive academic environment. Ultimately, the institutionalization of History 3 and History 119 marks a transformative step toward a more inclusive historical imagination, one that affirms the multiplicity of pasts and amplifies the voices of those long silenced in the telling of Philippine and Southeast Asian histories.

Keywords: History 3, History 119, Decolonization, Decentering, Philippines, and Southeast Asian Histories

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies: Beyond Positionality. The Case of Syncretic Religions

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Abstract

There is a stark contrast between the broad consensus on the need to decolonize Southeast Asia studies and what it means for Southeast Asia studies to be colonized. Arguably, in the absence of clarity on the latter, the former cannot be accomplished. Current postcolonial thought still relies to a large degree on the Saidian analysis, inspired by Foucault, of how Western scholarship has misconstrued non-Western cultures. Said's admonition for humanities scholars to "dissolve Blake's mind-forg'd manacles" is nothing less than a call for scholars to cultivate a consciousness of the colonial legacies of their respective disciplines. Overcoming orientalism is possible only by shedding the power structures that underlie it. Today this is addressed through the problem of positionality. By means of a concrete example from Javanese Studies, I argue that the Saidian analysis falls short of its inherent ambition: to decolonize the study of non-Western cultures. Colonial scholarship regarded phenomena such as syncretic Javanese Islam as expressions of a low state of civilizational development. However, more contemporary postcolonial redescrptions do not remedy the cognitive dissonance inherent to this notion of a syncretic religion. This is the result of the reductionist focus on power structures and positionality. Instead, we should look at orientalist scholarship as exactly that: as scholarship; as Western scholarship on non-Western cultures. Focus should be on the investigation of the pre-theoretical notions upon which it relies. These are the uninvestigated common-sense notions that guide the descriptions and understanding of both the West and the non-West. By tracing these notions to their Western cultural origin, we can clarify their embeddedness in Western culture and why they misrepresent non-Western cultures. In the process, we obtain greater clarity on what it means for Southeast Asian Studies to be colonized and decolonised.

Keywords: Orientalism; Decolonization; Positionality; Javanese Studies; Religious Syncretism; Experiential Entity

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Confluence as Decolonial Practice: Reimagining Exhibition-Making Process in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

This research investigates the potential of experimental, process-based exhibitions and collaborative curatorial projects to contribute to the decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies. Centered on the case study of *Confluence*, an artist-run initiative that foregrounds dialogic, situated, and reflexive curatorial practices, the study challenges hierarchical and exclusionary frameworks that have historically shaped art production and presentation in the region. By decentralizing curatorial authority, embracing multiplicity and ambivalence, and prioritizing process over product, *Confluence* unsettles conventional roles of curator, artist, and critic through shared authorship and relational ethics. The project highlights the complexities and tensions inherent in equitable collaboration, emphasizing ongoing labor, care, and ethical negotiation rather than fixed outcomes. Engaging with local contexts and indigenous knowledge, the study proposes an ethos of co-presence and mutual accountability that resists universal models and embraces uncertainty as a space for generative learning. Ultimately, this research frames experimental exhibitions as living conversations—dynamic sites of decolonial resistance, cultural reclamation, and plural futures within Southeast Asian art and scholarship.

Keywords: Decolonial Curatorial Practice, Collaborative Curation, Alternative Practice, Confluence

Decolonial Discourses and the Islamization of Knowledge Project in Malaysia

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Abstract

Walter Mignolo once praised the work of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, claiming that his calls for Islamization of Knowledge was part of the collective global project of modernity/decoloniality (2011). However, the ideas and writings of Naquib al-Attas have generally not been critically examined by decolonial scholars, including Mignolo himself. In this paper, I examine Naquib al-Attas’s Islamization of Knowledge project, which has sought to dewesternize knowledge production in Malaysia through inspiring an epistemological revolution since the 1970s. I analyze some of the key texts associated with his efforts to dewesternize knowledge and develop Malay Muslim historiography, such as *Islam and Secularism* (1978), *Preliminary Statement on a General Theory of the Islamization of the Malay-Indonesian Archipelago* (1969), and *Historical Fact and Fiction* (2011). I argue that the decolonial aspirations of this project has simultaneously promoted an ethno-nationalist and exclusivist version of Malaysian history, a feature which is often overlooked by Western scholars engaging with Naquib Al-Attas. I seek to highlight these tensions by bringing the work of the Islamization of Knowledge project in dialogue with mainstream decolonial scholarship, and also alternative decolonial discourses in Malaysia such as Syed Hussein Alatas’s *School of Autonomous Knowledge*. As such, the Islamization of Knowledge project highlights the epistemic challenges which have been undertheorized by scholars seeking to ‘decolonize’ fields and disciplines, including Southeast Asian studies. For instance, there is a need for more nuanced and multi-faceted way of categorizing and analyzing decolonial discourses which critique Western imperialism through the lens of ethno-nationalism and majoritarian politics. Decolonial scholars in this region have to develop conceptual tools for identifying and critiquing reactionary decolonial discourses, while still articulating an alternative to Euro-American systems of coloniality.

Keywords: Islamization of Knowledge, Malaysia, Autonomous Knowledge, Malay Historiography

Bundok Promises: Drawing In Decolonization by Troubling Colonial Photography

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Abstract

Colonial photography is cartographic violence wherein the natives are displayed and posed in a way to justify the incursion into their lands as well as to exhibit the necessity of pacification and education of the colonial subjects. In the colonial archives, the vassal state is entrenched. Archives are vital to today's global structures of ongoing violent resource extraction. This paper discusses arts-based research weaving through archival photographs of Colonial Philippines and to “trouble” them as an artistic act of transgressions, that is transgressing “ownership” of the images as well as to emerge a different way of engaging the archive, which, I argue, are moments of decolonization. Drawing is a lingering way of thinking: “Thinking within the drawing process is thinking with oneself and with the subject being drawn (Kashanipour, 2021, 4).” This implicates me as both artist and as legacy of a colonial subject. In a way, this arts-based research is a means for me not to reclaim the images (for reclaiming situates a possession to which I have no business nor interest) but to recalibrate them in a sense of a tropical lushness unapologetic of its wildness. “Boondock” entered the colonial lexicon when American soldiers in the late 1890s to 1900s were chasing Filipino rebels who went up the “Bundok” or mountains, which now have connotations of hinterland. Bundok is refusal and a promise of struggle and defiance. Bundok becomes a methodology to desecrate colonial mythmaking of the insistence on the other as incapable and an inconvenience that needed tutelage. What the colonial powers tried to capture in their lens of authority and possession, this artist adds layers of images of changing the photograph itself, scribbled lines of whispered prayers and incantations of anger, strength, and visions of historical foment as irruptions on to the very colonial image itself.

Keywords: Arts-based research, archives, Philippines, Palimpsest, Drawing

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

**Diasporic Indigeneity in the United States, or, I Am An Igorot or A Moro,
but NOT Filipino**

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Abstract

The Igorot (northern “tribes” from the Cordillera Region of the Philippines) and Moro (Islamized “tribes” of Southern Philippines) are a growing community in California, with many of them opting to identify, first, with their ethnic identity, then their racialize identity, before they identify as “Filipino.” These communities “came” to the United States as part of the various World’s Fairs that occurred throughout the country and later, resettled after being part of the various human zoos. With a growing discrimination from Filipino Americans against these communities – from seeing them as perpetually suspended in time and space, to being not considered “Filipino,” - I raise the question of where do Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines in diaspora fit in “Filipino American” ethno-racial identity?

Keywords: Indigenous, Indigeneity, Philippines, Igorot, Moro

Panel: Outside Looking In - Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Mutual Recursion: Decolonial Scholarship and Anti-Imperialist Campaigns in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

The decolonial turn has achieved a number of significant things, such as the rethinking of Western ethical and philosophical foundations, the reorganization of academic disciplines to prioritize ethnic and racial minorities, and the reevaluation of Oriental systems of thought. It has also facilitated the repatriation of material culture, enabling physical and spiritual reconnections and the reparations that financially compensate the aggrieved. However, it has also been criticized for what Ramón Grosfoguel calls “epistemic extractivism,” wherein the Others’ ideas are stolen to further accumulate social, cultural, and, hence, economic capital that buttresses the Global North’s dominance in global intellectual production. There is also a tendency for decolonization to be just “a metaphor,” according to Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, leading to its cooptation by dominant interests that are injurious to the historically oppressed.

It is only sensible that we explore and examine two critical and related concerns: the tenability of Southeast Asian Studies by Southeast Asians in Southeast Asia and the actual linkages of decolonial efforts with social movements resisting neocolonialism. The first is a serious effort to shift the geography of scholarly endeavor, emphasizing the connections between location, identity, and the validity of knowledge. The second one reaffirms the basic principle of interpreting the world for the purpose of changing it. Decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies can genuinely progress by braiding Southeast Asian peoples’ intellectual production with the struggle for equality, justice, and peace.

Keywords: decoloniality, knowledge-production, Southeast Asia, anti-imperialism, social movements

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“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Imaginary Decolonization: Seapunk & The Search for Authentic Southeast Asian Solarpunk Futures

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Abstract

What are the loci of decolonization, and where are we decolonizing from (and towards)?

Decolonization spans many loci: political, institutional, academic, economic, cultural, societal, territorial, and more. This paper suggests the realm of the “imaginary” as a fundamental yet underappreciated loci of decolonization, and proposes that “imaginary” questions of how people envision themselves, their agency, and their futures should be considered critical foremost frontiers for any serious decolonization m.

Drawing inspiration from the recent Seapunk research-and-imagination movement – characterized by “a search for fresh and authentic Southeast Asian solarpunk futures” – this paper offers the four key root reimaginings from Seapunk’s inaugural symposium as four foundational vectors of imaginary decolonization: (1) living with, instead of over, the world, (2) small sovereignty enabled by big commons, (3) synthesizing science and spirituality towards an ethic of stewardship, and (4) reimagining the relationships between the urban, rural, cosmo-, and local towards fresh forms of “future indigenous” living.

Each of these four vectors is then explored in this paper, accompanied by analysis of historical context, present predicaments, and future horizons across various regional events and encounters. Contemporary colonial legacies are considered alongside fictional futures (from across many Southeast Asian visionaries, experiments, theories, and movements) to illustrate what bold and innovative Southeast Asian imaginary decolonization might look like across the region.

Keywords: Seapunk, Solarpunk, Futures, Cosmo-local, Rurban, Imaginary, Commons, Indigenous

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Nonaligned Aesthetics: On Contemporary Vietnamese Art & Afro-Asian Diaspora

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Abstract

Scholars like Lisa Yoneyama, Kuan-Hsing Chen, and Heonik Kwon have argued that the Cold War arrested the decolonization project in Asia and the Pacific. Pulling from their arguments, my ongoing book project argues that aesthetics is a vital arena in which arrested decolonization is re-imagined and pursued especially as it relates to global Southeast Asian diaspora. Rather than attempt to offer a comprehensive account of Southeast Asian aesthetics, my paper focuses on the art practice of contemporary Vietnamese artist Tuan Andrew Nguyen and how his work pries open new means of approaching and theorizing decolonization.

I analyze Nguyen’s traveling exhibition of two short film installations, *The Specter of Ancestors Becoming* and *Because No One Living Will Listen*. Exhibited at the New Museum in New York City in 2023, both films examine the lingering afterlives of war, family, and colonialism through the eyes of Afro-Asian diasporic people. Specifically, *The Specter of Ancestors Becoming* presents some experiences of mixed-race Vietnamese and Senegalese peoples living in Senegal, and *Because No One Living Will Listen* examines the experiences of mixed-race Vietnamese and Moroccan peoples living in Vietnam. Since its exhibition in New York, these films have since been shown in Spain, Senegal, and South Africa.

Rather than interpret Nguyen’s mobilization of Afro-Asian experiences through the spirit of Bandung, I locate his work as a mobilization of nonaligned aesthetics. I approach nonalignment through aesthetics to conceptualize how contemporary Vietnamese artists can be read as reconceptualizing nonalignment as both a political project stemming from nation-based critiques of Cold War polarities and a diasporic imperative for a decolonized future. Thus, my paper draws from postcolonial theory, critical race studies, global Asias, and feminist studies to analyze how Nguyen’s work advances a decolonizing vision by following Afro-Asian connections that exceed state-determined approaches to nonalignment.

Keywords: nonalignment, aesthetics, Afro-Asian diaspora, contemporary art, Vietnam

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Thai American Oral History Project – Youth Empowerment through Heritage Language Learning

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Abstract

The Thai American Oral History Project began in 2023 in the Chicagoland area and aims to empower Thai American Youths through heritage language education/maintenance and through intergenerational interactions. The project has also illuminated the process in which a majority group becomes minoritized through migration, settlement, racialization, and diasporization. Through the collection of oral histories, the Thai teens are improving their own language abilities, contributing to knowledge making about their own communities all while learning more about the socio-historical contexts that led their families to leave Thailand and in which the Thai American communities were built in the United States.

Keywords: Thai History, Diaspora, Oral History, Youth Empowerment, Heritage Language

Panel: Outside Looking Across the Scholarly Borderlands: Perspectives from the Field of Southeast Asian American Studies

Can We Decolonize the so-called Non-Colonized Thailand?: A view from Thai-Cambodian Borderland

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Abstract

Thailand and Thai studies have been ambiguously discussed in the scholarship of decolonization. Especially in the realm of Southeast Asian Studies, decolonization has been mostly reserved for the colonizer vis-à-vis the former colonized states. “Thailand has never been colonized” can be found in the national narrative with the sense of pride and exceptionalism. It has been embedded in Thai society and turned into a common reaction of Thai people upon hearing the word ‘colony’ (ananikhom) that is of something that happened in the past, long-gone and irrelevant to Thailand. Although scholars of Thai studies and Southeast Asian studies have already discussed in the postcolonial studies and offered multiple terms such as pseudo-, semi-, crypto-, internal colonialism to explain the colonial condition of Siam. In this study, I employ decolonial thinking from the perspective of Phnom Dangrek, a Thai-Cambodian border by juxtaposing the postcolonial history of Thailand and Cambodia to portray how colonialism confused and eventually blocked the pre-colonial relations of the border dwellers between the Korat plateau and the Khmer lower plain. Combining with the term “internal colonialism” and Cold War studies, I explored the relationship and the split of ethnic Khmer in Thailand Cambodia in the context of the Third Indochina War. The findings of this study invite scholars of Southeast Asian Studies to include Thailand in the scholarship of decolonization through the studies of colonial roots of border and war remnants in the form of landscape changes and memories of those affected by war. Yet Can we decolonize the so-called non-colonized Thailand? This question remains challenging and requires further discussion in order to not fall into a trap of metaphorizing decolonization, rather than an actual movement.

Keywords: Thailand-Cambodia, Third Indochina War, Phnom Dangrek, internal colonialism

Navigating Malaysia’s Fragmented Frontiers: Converging Human-Primate Interfaces, Primatology, and the Plantation Economy

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Do not circulate working paper draft without the author’s permission

Abstract:

Through state and industry-led development activities such as urban expansion, government officials, land developers, scientists, and plantation farmers actively drive shifting ecological relations and power dynamics in Southeast Asia’s landscapes, rife with uneven multispecies interfaces (Govindrajan 2018, Paredes 2023). In contemporary Malaysia, state officials and property developers form a series of public-private partnerships, often to designate forested land for urban expansion while displacing free-ranging primates. State and corporate actors unevenly experiment with landscapes as testing grounds for improvisational developmental logics of hybridized Islamic-Malay and Neo-Confucian values in Malaysian state capitalism (Ong 2000, Gomez & Sundaram 1999). Through my ethnographic fieldwork, I explore how primatologists, urban residents, and property developers address local human-primate interactions as political responses to Malaysia’s state conservationist management. I critically examine these interfaces where development activities are forcing contentious human-primate encounters as situated modes of ethical practices that content, mediate, or push back against state politics of Malaysian governance (Zawawi Ibrahim 1998). I argue that the political management of primate behavioral data processes becomes a novel site of interspecies experimentation — one that negotiates the contemporary tensions of governance over primates and property development. Urban development has produced new contact zones between human communities and free-ranging primates, making interspecies encounters also a site for new experiments in social relations amongst local ethnic groups (Chao 2022, Salazar Parreñas 2018, Yeoh 2019). Tracing Malaysia’s ongoing ecological relations and landscapes, I show that rather than being fixed historical developments or extractivist spaces of colonial knowledge production, they are active sites where unequal multispecies interfaces give way to unexpected kinds of interspecies relational ethics, all in relation to state conceptions of land and livelihood management (Maniam 1996, Lala et al 2015). Overall, I unsettle the colonial notion of Malaysian land management shunting ethnic differences as sharp demarcated and static bundles of spatial relations.

Keywords: Anthropology of Capitalism, multispecies theory, Primatology, plantation studies, peri-urban ecologies

What Sexualities Are And What Do Sexualities Do? An Indigenous Understanding And Experiences Of Sexualities In Timor-Leste

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Abstract

Although Timor-Leste is one of the most tolerant countries towards the LGBT (LGBT is a short umbrella term of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community in Southeast Asia, discrimination and violence against them are still prevalent. Anti-LGBT believers of Timor-Leste have opposed LGBT rights with a fundamentalist claim of culture and religion, stating that there was no sexual diversity before the colonizers came. From a social constructivist perspective of sexuality, which sees that sexuality is a human creation in contingency with cultural and historical contexts, this article challenges the fundamentalist ontology by problematizing the categorized sexuality and the logic of “heteronormativity”, that is, the normalization of heterosexual sexual orientation, in the context of colonialism. It uses in-depth interviews and participant observation methods, including interviews with 41 LGBT community members aged 18-65 as well as 15 elders from 14 municipalities of Timor-Leste, based on snowball sampling. It contributes to recovering the under-documented and under-researched Indigenous unique and complex understanding and experiences of sexuality and gender in Timor-Leste, which was not fully suppressed by colonial rule. It further suggests that sexuality is an alternative form of resistance and resurgence of Indigenous Timorese against continuous suppression of colonialism and nationalism.

Keywords: LGBT, Timor-Leste, sexuality, gender

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“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

On the Tragedy of Cambodian Historiography

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Abstract

One cannot read or write about Cambodia without encountering David Chandler’s *A History of Cambodia* or *The Tragedy of Cambodian History*. In these texts, Chandler engages an explicit narrative emplotment of Cambodian history as tragedy, linking Cambodia’s fate to its location between Vietnam and Thailand and to unique and long-standing Cambodian cultural characteristics and a particularly Cambodian psyche. Although critiques of static Cambodian historical frameworks exist, and although Chandler himself becomes more measured in later editions of his foundational texts, “tragedy” remains the predominant frame of reference in understandings of Cambodia, overdetermining and undermining the speculative pasts and futures we might tell and foresee.

Reading “the tragedy of Cambodian history” as analytical site for the decolonization of Southeast Asian Studies, this paper draws upon an extended meditation on Cold War Orientalism and David Scott’s discussion of historical emplotment, tragedy, colonial modernity, and the Haitian Revolution. Addressing the largely opaque and unmarked logics that come to structure the historical record and condition the contours of historical narrative, I hope to unsettle the commonsense slippage of Cambodia and tragedy in mainstream accounts. Positioning Cambodian historiography instead as tragedy—and identifying the tragedy here as coloniality rather than Cambodian culture—in this paper, I analyze how unmarked investments in liberal modernity conscript Southeast Asian subjects into dominant histories, binding these subjects to a predetermined failure in the past, present and far into the future.

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“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Decolonizing Historical Knowledge in the Philippines: Local History as Critique

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Abstract

In Philippine historiography, the emergence of local history as a field of interest and a discipline of study stemmed from efforts to enrich national history (Mojares 1989; 1997) and/or to reclaim identities (Florendo 2003; 2015; 2018). This paper attempts to build a usable historical framework utilizing local history as a way of critique to national history. Earlier attempts to decolonize historical knowledge in the Philippines began with the emergence of nationalist historiography during the postcolonial period (Agoncillo and Alfonso 1960; Constantino 1975; Salazar 1991) yet issues and questions (Guillermo 2003; Claudio 2013; 2017) arise from these frameworks. The framework I am interested to build hopes not only to construct and reconstruct but also deconstruct narratives for the purpose of forwarding an option or alternative in relation to the process of decolonizing historical knowledge. Considering how nation-states are imperial artifacts in the context of Southeast Asia (Aydin et al. 2022), and how they tend to carry such an imperialistic nature of silencing the voices from the margins or peripheries, I suggest how the study of local histories can be a way of both liberation and rediscovery of lost narratives and identity as part of/or in connection to the decolonization process in the Philippines. First, I hope to raise and shape this framework from critiques of how national history is interpreted, read, and written in the postcolonial period. Second, I look at how the historiography from local history perspectives establish relationships or converse with national history. Third and last, I look at how local history can serve as a decolonial framework in such processes and projects. In building this framework within the Philippine context, this paper hopes to contribute to ways of theorizing and building decolonial-historical frameworks and methodologies in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: local history, historiography, Philippines, autonomous, Asia as Method

Decolonizing Democracy in the Bangsamoro: Advancing Appreciative Inquiry as a Theoretical Framework on Muslim Governance in the Philippines

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Abstract

This paper advances appreciate inquiry as a theoretical lens to examine Muslim governance in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines. Challenging the dominant narrative that portrays Islam and democracy as inherently incompatible, it argues that the Bangsamoro’s evolving framework of moral governance exemplifies a decolonial democratic practice grounded in Islamic values and Indigenous epistemologies. Rather than positioning participation, justice, and accountability as liberal constructs, the study foregrounds how these principles are interpreted as organic to the community’s moral and political traditions. By engaging appreciate inquiry, the paper shifts the analytical focus from deficit-based assessments to an exploration of community aspirations, cultural integrity, and locally grounded governance innovations. It situates the Bangsamoro experience within broader debates on decolonization, democratization, and epistemic justice, asserting that Muslim democracy in BARMM is not a divergence from democratic norms but a form of pluriversal politics. This reimagining of democracy from the Global South contributes to expanding theoretical frameworks and enriching comparative understandings of political legitimacy and self-determination.

Keywords: Muslim democracy, decolonization, Bangsamoro, moral governance, appreciative inquiry

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Southeast Asia: Regional Perspectives

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Abstract

Southeast Asia (SEA) is not only rich in multicultural diversity but also in multilingual nations, with a population of more than 624 million and over 1,253 languages (Ethnologue, 2015). Due to the cultural uniqueness of each country, this region adopts national languages in accordance with language planning and political management. However, this strategy poses challenges for SEA, potentially leading to conflicts among ethnic groups due to leadership disputes. Ethnic tensions in SEA remain a controversial issue between governments and minority groups, such as the conflict in Aceh, Indonesia, the Muslim population in southern Thailand, and the Bangsamoro in Mindanao, the Philippines.

This paper explores linguistic perspectives in SEA and examines two main issues. First, it investigates the concept of a linguistic area, which refers to a geographic zone where genetically unrelated languages share numerous linguistic structures due to prolonged interaction. SEA has been considered a linguistic area because its languages exhibit common features such as lexical tone, classifiers, serial verbs, verb-final structures, prepositions, and noun-adjective order. The region encompasses five major language families: Austronesian, Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai, and Hmong-Mien.

Second, this paper examines the process by which SEA nations select a single language as their national language. National languages play a crucial role in the education system, as evidenced by the adoption of Malay as the national language in multiple countries—Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore.

The research methodology applied in this paper is the comparative method, which aims to identify the linguistic features of SEA languages in terms of phonology, morphology, and grammar.

Keywords: Southeast Asia, Regional Perspectives

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Decolonizing Digital Literacy to Reinforce Democracy in the Age of Mis/Disinformation

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Abstract

In an era where digital connectivity has become ubiquitous, the spread of mis/disinformation poses a significant threat to democratic processes, including in non-Western democracies. This research project aims to decolonize approaches to digital literacy in Indonesia, focusing on how cultural values can serve as filters against mis/disinformation. By focusing on Indonesian cultural knowledge and practices, this study seeks to develop more effective and culturally resonant strategies for digital literacy, moving beyond Western-centric models. This research addresses a research question: How can Indonesian cultural values serve as filters against mis/disinformation? Methodologically, this research employs decolonial approaches, combining interviews with policy makers and community-based focus groups. Focus groups with housewives, key information mediators in Indonesian communities, will explore how cultural values inform their evaluation of online information. The focus groups also to ensure that local knowledge and practices are central to the research process. The findings from this research will contribute to the development of more effective strategies for combating mis/disinformation at the community level. By focusing on Indonesia's unique socio-cultural landscape, this study will contribute to a more inclusive understanding of digital literacy in postcolonial societies of Southeast Asia.

Keywords: digital literacy, misinformation, cultural values.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
“**DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES**”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Decolonizing as Restoring Relations: A view from Indigenous Studies

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Abstract

In this paper, I draw on Indigenous Studies scholarship, as largely centered on the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand, to identify additional pathways towards decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies. I further draw on my own work with Indigenous communities in Southeast Asia who are increasingly identifying in solidarity with other Indigenous Peoples the world over despite a general consensus that Southeast Asia is a post-colonial space where the global concept of Indigeneity is inapplicable. I argue that Indigenous Studies scholarship can help us better highlight and understand the ways in which colonialism in various forms continues to permeate the region and scholarship on the region. I also draw on Indigenous Studies scholarship to highlight potential pathways towards further decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies. I especially center my discussion on the principles and methods of guesthood and collaboration.

Keywords: Southeast Asia, Indigeneity, decolonization, relationality, guesthood, collaboration

Decolonizing Cold War Narratives: Takhli, American Military Base, and Societal Transformations

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Abstract

The conventional study of the Cold War predominantly concentrated on elite narratives encompassing diplomatic history and the domestic politics of Cold War nations. Many historical narratives have become increasingly dominated by the central perspectives rather than by local viewpoints. During the Cold War, the United States has contributed to the development of the Thai military, which permitted the use of seven Thai air bases to support US military forces and air operations in Indochina. Takhli Royal Thai Air Force Base underwent renovations starting in 1961 and hosted American forces from 1964 to 1971 and again from 1972 to 1974. The stationed military units comprised the 355 Tactical Fighter Wing. Takhli served as the primary station for American air forces in northern Thailand for operations in Vietnam. The presence of the US military has influenced economic mobility and altered the social and cultural landscape of regions hosting military bases. This circumstance has resulted in a substantial transformation of the economic and social environment in the vicinity of US military stations. Different structures had been erected to support and furnish services for the US military, including entertainment venues, hotels, movies, restaurants, and food establishments. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in employment for individuals working in military camps. Despite the abundance of imagery and interpretations derived from literature and theater, a thorough examination of the transformations in the physical, economic, and socio-cultural environments in Takhli is absent. Many discuss moral decline, primarily reflecting a viewpoint from central Bangkok. This study seeks to elucidate the collective memory of the Cold War period, particularly the establishment of the American military base, and its transformative impact on the Takhli District and its community, encompassing economic, social, and cultural changes that will decolonize the national narrative from the predominant discourse in Thai society.

Keywords: Cold War, U.S. military base, Takhli, collective memory

Decolonizing Historical Sources: Reviving Local Histories in Southeast Asia Through Genealogy

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Abstract

The colonial historiography of Southeast Asia is commonly based on European sources, which demonstrates a limited and partial perspective on the region and its societies. Besides, colonial records on Southeast Asian history often emphasize the perspective of colonial administrators while failing to reflect the social, cultural and familial dynamic of indigenous communities. In fact, many communities in Southeast Asia have their own way of keeping various types of historical sources such as genealogical records or family histories. This genealogy, mostly described in local chronicles such as Malay Annals (*Sulālat al-Salāṭīn*), Chronicle of the Kings of Pasai (*Hikayat Raja-Raja Pasai*), Chronicle of Java (*Babad Tanah Jawi*), Chronicle of Banjar (*Hikayat Banjar*) and others, is of important source in reconstructing and preserving the historical narratives of communities in the region. This article discusses the important role of genealogy in reviving and enriching local histories as a way of challenging the colonial narrative in Southeast Asia. Unlike the centralized narrative often shaped by colonial historiography, local histories focus the everyday lives of community and reflect the worldviews of Southeast Asian societies. Accordingly, reviving genealogy as a historical method is critical for decolonizing history of Southeast Asia since it focuses on the lived experiences of people rather than relying merely on colonial archives and official documents, which often distort the perspective of marginalized groups. Genealogy enables a more individualized and culturally nuanced understanding of history, emphasizing continuity, identity and the collective memory of a community.

Keywords: decolonizing, genealogy, local history

Isabelo de los Reyes, Revolutionary Ethnography, and the End of Spanish Colonial Rule in the Philippines

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Abstract

Ethnography and anthropology’s primary purpose in the Spanish colonial Philippines was conquest. The observations of Spanish officials, writers, and clergy like Antonio de Morga facilitated conquest through providing knowledge for engineers of control, objectifying ‘savage’ people in need of salvation, thus justifying colonization on economic and religious grounds. Though written prior to the institutionalization of ethnography or anthropology as sciences, Spanish ‘Philippine studies’ remained influential throughout the 19th century in shaping continued conquest and perception of the Philippines’ history, culture, and society, even among local educated elite (“ilustrados”). Nevertheless, the decolonization of “Philippine studies” is much older than the term “decolonization” itself. Educated Filipinos in the late Spanish colonial period (1872–1898) immersed themselves in European anthropological methods and networks and produced alternative ethnographic narratives about the Philippines in order to forward the cause of its liberation, responding directly to the existing Spanish canon and collaborating with allied European scholars and anthropological organizations. This effort toward new narratives about the Philippines formed the genesis of ‘Philippine studies’ and Filipino anthropology as a distinctly anti-colonial scientific discipline and gathered widespread support for reforms and eventual independence on the global stage.

This paper explores the work of one of the first Filipino anthropologists: the folklorist and labour organiser Isabelo de los Reyes, who pioneered the writing of anthropology as anticolonial propaganda. He wrote of his own province’s beliefs and practices, directly criticized corruption and Spanish imperialism, and argued for a rich multiplicity of Philippine histories and cultures in a budding independent nation. A close study of his work highlights Filipino anthropology’s genesis as a lived political praxis embedded in a liberatory movement against colonialism—a praxis that, in a neocolonial Southeast Asian present, scholars must learn from more than ever.

Keywords: Isabelo de los Reyes, Spanish colonial Philippines, anthropology, anti-colonialism

Female Islamic Scholars and the Decolonization of Religious Knowledge in Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

One of the key aspects of decolonizing religious knowledge is challenging the dominant narratives that have historically marginalized women's voices. For centuries, women's perspectives and spiritual insights have been excluded from religious spaces, perpetuating gender inequality and limiting their roles in interpreting sacred texts and exercising authority. This article underscores the importance of incorporating women's experiences and knowledge in religious knowledge production, particularly in the context of issuing fatwas (Islamic legal opinions).

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and employing gender and anthropological perspectives, this study examines how female Islamic scholars (ulama) decolonize religious knowledge through fatwa-making during the 2017 and 2022 Indonesian Congresses of Women Ulama. Their active participation in fatwa-making challenges male-dominated institutions, disrupting traditional norms and power structures within Islamic authority.

Moreover, female ulama present alternative approaches to fatwa-making by integrating women's lived experiences into the interpretation of Islamic texts. This stands in contrast to conventional methods that prioritize established male scholarship. By incorporating women's perspectives, they issue fatwas that address the specific needs of women, encouraging critical engagement with religious doctrines and uncovering patriarchal biases.

Beyond transforming religious practices, this process empowers women to exercise Islamic authority. Fatwas issued by female ulama also serve as tools for social change, as illustrated by the 2017 Congress's fatwa advocating for the amendment of Indonesia's Marriage Law to raise the minimum marriage age for women. This study further highlights how female Islamic scholars cultivate a community-based authority recognized through grassroots engagement, offering an alternative model of religious leadership that transcends institutionalized norms.

Ultimately, the experiences of female Islamic scholars from Southeast Asia—particularly Indonesia—challenge the narrow conception of Islam and Muslim women as predominantly Arab or Middle Eastern, expanding the understanding of Islamic scholarship.

Keywords: Indonesia, Female Islamic Authority, Women Ulama, Gender-sensitive fatwas,

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“**DECOLONIZING SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES**”
17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

What was Indochinese about the Indochina College of Fine Art? A Case Study in Decolonizing Southeast Asian Art History

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Abstract

If Indochina is a colonial construct, how can we deconstruct it and explore its decolonial condition? For this workshop, I propose to use the Ecole des beaux-arts de l'Indochine, or the Indochina College of Fine Art, as a case study for critically reflecting on the geographic and cultural boundaries of Indochina. In 2025, the school will be celebrating its 100th anniversary so it may be an opportune moment to rethink the impact that colonial art education had on indigenous art practices and art historical knowledge. In the field of Art History more generally, the process of decolonialism has meant decentering European art in favor of art from the global south. Some Southeast Asian scholars have also been taking an art historiographic approach in re-examining the colonial scholarship that led to the theorization of Southeast Asian art. I propose to combine both of these approaches in order to question the demographics of the school and consider the possibilities of a decolonial condition. This means deconstructing the geographic focus of the school, i.e. Indochina, a colonial construct, and its European curriculum, in order to interrogate its art historical legacy among Vietnamese, Cambodian and Laotian artists today. I also aim to understand whether Indochina in the context of the school also essentially was, as Christopher Goscha's assertion suggests, synonymous with being Vietnamese. The goal is not so much to propose dismissing the colonial art school paradigm altogether but rather to reconsider how the school has been accounted for in art histories of the region by scholars in and of Southeast Asia, and seek where alternative indigenous voices exist.

Keywords: Indochina, Art History, Vietnam

Decolonizing Catholicism : A Case Study of Museo de Intramuros, Philippines

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Abstract

This study investigates how museums can function as tools for decolonization by examining the case of the Museo de Intramuros in the Philippines. Through in-depth interviews and participant observation, the research explores how the museum’s storytelling and exhibitions challenge the conventional perception of Roman Catholicism as a purely colonial legacy. While Catholicism is often viewed as a religion imposed by Spanish colonizers, the museum recontextualizes it as a faith that has been shaped, adapted, and localized by Filipinos over time. By highlighting Filipino-produced religious art, Catholic fiestas, and narratives of cultural adaptation, the museum foregrounds Filipino agency in transforming Catholicism into an integral part of local culture. At the same time, it does not ignore the complex and sometimes violent history of colonization, including the erasure or modification of indigenous artistic expressions by friars.

Located in Manila’s historic Intramuros district, the museum frames evangelization not solely as colonization but as a dynamic contact zone between the Philippines and the West. Through this lens, Catholicism is presented as both a site of oppression and creativity, contestation and continuity. However, despite the decolonial potential of its content, the exhibition’s messages may not always be accessible to visitors without backgrounds in art or history. To enhance public understanding, the museum would benefit from more explicit interpretive tools, such as guiding questions or contextual signages that clearly communicate the dual narrative of suppression and agency.

Furthermore, while the content of the exhibition promotes a decolonized narrative, the exhibition-making process itself still reflects traditional, expert-driven curation. A truly decolonial approach should extend to the process by involving a wider range of voices, including local communities and cultural practitioners, in shaping how stories are told. This study suggests that decolonizing the museum is both a representational and participatory project still in progress.

Keywords: Decolonization, Museums, Catholicism, Philippines, Museo de Intramuros

Decolonizing the knowledge production of Southeast Asian ‘traditional’ architecture

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Abstract

This paper questions the knowledge production of traditional architecture in Southeast Asia. Colonialism viewed the Southeast Asian region from an orientalist perspective, assuming that Southeast Asia is traditional and lacks societal progress. As a result, they see local architecture as something passed on from generation to generation without any changes or progress. I will challenge this assumption by using Javanese 'traditional' architecture as a case study. Javanese architecture has been one of the most 'traditionalized' and romanticized forms of architecture in Southeast Asia. Colonial knowledge production was based on information produced by the royal court of Surakarta in the 19th century. This early knowledge has been passed down to the present, assuming that all the 'traditional' values have remained unchanged through the generations. Mainstream literature on Javanese 'traditional' architecture assumes that there are extensive rules to follow to be considered 'traditional.' I propose to decolonize this knowledge production by stopping the romanticization of the 'traditional' and examining Javanese architecture from a historical perspective. If we view Javanese architecture through a historical lens, we can see that there have been changes and new inventions in what is considered the idealized model of Javanese architecture: the kratons and noble houses. The kraton adopted foreign elements from both Western and Asian sources and invented new structures and ornaments. Meanwhile, some noble houses have used 'non-traditional' materials from the beginning. By examining Javanese architecture from a historical perspective, we can see that it is not as 'traditional' as assumed and is adaptive to changes and new challenges.

Keywords: decolonization, traditional architecture, historical perspective, Javanese architecture.

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From the Philippines to the Southeast Asia: Addressing Structural Epistemic Ignorance in Folk Knowledge as a Form of Decolonization

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Abstract

From 1945 to 1960, several movements of decolonization began to occur in different regions of the world. It has been the ongoing attempts of former colonized countries, especially in the Asian and African regions, to liberate their cultural, political, and even economic conditions from the influence of their colonizers. Since then, decolonization has taken different forms. It has extended to cultural preservation, political advocacies, economic policies, education, healthcare, and language. Given these general states of decolonization, it is still imperative to discourse regarding our perspectives on the matter. In this way, we can further assess and improve our existing practices of decolonization.

Each Southeast Asian country has been decolonizing studies about their own culture, politics, and economics. This paper generally aims to present how we can decolonize Southeast Asian studies. Its central point is to deliberate on the philosophical perspectives on decolonization, particularly on structural epistemic ignorance. To contribute to the region's decolonization movement, this paper will appraise the structural epistemic ignorance committed in relation to the folk knowledge or *Pilosopiya ng Masa* (Philosophy of the Masses) in the Philippines. We can apply the results of the analysis from the Philippine context to the Southeast Asian context. With that, the paper will provide recommendations on the decolonization of Southeast Asian studies to address the existing structural epistemic ignorance. It will generally consider the reorientation of the education system, acknowledgement of cultural and social changes in the region, and involvement of methodologies and participation from indigenous communities.

Keywords: Philippines, Filipino Philosophy, Folk Knowledge, Structural Epistemic Ignorance, Decolonization

Blind Spots in Decolonial Museology: Vietnam’s Museums and Minority Narratives

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Abstract

Decolonial museology has largely focused on Western countries due to their imperial legacies, but museums in Southeast Asia, such as those in Vietnam, also face challenges related to the decolonial process. Postcolonial museums in Vietnam require a decolonial approach to museology, though it often diverges significantly from European context.

This paper will explore how Vietnamese museums emphasize the country’s history as a victim of colonialism while overlooking its role as a conqueror of minority ethnic groups. For instance, the Museum of Cham Sculpture in Danang, previously known as Musée Henri Parmenier, highlights Cham culture but neglects the fact that the Cham were an empire eventually conquered by Vietnamese Le Dynasty. Similarly, both the Vietnam National Museum of History in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City History Museum integrate Cham culture into Vietnam’s national narrative, without addressing the historical conflicts with these minority groups. The post-colonial narratives in Vietnamese museums often portray Vietnam as both a victim and a victor, but not a colonizer. These stories subtly highlight Vietnam’s capacity to function as an empire, much like China and France, which once colonized Vietnam.

I argue that the decolonial process in Vietnamese museums is incomplete because it neglects Vietnam’s internal histories of colonization, particularly its relationship with ethnic minorities. By focusing solely on Vietnam as a victim of foreign powers, the current museum narratives fail to engage with the country’s internal history of conquest and domination. This paper seeks to uncover these blind spots and propose a more inclusive approach to decolonial museology within Vietnam. The research will analyze exhibitions and texts from key Vietnamese museums, exploring how their narratives can be reexamined to address these omissions.

Keywords: Decolonial Museology. Vietnam. Historical Narrative. Ethnic Minority.

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Counter Histories as Resistance: The Panglong Promises, Historical (Re)collections, and Ethnic Struggles in Myanmar

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of the critical period from 1945 to 1947 in Burma, marked by intense negotiations over independence and the involvement of ethnic minorities in pivotal events such as the Second Panglong Conference. The recollection of this period, as presented in centralized platforms such as school curricula and state speeches, continues to play a role in the disenfranchisement of the nation's minority populations. Simultaneously, the crafting of 'counter histories' by ethnic groups like the Shans, Kachins, Chins, and Karens has emerged in response to Burman domination, varying in methods, purposes, and platforms. By examining the formation and impact of these 'counter histories', this study highlights how these narratives serve as tools for resisting marginalization and questioning the dominant, Burman-centric post-colonial narrative of Myanmar. These counter histories challenge the simplified national storylines and shed light on the entanglement between ethnic identities and national politics. They underscore an ongoing struggle within the broader decolonization process in Myanmar, one that questions not only the narrative it presents but also whether it could be seen as an ongoing possibility for nationalist 'others.' This paper contributes to the field of decolonization studies by demonstrating how historical recollections from ethnic minority perspectives can help reimagine the boundaries and definitions of national history and identity in post-colonial settings.

Keywords: Panglong; Counter Histories; Burma; Ethnic Minorities

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Bahnar Youth’s Decolonial Aspiration: Engaging With The Church, Troubling The Village And Comparing With The Kinh

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Abstract:

Two hundred years ago, Vietnam’s Central Highlanders were independent tribal communities. Today, they face the legacy of internal colonization—particularly through mass Kinh migration after 1975—leaving them minorities in their own land. In state discourse, they are often portrayed as “backwards” and resistant to education. This article draws on ethnographic research in a Catholic Bahnar village in Kon Tum province, focusing on how Bahnar youth articulate decolonial aspirations within contested spaces between village, school, and church. Through participation in Catholic youth initiatives and everyday life, Bahnar youth do not seek a return to precolonial traditions, but reimagine their futures through Catholic values and networks. Their aspirations challenge generational expectations and state narratives, striving for dignity, education, and upward mobility. These decolonial desires are not acts of rejection, but of creative reconfiguration—claiming space to be modern, indigenous, and equal to the Kinh on their own terms.

Keywords: Decolonial desires, Southeast Asia Massif, Education Anthropology, religious NGO

Interdisciplinarity as an Effort to Decolonize Southeast Asian Studies

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Abstract

Inter-referencing or contrasting commonly shared misconceptions about a certain region are often used to decolonize area studies. The current paper further proposes that, accompanied with careful attention to the particularities of a certain context under study, an interdisciplinary approach be adopted to provide possible observations that may otherwise be ignored or overlooked from a unidisciplinary viewpoint. As a point of illustration, the paper will concentrate on the topic of same sex marriage in present-day Vietnam. Being outlawed in 2000, same-sex marriage was finally decriminalized in 2014. However, the modified law explicitly does not recognize marriage between two persons of the same sex from a legal viewpoint. A gay couple then can hold a wedding ceremony to celebrate their union, yet they cannot have it registered and legally recognized. The peculiar legal position is often seen as an indicator of the government's worrying human rights record. However, a legal and political analysis of the topic, accompanied by a cultural investigation into relevant time honored traditions, may highlight that traditional rituals can still work as an alternative mechanism of marriage legitimation from a social perspective. The long-lasting practice of non-compulsory marriage registration may also explain the peculiarity of the legal regulation. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the paper hopes to set light on these often-overlooked mechanisms behind the legal status of same-sex marriage in Vietnam and contribute some nuances to the existing scholarship that has long been dominated by sociological, anthropological, and ethnographic studies¹.

Keywords: Interdisciplinarity, decolonization, Southeast Asian Studies, Same-Sex Marriage, Vietnam

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Counter Histories as Resistance: The Panglong Promises, Historical (Re)collections, and Ethnic Struggles in Myanmar

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Abstract

This paper explores the impact of the critical period from 1945 to 1947 in Burma, marked by intense negotiations over independence and the involvement of ethnic minorities in pivotal events such as the Second Panglong Conference. The recollection of this period, as presented in centralized platforms such as school curricula and state speeches, continues to play a role in the disenfranchisement of the nation's minority populations. Simultaneously, the crafting of 'counter histories' by ethnic groups like the Shans, Kachins, Chins, and Karens has emerged in response to Burman domination, varying in methods, purposes, and platforms. By examining the formation and impact of these 'counter histories', this study highlights how these narratives serve as tools for resisting marginalization and questioning the dominant, Burman-centric post-colonial narrative of Myanmar. These counter histories challenge the simplified national storylines and shed light on the entanglement between ethnic identities and national politics. They underscore an ongoing struggle within the broader decolonization process in Myanmar, one that questions not only the narrative it presents but also whether it could be seen as an ongoing possibility for nationalist 'others.' This paper contributes to the field of decolonization studies by demonstrating how historical recollections from ethnic minority perspectives can help reimagine the boundaries and definitions of national history and identity in post-colonial settings.

Keywords: Panglong; Counter Histories; Burma; Ethnic Minorities

When Will Vietnamese Literature Win a Nobel Prize?: Decolonizing Mentalities in Contemporary Vietnamese Literature

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Abstract

For the first time in history, two Vietnamese novels were awarded the PEN Translates grant in 2024: *Elevator in Sài Gòn* by Thuận and *Water: a Chronicle* by Nguyễn Ngọc Tư. This grant supports publishers in translating and publishing more books from various languages in the UK. This positive development has excited Vietnamese writers, critics, and researchers alike, as one of the long-standing questions in Vietnamese literary circles has been: When will a Vietnamese author win the Nobel Prize?

These two events raise many questions about the colonial mentality within Vietnamese literary discourse. One of these questions is: why does the West dominate in defining artistic, literary, cinematic, theatrical, and visual art values, especially in relation to smaller, less powerful countries? Research on contemporary Vietnamese literature has, up to this point, largely focused on analyzing domestic works, with little attention given to the lingering effects of colonial empires on the reception and evaluation of works by postcolonial writers. My essay will analyze this situation and raise the issue of an urgent need within Vietnamese studies in general, and Vietnamese literary studies in particular, to decolonize the mindset in how critics and authors perceive contemporary Vietnamese literature. Specifically, I aim to introduce a framework for researchers of contemporary Vietnamese literature, where both Vietnamese writers and their subject matter should be viewed through the lens of altermodernity: examining the efforts of authors attempting to break free from the ongoing influence of colonial powers. These are writers who tell stories from non-Western countries that are not shaped or marketed according to Western expectations—something that often results in a homogenized view of diverse cultures, catering to Western tastes. Additionally, the essay will also look at the choice to write in or not write in Vietnamese as a way to rethink borders and how writers position their identities within both local and global dimensions.

Keywords: Vietnamese contemporary literature, altermodernity, decolonizing mentalities

Decolonizing Historical Narratives: A Visual Study of Malaysia-Thailand Relations Through the Lens of the National Archives of Thailand

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Abstract

This research investigates the historical relationship between Malaysia and Thailand in the 19th century through an in-depth analysis of 177 photographs from the National Archives of Thailand. These photographs provide a unique visual narrative that captures significant cross-border interactions during a period shaped by colonial influence. By focusing on these archival images, this study seeks to uncover how cultural, economic, and political ties between the two nations evolved, particularly in the context of diplomatic efforts along their shared borders. The images reveal the deep-rooted connections between local communities in both regions, illustrating shared cultural practices, economic exchanges, and mutual influences across borders. From royal visits and diplomatic engagements to daily interactions in marketplaces, the photographs showcase the diverse ways in which both nations influenced each other in shaping regional dynamics. This visual evidence challenges traditional colonial narratives, providing a more comprehensive understanding of Southeast Asian history that is grounded in local agency and cooperation. Through the deconstruction of these visual records, the research demonstrates the long-standing socio-political and cultural ties between Malaysia and Thailand, which continued to influence their postcolonial interactions. By using the photographs as primary historical sources, this study not only reconstructs a more localized narrative of Malaysia-Thailand relations but also contributes to the broader discourse on the decolonization of Southeast Asian studies. The findings offer new insights into how visual media can serve as a powerful tool for reinterpreting history, providing a fresh perspective on the bilateral relations that shaped the region during the 19th century.

Keywords: Historical Narratives- Malaysia-Thailand- National Archives of Thailand

Imagining the Roots: Austronesian Studies in Pantayong Pananaw as Decolonization

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Abstract

There still needs to be an established field of Austronesian Studies in the country. If there is any effort to understand the Philippines from an Austronesian perspective, it comes from separate projects in linguistics, archaeology, anthropology, and history.

However, the 'Austronesian' holds a special place in Zeus Salazar's theorization of Filipino history and culture. Salazar used the Austronesian as a theme in his research on Filipino history and consciousness. Salazar is the proponent of Pantayong Pananaw, a historiographical school in the Philippines that aims to study Filipino history from the perspective of Filipinos using their language and culture. Pantayong Pananaw has long been called one of the indigenization programs in the social sciences in the Philippines, along with Sikolohiyang Pilipino and Pilipinolohiya. Although there are doubts about whether Pantayong Pananaw can be considered a decolonization project, it cannot be denied that they both possess a critical stance against the hegemony of colonialism. This paper aims to trace the intersection of Austronesian Studies and decolonization through the exposition and interrogation of selected writings by Zeus Salazar. On the one hand, Austronesian will be viewed as the foundation of the imagined nation; on the other hand, Austronesian will be seen as a critique of the prevailing historiography still influenced by Spanish colonialism and American imperialism.

Keywords: Austronesian Studies, Decolonization, Pantayong Pananaw, Zeus Salazar

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Nuancing Decoloniality: Revisiting Marcos’s Tadhana Project and the Ambivalence of the Decolonial Critique

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Abstract

Aiming to illustrate both the efficacy, as well as the problems with decolonial theory, this paper takes another look at the historiography of Marcos-sponsored history-writing project, Tadhana: A History of Filipino People, which was carried out in the 1970s and 1980s in the Philippines. An exemplar of indigenist or inward perspective in writing Philippine history, Tadhana arguably constitutes one of the earliest, most conceptually developed, and most sophisticated decolonial historiography perhaps not just in Southeast Asia, but also in the Global South. At the same time, it justifies Marcos’s authoritarianism, notwithstanding the scholarly or non-political intent of the many brilliant Filipino scholars who worked in the project. By showing the complexity of power relations both in the contents of the Tadhana, as well as the dynamic of the state-scholars relations that drove the project, this paper argues that the binary colonial-decolonial framing is oversimplified and, thus, inadequate to address the more fluid and multi-polar landscapes of power relations in the post-colonial world. More consequentially, it diverts attention away from the more immediate factors that can explain many persistent problems, as well as from the sins and incompetence of local elites who took the mantle of power and controlled the post-colonial state apparatuses. Absolved of responsibility, the local elites ironically end up being among the biggest beneficiaries of decolonial discourses. A much more nuanced and self-reflexive approach that requires mapping out of, and accounting for, the power/knowledge relations may be more analytically effective and politically advantageous for the interests of common people and the marginalized.

Keywords: decoloniality, Tadhana Project, coloniality, Marcos

Redefining international border regime from the perspective of indigenous communities' interests in Indonesia-Malaysia border area

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Abstract

A modern state defines (international) border as a line that separates the sovereignty of one state from another. Unfortunately, in Southeast Asia, most countries inherited border lines that were determined by the colonialists, without considering the presence of indigenous communities living around the border areas. Consequently, several communities that used to live together now have to live separately in two different countries. For example, the people of Dayak Bakati and Seluko who have inhabited the western part of Borneo Island for centuries now have to live separately in two different states: Indonesia and Malaysia. Kinship and cultural ties have encouraged them to carry out various traditional cross-border activities such as family visits and barter trade. In early 2010s, the Indonesian and Malaysian governments began to formalize cross-border activities by establishing the Aruk-Biawak integrated border checkpoint. They formalized barter trade into border trade which apply general export-import rules. Statistically, cross-border trade has shown an increase since the policy implementation. However, qualitatively, this study found that it was big traders from outside the border area who were able to conduct cross-border trade. Meanwhile, people of Dayak Bakati and Seluko who live in the border villages are unable to sell their agricultural commodities to neighboring countries, because the formalization policy requires trader to have a legal status as company, enterprise, venture, or other forms to be able to conduct cross-border trade. This formalization policy also makes it difficult for indigenous communities to perform cross-border family visits for urgent needs, because it insists the rules of vehicle declaration and road tax that cost them a lot. At the end, this study discusses the redefinition of international border regime from the perspective of indigenous communities' interests, as well as the possibility of affirmative policy for them amid the formalization of cross-border rules in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: indigenous community, Indonesia, informal border crossing, Malaysia

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Feminist research in an era of decoloniality: speaking with or speaking for other women?

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Abstract

Sara Ahmed (2000: 53) warns against ‘privileged white women’ who are in a ‘position to be heard’ speaking ‘for the subaltern woman’. Do white feminist scholars always do this when they represent women from other places and cultures they research and write about, or can they speak with and provide a space for voices and experiences to be heard in places where women’s experiences and voices are still crowded out by men’s voices? Can white feminist academics deliberating from secure permanent positions in wealthy neoliberal universities in the Global North truly appreciate the intersectional experiences of women of colour enough to represent them and should they? This paper will involve reflections on Ahmed’s warning in relation to engagement and research with women in Timor-Leste by the author with the aim of decolonising research engagements and making academics accountable to their research partners and those they represent. Strategies such as 3S Framework (Step Up, Stand With, Step Back) will be explored.

Keywords: decolonising research, women's studies, gender

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ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics (1989-1995): An Attempt to Decolonize and Form a Regional Art History and Aesthetic

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Abstract

In Art History, the late Edward W. Said, whose landmark work *Orientalism* reshaped post-colonial scholarship, have influenced the field of art history but in the context of Southeast Asia, the late Syed Hussein Alatas, a Malaysian sociologist, have also urged scholars to critically reflect on their academic pursuits. While his call was primarily directed at social sciences, it is equally relevant to other fields of knowledge, including art history. But such postcolonial consciousness is not new as the foundational role in shaping regional art history of Southeast Asia, through the ASEAN Symposium on Aesthetics (1989-1997) could be seen as the first major effort to investigate, interpret and perhaps to decolonize the development of art and aesthetics in Southeast Asia with. This paper will examine the symposium through the three proceedings publications were published between 1989-1997. The symposiums were notable for being among the first few gathering of experts under ASEAN member states in the field of visual art. By examining the papers presented in these symposiums, this paper explores how regional scholars at the symposium attempted to "decolonize" and mooted the idea of a critically informed regional art history.

Keywords: Syed Hussein Alatas, Edward Said, ASEAN Symposium of Aesthetics, ASEAN

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Decolonizing Southeast Asian Archaeology Rethinking Power, Land, and Cultural Dynamics

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Abstract

This paper examines evolving interpretative paradigms in Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean archaeology. Decolonizing Southeast Asian archaeology seeks to correct long-standing biases. Early research, largely by European scholars was shaped by colonial perspectives, portraying indigenous cultures as passive recipients of foreign influence, particularly from India and China. Colonial frameworks emphasized power as territorial conquest, a view rooted in Western traditions shaped by Judaeo-Christian ideologies. In the Old Testament, the “Promised Land” and divine rights to territory justified expansion and domination. These beliefs underpinned colonial narratives, framing land not only as economic capital but also as a civilizing mission targeting non-Christian populations. Consequently, colonial archaeology often prioritized external impacts like Indianization or Sinicization, sidelining local agency and reducing Southeast Asian societies to reactive entities.

This approach distorted understandings of the Indian Ocean world, where precolonial power was often exercised through trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchange, rather than conquest. Decolonizing efforts now seek to recover these internal dynamics and highlight the agency of local actors. Emphasis is placed on indigenous trade networks, selective cultural adoption, and hybridized practices, offering a more nuanced understanding of historical processes.

Globalization theory and transculturality offer valuable frameworks for this revision. Rather than viewing cultural exchange as linear or imposed, globalization emphasizes multidirectional flows of goods, ideas, and practices. Transculturality further refines this, highlighting the fluid and hybrid nature of cultural identities formed through continuous interaction. These frameworks challenge essentialist or bounded views of culture, allowing archaeologists to better represent the dynamic realities of Southeast Asian histories.

By incorporating these perspectives, decolonized archaeology can move beyond Eurocentric and colonial models. It can more accurately reflect the complexity, fluidity, and interconnectedness of the region’s past, revealing Southeast Asia not as a passive periphery, but as an active participant in shaping global history.

Keywords: Decolonizing, Southeast Asian Archaeology, Local agency, Globalization theories, Transculturality

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**Films as a Method of Decolonization:
Mobility, Borders, and History in Ann Hui’s Vietnam Trilogy**

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Abstract

From the late 1970s to the early 1980s, Hong Kong director Ann Hui produced three films, *The Boy from Vietnam* (1978), *The Story of Woo Viet* (1981), and *Boat People* (1982). They are collectively known as the “Vietnam Trilogy.” These works are seminal in her early exploration of refugee and migrant identities, and they mark a significant intervention in the cinematic representation of displaced populations in postwar East and Southeast Asia. In this trilogy, Hui, as a Hong Kong filmmaker, approaches Vietnamese issues from a distinctly local perspective, narrating a Vietnam story that diverges from mainstream discourses. As Vinh Nguyen has observed, in the early 1980s, most migrants lacked channels for self-expression and were often compelled to view themselves through the lens of news media or governmental policy. Although in recent decades, diasporic Vietnamese writers, visual artists, and filmmakers have begun to tell their own stories, Ann Hui’s films remain rare and foundational works that portray Vietnamese refugees as subjects worthy of narrative and ethical reflection. The trilogy not only chronicles the border crossings and everyday lives of Vietnamese refugees but also, through media such as cameras, photographs, and letters, presents both the lived realities and constructed fictions of daily life under communist rule. It further illuminates the dilemmas faced by exiles and local residents, as well as the complex, evolving dialogue between Vietnam and Hong Kong during a period of profound historical transformation. This article uses Ann Hui’s Vietnam Trilogy as a case study to explore how cinematic images can serve as a method of decolonization, encompassing the representation of subaltern voices, the reconstruction of historical narratives, and a rethinking of the “Vietnam question” through the lens of 1980s Hong Kong.

Keywords: Ann Hui, Vietnam Trilogy, decolonization, Vietnamese refugees, migrant narratives

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Sunken Archives, Open Windows: Loss and Salvage in a Southeast Asian ‘Sea of Islands’

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Hana Qugana

Abstract

"The loss I have to regret beyond all is my papers and drawings: all my notes and observations, with memoirs and collections, sufficient for a full and ample history—not only of Sumatra, but of Borneo, and almost every other island of note in these seas." (Thomas Stamford Raffles, after the sinking of the *Fame* off Bengkulu, 1824)

"Are you not ashamed to grieve in this manner? ... Leave off weeping, and let me open a window." ('native woman' to Sophia, Lady Raffles, 1821)

The losses heralded by colonialism in Southeast Asia can be represented not only by the appropriation of resources, dispossession of peoples, and interruptions to state-building; they also engendered an archival loss with untold consequences for a field being continually reshaped amid countervailing winds. This paper takes stock of the immensity of this loss to Southeast Asian Studies and its potential to inform decolonial futures. More than a mere inventory of texts and objects, lost and found, it is an appraisal of loss-as-method, a means by which probing absence reveals histories yet to be written. That colonial plunderers and would-be preservationists hoarded cultural troves, only to see them succumb to the fires of shipwreck and insurrection, poses vexing questions about the collection, control, and curation of the region's histories, cultures, and material wealth. This paper attests to the highly generative power of loss across maritime Southeast Asia by considering the sunken archives of history 'beneath the waves', before turning to the aural worlds of colonial epistemicide and Raffles' looted gamelan. It concludes by foregrounding an emerging Pacific turn in Southeast Asian Studies, and the potential for decolonising area studies by turning to a wider 'sea of islands'.

Keywords: archival turn, environmental history, colonialism, epistemicide, heritage studies

Yunnan as Inter-Asian Method – not quite “Chinese”, nor quite “Southeast Asian”

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Abstract

Decentering Western constructions and imaginaries of Southeast Asia and Southeast Asian Studies, this paper shifts attention to inter-Asian knowledge productions. It focuses on Yunnan as an interstitial frontier that complicates any bounded notion of “China” and “Southeast Asia”. Fully integrated as a southwestern province of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) only in 1949, and now bordering Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar, several scholars regard Yunnan’s cultural and political history as belonging to Southeast Asia rather than China. The Chinese world historian Yang Bin (2009: 13) laments that “Chinese studies fail to perceive Southeast Asian features in Yunnan, while Southeast Asian studies have taken for granted that Yunnan belongs to the field of Chinese studies”.

Going beyond the still observable perseverance of spatial references to and labels of “China” and “Southeast Asia”, this paper calls for exploring locally grounded regional perspectives of historically ingrained cross-border movement and mobility that might be difficult to grasp by conventional containers of area or country studies. This will be illustrated with the examples of Sipsongpanna (now “Xishuangbanna” in China’s Yunnan province), as a central venue of a larger “Tai World” of different Tai-speaking peoples, and of various flows of mainly Han and Hui Yunnanese Chinese, who moved throughout history into and within neighboring “Southeast Asia” as merchants, muleteers, laborers, and later anti-Communist Kuomintang (KMT) refugees. These examples highlight the specific case of Yunnan as an inspiration for an alternative method (à la Kuan-Hsin Chen’s (2010) *Asia as Method*) to rethink—thus simultaneously decolonize, de-imperialize and de-sinicize—the external scholarly production of knowledge on “Southeast Asia” through an actor-centered and lifeworlds perspective of mobility and movement from the ground up. This also includes ethnographically informed sensitivity to vernacular terminologies going beyond new spatial metaphors or scholarly, Western appropriations of vernacular notions such as “Zomia”.

Keywords: Yunnan, China, Southeast Asia, Inter-Asia

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Building the Boundless American Christian Empire: American Baptist Missionary Works in the Shan States in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

American Baptist Missionaries reached Southeast Asia in the early nineteenth century. Among the pioneers of building the mission stations in the Shan States in Burma/Myanmar and Yunnan province in Southern China, the Young family has been regarded as one of the most influential and controversial figures. Particularly, their aggressive mission works that essentially expanded the American Christian empire in this borderland have received negative responses and assessments from their fellow American Christian missionaries and Western and Chinese scholars. Yet, it is noteworthy that a majority of the very people that the family had strived to convert, like the Lahu and the Wa, recognize the family's contribution to supporting and upholding their ethnic identity as well as political entity.

This presentation examines the accounts of the Young family, especially the first generation of the Baptist missionary, William Marcus Young, and his colleagues in the Shan States of Burma and Lancang area in Southern China that yielded a large number of conversions in the nineteenth century and twentieth century to see how the building of borderless American Christian empire in the borderlands was conceived and implemented. For a sharper analysis, the presentation will focus on the comity agreement disputes between the American Baptists and Presbyterians, and the border disputes between the British, French, and Chinese imperial governments which William Marcus was directly involved in. Through a survey of the missionary accounts and their ethnography, this presentation attempts to identify similarities and differences in the American colonial empire building in North America and mainland Southeast Asia where the British, French, and Chinese empires' rivalries for extending their spheres of influence took place to elucidate the ways in which the United States have expanded its Christian imperialism in mainland Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Christian empire, Shan States, Young family, ethnic minorities

Thai Troops in (Laos) Secret War: Decolonizing the Nationalism Narrative of Thai Veterans ¹

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Abstract

This paper reexamines the dominant Thai narrative of the “secret war” in Laos, traditionally framed as a covert anti-communist operation carried out by Thai forces without official acknowledgment. Official histories have largely relied on the testimonies of elite Thai veterans—educated, ideologically shaped individuals who emphasize their unrecognized heroism and align their accounts with nationalist and anti-communist state narratives. In contrast, the perspectives of rank-and-file soldiers, whose motivations were shaped more by socioeconomic hardship than ideological commitment, remain largely unpublished and risk being lost entirely. These ordinary soldiers’ memories reveal a more complex and grounded view of the war, shaped by daily struggles and pragmatic choices rather than patriotic ideals. Furthermore, the paper highlights the silenced voices of the Royal Lao Government troops and ethnic Hmong allies who fought alongside Thai forces but were marginalized after the 1975 collapse of the Vientiane government. By drawing on oral histories from Thai, Lao, and international sources, this study foregrounds the lived experiences of those on the ground, offering a “bottom-up” perspective of Cold War dynamics in Southeast Asia. It challenges conventional Eurocentric and hegemonic accounts of the Cold War as merely a proxy conflict between superpowers, arguing instead for a reconceptualization that centers local agency, memory, and everyday political negotiation. Ultimately, this paper seeks to revise and expand the historical understanding of the secret war by restoring overlooked voices to the historical record.

Keywords: Thai veterans, Secret War, Cold War, Nationalism, Historiography

Internal Decolonization? Chiang Mai and other cities in the colonial margins of mainland SE Asia

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Abstract

If the cities and states of Thailand's north were subjected to the (internal) colonialism of the Bangkok state, what might decolonization mean for the cities and people of northern Thailand? Thai studies has long grappled with the impact of colonialism, while scholars have articulated numerous hyphenated forms of empire to describe Siam's complicated relationship with empire. This paper examines the urban history and contested heritage of urban space in Thailand's colonial margins to a) recognize the colonial DNA embedded in the urban Thai experience, and b) unpack and challenge the hierarchies of power that have been built across the region by the Bangkok state, from the colonial era to the present. Therefore, decolonization in this part of Southeast Asia means, in part, acknowledging the presence of a colonial history in never-colonized Siam. Beyond that, it also requires (internally?) decolonizing urban space by advocating for both a local right to the city and a nuanced approach to urban heritage preservation that moves beyond a focus on origins or national histories, but also on the complex, overlapping, and messy history that produced the modern city. Finally, acknowledging the influence of colonial power structures on the politics of urban space in Thailand highlights not only Bangkok's dominance as a primate city, but also Chiang Mai's role as a regional center, a role that owes as much to the colonial era as to the height of the Lanna period. Moving beyond the colonial in this part of Southeast Asia, therefore, means both challenging existing legacy of colonial power over urban space, and understanding northern Thailand as more than just northern, and certainly more than just Thai.

Keywords: Chiang Mai, Lanna, urban heritage, internal colonialism, right to the city

Guided Consumption: Sarinah and the Remaking of Post-Colonial Consumer Space in Indonesia, 1960s

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Abstract

Sarinah, Indonesia’s first state-owned department store, was envisioned by President Sukarno as a *toko serba ada* for ordinary Indonesians—especially women, whom he hailed as “the backbone of the Revolution.” The fifteen-storey tower on Jalan Thamrin began with a ceremonial piling on 23 April 1963 and opened to shoppers on 15 August 1966. Its construction was financed through Japanese reparation funds and executed by Obayashi Corporation. This paper reads Sarinah as a post-colonial reworking of the Dutch department store model, examining how a space once associated with colonial privilege was transformed into a stage for Guided Democracy’s project of “guided consumption.” Drawing on Sukarno’s speeches, contemporary newspapers, and early promotional advertisements, the study shows how architecture, procurement quotas, and retail training were mobilised to align economic nationalism with the practical demands of a developmental state shaped by Cold War realignments. Yet daily operations revealed persistent contradictions between the ideals of self-reliance and continued dependence on foreign capital, imported technology, and volatile currency instruments. Three questions guide the analysis: How did the state use Sarinah’s retail space as a civic classroom after the nationalisation of Dutch commercial enterprises? In what ways did merchandising policies attempt to reconcile nationalist ambitions with market constraints? And how were women addressed—as both workers and prospective consumers—within the store’s evolving moral economy? By framing Sarinah as a laboratory for re-coding, rather than discarding, colonial consumer culture—and by situating it within broader struggles over decolonisation and economic sovereignty—this paper argues that everyday shopping routines were as politically charged as state policy. In doing so, it proposes a rethinking of decolonisation as a contested practice embedded in both architecture and purchase, in managerial speeches as well as clerical labour.

Keywords: decolonization; consumer culture; Guided Democracy; women shoppers

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

“Can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies” Redux

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Abstract

A call for decolonization of disciplines everywhere takes a specific form corresponding to the field's colonial legacies. For Southeast Asian studies, specifically, I argue that the most immediate task is to reconstruct the field's repertoire that comprehensively builds upon the conceptual contributions of Southeast Asian thinkers. Despite the critique of area studies as a Cold War discipline, the antiwar and sufficiently activist version of Southeast Asian studies, which some may call “the Cornell School,” managed to become a relatively hegemonic paradigm. The field's existence already hinges upon a defense of Southeast Asianness through the provincialization of Europe, which, in a way, almost made Edward Said's Orientalism and the rest of postcolonialism irrelevant to the field at large a priori. In other words, it was already postcolonial, albeit of a white male's kind, in outlook prior to the arrival of postcolonialism. As Ariel Heryanto shows in his famous article, “Can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies?” the problem lies rather elsewhere in the subordinate status of Southeast Asians in Southeast Asianist knowledge production. This subordination could be attributed equally to structural exclusion in white-dominant academia and colonial underdevelopment of intellectual infrastructure in the region, reproducing conditions of what Syed Hussein Alatas calls “intellectual imperialism.” This presentation ruminates on ways to bring Southeast Asians back into the field and illuminates what “Southeast Asian studies for Southeast Asians” might look like.

Keywords: Decolonization, Southeast Asian Studies, intellectual imperialism

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Decolonizing Research in the Eastern Himalayas: Collaborative Innovations at the Highland Institute

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Abstract

For over a century, indigenous communities in the Eastern Himalayas, particularly in the India-Myanmar borderlands, have been the subjects of external research agendas rooted in colonial and post-colonial frameworks. This paper highlights a shift towards centering indigenous epistemologies and methodologies demonstrated by the work of indigenous researchers at the Highland Institute (THI) in Nagaland, India. By fostering active partnerships with local communities, THI moves beyond extractive research models, embracing indigenous knowledge systems related to health, education, technology, and environmental stewardship. The institute trains young researchers in advanced social science tools to establish a self-sustaining, community-led research culture. This approach emphasizes ethical commitments to shared authority and mutual accountability, respecting local perspectives, sacred knowledge, and boundaries. In the field, the researchers engage with communities in an immersive ethnographic praxis by participating in everyday activities, such as farming and fishing, thereby deepening understanding and trust. While keeping in mind the political and cultural sensitivity of the region, the research teams navigate the social and historical realities of communities by consciously attempting to minimize their biases concerning regional politics. This collaborative model enables significant discoveries, supports epistemic justice, and includes indigenous people throughout the research process. The paper provides a case study on decolonized research, exploring how indigenous knowledge systems in areas like culture, health, and climate change can reshape research more equitably and innovatively.

Keywords: Decolonizing research, community-led approach, Nagaland, indigenous studies, Indo-Myanmar Border

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Decolonizing Translation: Public Scholarship and Southeast Asian Studies

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Abstract

Please note -- this is neither an individual paper nor a joint paper -- but a workshop. A suggested format would be a 75-90 minute workshop.

What is translation? Who translates? Why do we translate? What are the politics and ethics of translation? What are the challenges and possibilities of translation? What is the space for translation in Southeast Asian Studies? What is the role of translation in decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies? Can Southeast Asian Studies continue without more translation? This is a workshop for those interested in incorporating translation and circulation of materials (including but not limited to academic work, essays, court decisions, poems, etc.) related to social justice and decolonial practice in Southeast Asia into their academic, activist and public scholarship. The organizer will share experiences, lessons and challenges from the Justice in Translation series at UW-Madison, and we will think and plan collectively about future steps towards a regional translation network.

Keywords: translation, public, politics, Southeast Asia, activism

Interdisciplinarity as an Effort to Decolonize Southeast Asian Studies

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Abstract

Inter-referencing or contrasting commonly shared misconceptions about a certain region are often used to decolonize area studies. The current paper further proposes that, accompanied with careful attention to the particularities of a certain context under study, an interdisciplinary approach be adopted to provide possible observations that may otherwise be ignored or overlooked from a unidisciplinary viewpoint. As a point of illustration, the paper will concentrate on the topic of same-sex marriage in present-day Vietnam. Being outlawed in 2000, same-sex marriage was finally decriminalized in 2014. However, the modified law explicitly does not recognize marriage between two persons of the same sex from a legal viewpoint. A gay couple then can hold a wedding ceremony to celebrate their union, yet they cannot have it registered and legally recognized. The peculiar legal position is often seen as an indicator of the government's worrying human rights record. However, a legal and political analysis of the topic, accompanied by a cultural investigation into relevant time-honored traditions, may highlight that traditional rituals can still work as an alternative mechanism of marriage legitimation from a social perspective. The long-lasting practice of non-compulsory marriage registration may also explain the peculiarity of the legal regulation. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the paper hopes to set light on these often-overlooked mechanisms behind the legal status of same-sex marriage in Vietnam and contribute some nuances to the existing scholarship that has long been dominated by sociological, anthropological, and ethnographic studies.

Keywords: Interdisciplinarity, Vietnam, decolonization, same-sex marriage

Tracing A Queer Cambodian Genealogy Through Embodied Memory

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Abstract

What has been written on Cambodia and its diaspora in the aftermath of the Khmer Rouge era focuses on the survivors and their descendants through a hetero-normative lens and through the framework of “objective” storytelling. The literature gap on queer Cambodians and the emphasis on objectivity has limited our understanding of Cambodian diverse ways of knowing, particularly through the embodied conscience of queer Cambodian Americans. The modern genocidal history of Cambodia has made it difficult to conduct the research needed to establish a historical context for queer sex/gender categories in Cambodia and its diaspora; thus, one must employ a decolonizing interdisciplinary methodology to theorize the historical gaps. Long considered too subjective in United States’ academics for the subject of investigation to conduct research on their own affinity group, this research places the author’s self-reflection along with their two queer siblings in comparative analysis with other secondary and primary sources on queer Cambodians in the diaspora. This paper argues that the interpretation of one’s lived-realities through the subject themselves deconstructs and subverts hetero-normative, nationalist, and colonial narratives that erases queer Cambodian American voices and lived-realities. Additionally, through an introspective insider’s position, this paper attempts to illuminate the embodied traces of culture, religion, tradition, gender and queerness within the Cambodian American communities and theorize a queer Cambodian genealogy that transcends across time and space. Ultimately, the aim of this research is to suggest gaps in historical context can be conceptualized through the study of embodied memory.

Keywords: Queer, Cambodian, Cambodian American, Diaspora, Embodied Memory

Death Ritual of the Last King, a manufacturing of an infrapolitics in Xishuangbanna, where China meets Laos and Burma

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Abstract

On the Chinese National Day, October 1, 2017, Chao Mhom Kham Le, the Last King of Sipsong Pan Na Tai State, presently Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan, PRC China, passed away in Kunming. His death has been perceived by the Lue, both inside and outside China, as the loss of their Chaophandin, the King of Sipsong Panna. The death of Chaophandin led to the revival of traditional Tai King's royal cremation, which lasted for a year. The cremation and rituals they conducted significantly reflected the Lue's traditional belief, cultural practice, and their memory and imagined loyalty to the lost king, the Chaophandin. The emergence of this Tai king's royal cremation in Modern China today, I argue, in itself is a symptom of resistance to the state. Investigating this emerging death ritual, thus is a challenging question to a normative perception of what is called, Southeast Asian Studies.

In the Tai worlds, the Chaophandin, even his spirit, represented the state, the symbolic power, and is the spiritual center that unified the Tai peoples of such kingdom. By contextualizing the revivals of Tai King cremation and its ceremony, the Lue conducted for the lost king, under the radical transformation of Xishuangbanna, which recently have led to urbanization of Jinghong city, huge investment on housing areas, and modern transportation constructions, the China-Lao rail links particularly, in this paper I will show that the ritual conducts on the king's cremation, the king's spirit worshipping, and the king stupa construction, could be interpreted as a new cult and belief of death, that is provocatively resurrected. In Xishuangbanna, where China meets Laos and Myanmar, this death ritual is a symbolic space, that manufacturing the underground movement, through the Lue yearning for their lost king. It is a local story, an infrapolitics, that reflecting on their traditional state structure, the lost homeland, in encountering with a series of the latest regime of Chinese state penetration, which is now going beyond the map of China Nation.

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Reclaiming NarrativeResisting Land Grabs: Orang Asli Expressive Archives as Decolonization

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Abstract

This paper argues that Orang Asli (OA), the original peoples of Peninsular Malaysia, are reclaiming their narratives and resisting land grabs through artistic expression and collaborations. Since independence, the Malaysian state has reshaped and retold the history of OA. The national educational curriculum omits OA narratives and national policies are written without OA input or approval. As a result, OA knowledge and culture are reduced to stereotypes. These narratives contribute to policies and governance that allow outsiders to control and exclude OA from their land. As OA epistemologies and ways of life are deeply intertwined with their environment, this land loss signifies epistemicide.

The paper critically engages with legacies of colonial past, and the ongoing colonial present as a form of decolonizing Southeast Asian Studies. We recenter Indigenous voices in Malaysian narratives and reassert Indigenous presence in local spaces. OA community-led collectives, such as the Mah Meri Tompoq Topoh and the Semai Jelai Asli Craft, preserve and promote their cultural traditions by subversively interrupting epistemicide. Central to this discourse is the concept of expressive archives—living repositories of Indigenous customs (adat) that thrive despite external threats. These acts of subversion assert OA rights to self-determination in cultural and environmental spheres.

Keywords: Orang Asli, reclaiming narratives, expressive archives, Peninsular Malaysia

Overcoming marginality: The decolonizing force of Zo studies

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Abstract

Imagining a world territory – and a cluster of societies – as “Southeast Asia” constitutes the core of the enterprise of Southeast Asian studies. Decolonizing this field requires not only critiquing and reconfiguring the “colonial gaze,” but also the “postcolonial gaze” inherent in practices of methodological nationalism and methodological area-ism. This paper presents a case of locally-rooted scholars who use their theoretical curiosity and methodological acumen to undo the (post)colonial gaze and shatter the academic and political marginalization that they suffer. The field of “Zo studies” is unusual in that it is dominated by local scholars, unlike Southeast Asian studies as a whole, in which Euro-American knowledge production has been, and continues to be, privileged and prominent. The Zo lands straddle the borders of Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh – long closed to outside researchers – and Zo scholars foreground emic discussions about ethnic selves and the positionality of the researcher. They seek to dismantle colonial labels and the still largely intact “ethno-architecture of imperialism” that underpin contemporary power relations – marginalizing, exploiting, and obfuscating borderland societies in Southeast Asia and South Asia. They represent an “Indigenous minority” trajectory of intellectual decolonization that can be a model for other subfields of Southeast Asian studies.

Keywords: intellectual decolonization – Southeast Asia – postcolonial gaze – Zo studies - South Asia

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Decolonizing Heritage: Self-Determination, Values, and Politics of the Ifugao Rice Terraces in the Philippines

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Abstract

The Ifugao Rice Terraces in the Philippines, inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, have frequently been interpreted through colonial heritage frameworks that impose Western conservation agendas and ideals on local Indigenous communities. While World Heritage status offers opportunities for international recognition and the promotion of cultural practices, it often intersects with state-centric frameworks and globalized conservation standards that render heritage static, marginalize Indigenous knowledge, and constrain local agency. In recent decades, however, the growing recognition of Indigenous rights and the rise of decolonization movements have opened space for Indigenous groups to reclaim and assert the legitimacy of their own knowledge systems and traditions. By contesting externally imposed narratives shaped by conservation efforts and formal education systems, the people in Ifugao have actively sought to redefine their heritage on their own terms. Focusing on the politics of heritage, this paper explores how local actors in Ifugao engage in the decolonization of heritage discourses and narratives by asserting their agency in reshaping the values, meanings, and political significance of the rice terraces. It investigates how Indigenous communities in Ifugao navigate and negotiate dominant heritage discourses, strategically reappropriating expert-driven narratives to access resources, engage with broader Philippine society, and resist state-imposed agendas. In doing so, they affirm the legitimacy of their knowledge, challenge external authority, and articulate their political aspirations. By highlighting how Indigenous peoples engage with and appropriate heritage discourse to reclaim their histories and shape their developmental visions, the article underscores the transformative potential of heritage as a tool for empowerment and self-determination. It further emphasizes the dynamic, negotiated, and contested nature of heritage, recognizing its role in advancing decolonization, equity, and justice.

Keywords: heritage, Ifugao Rice Terraces, Indigenous people, agency, self-determination

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Malaya’s Anticolonial Movement in 1947

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Abstract

Mirroring the colonial regime’s divide-and-rule policy, the studies about British Malaya had been ethnically divided for a long time. In recent decades, scholars have been challenging such ethnic division and, in turn, the colonial legacy in various ways. For example, Jomo K.S. uses class as an analytical category to cut across ethnic boundaries and examine Malaya’s political economy. Numerous historians, including Rachel Leow and Sumit Mandel, have demonstrated how ethnicities in Malaya were historically created. Lately, Timothy Harper has shown the connections between the anticolonial movement in Malaya and other places during the interwar period, implying that activists in Malaya upheld political visions beyond ethno-nationalism. Building on these scholarly works, this paper will examine Malaya’s anticolonial movement after WWII to explore some strategies to decolonize Southeast Asian studies. It focuses on the PUTERA-AMCJA, which was established in Malaya in 1947 to struggle for self-government from Britain. This cross-class and multi-ethnic alliance can demonstrate how historical actors attempted to transcend colonial ways of thinking. While striving for self-government, the PUTERA-AMCJA dispatched representatives to the Asian Relations Conference (ARC) in India—the first conference that gathered Asian and Middle Eastern political entities to solve common problems caused by colonialism. By analyzing the ARC records, this paper highlights that, on the one hand, Malayan activists participated in independence struggles outside colonial geographical borders. On the other hand, Southeast Asian anticolonialists desired more than political independence from European empires. They also intended to maintain an equal relationship among all countries to prevent domination by greater powers, such as China and India. Accordingly, this paper will show that Southeast Asia is an important site for us to better understand the processes of decolonization, which are beyond the contest between an imperial metropole and its colonies over sovereignty.

Keywords: Malaya, Singapore, Anticolonialism

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Panel

Outside Looking Across the Scholarly Borderlands: Perspectives from the Field of Southeast Asian American Studies

Abstract

Scholarly works in this panel intentionally blur the arbitrary borders between Area Studies, Refugee Studies, Critical Race Studies, Ethnic Studies, and Asian (American) Studies to provide a more nuanced and wholistic understanding of Southeast Asian (American) experiences. Though borne from different historical era and political context, the fields of Southeast Asian Studies and Southeast Asian American Studies are integral pieces to the same humanistic puzzle, both aiming to understand what it means to be Southeast Asian today. In this panel, four scholars draw attention to how diasporic bodies, identities, and lives both problematize and enrich our understandings of the peoples who originate from the region and US interventions that resulted in the dispersal of these communities.

Panel members & abstract title

Kanjana Thepboriruk, Northern Illinois University, kanjana@niu.edu

Thai American Oral History Project – Youth Empowerment through Heritage Language Learning

Ivan Small, Northern Illinois University, ismall@niu.edu

Discombobulation and Dispersion: Settlement Models and Responses in 20th Century Asian America

Cindy Anh Nguyen, University of California, Los Angeles, c.nguyen35@gmail.com

Shifting from Nation-State Teleologies Towards Cultural Studies of Vernacular Life: K-12 Vietnamese American Curricula and Digital Humanities

Joseph Ruanto-Ramirez, Asian American Studies Program, Southwestern College,

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Diasporic Indigeneity in the United States, or, I Am An Igorot or A Moro, but NOT Filipino

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17-19 JULY 2025, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY, THAILAND

Panel

**On Decoloniality/Epistemic Reconstruction: Languages, Concepts
and Praxis**

Abstract

To decolonise means to recognize the presence of, and deconstruct, the colonial matrix of power that keeps the three levels of coloniality together: power, knowledge, and being (Quijano, 2000). While decolonisation seeks to establish nation-states, decoloniality focuses on epistemic reconstruction, which includes undoing the continuity of colonial injustice in knowledge production as well as revising the terms and content of epistemological dialogue (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). Our panel's approach to decolonizing Southeast Asian studies encompasses three key methodological lenses: languages, concepts, and praxis. The first paper by Jelena Golubovic examines the deeply ingrained power dynamics in relation to language in Southeast Asian Studies, with a case study on resisting 'internal colonialism' and hegemonic language ideologies through language activism in Southeast Asian filmography. The next paper by Ariff Hafizi Radzi, inspired by the German school of conceptual history (Begriffsgeschichte), considers how this approach can be adapted/reoriented for Southeast Asia to challenge the 'coloniality of knowledge' in Southeast Asian studies, emphasizing the need to write history(ies) of indigenous (emic) concepts and cosmologies/cosmo-visions by 'thinking with' Southeast Asians (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). The last paper by Fachri Aidulsyah deals with the notion of decoloniality as praxis and highlights the persistence 'coloniality of Being' (Maldonado-Torres, 2007) via the lived realities of the incomplete (and failure of) decolonisation of/in West Papua and Timor Leste from a subaltern and peripheral positionality and relational praxis. With these three papers, we aim to contribute to the ongoing process of dismantling nuances of coloniality (internal and external forms of coloniality) perpetuated by the colonial origins of Southeast Asian scholarship and knowledge production, advocating for a situated, embodied, and grounded perspective of decolonial Southeast Asian scholarship/studies.

Panel members & abstract title

Ariff Hafizi Radzi, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Humboldt University of Berlin
Provincializing the Universal: Reflecting on Conceptual History and the Epistemic Decolonisation of Southeast Asia

Fachri Aidulsyah, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
Decoloniality as Praxis (?): (Incomplete) Decolonisation in West Papua and Timor Leste

Jelena Golubovic, Humboldt University Berlin
Before Film, Beyond Language: Setan Jawa and the Limits of Categories