

## **Wilderness and Protected Areas: developing and adapting social and cultural perspectives on nature and wildness in Southeast Asia**

“Wilderness” is principally a western European concept that has been exported around the globe. It has often applied to the ‘New World’ landscapes that appeared wild or untamed to early explorers and settlers, and then to ‘Old World’ landscapes in those places subject to colonialism by European nations. It has perhaps found its greatest expression in North America and Australia/New Zealand where it forms the backbone of landscape protection based around an appreciation of the “sublime” and a wilderness aesthetic. While the word itself has its origins in the early Norse-Teutonic languages, there is often no direct equivalent in other languages and cultures. This is true throughout most of SE Asia where rich and diverse cultural histories have evolved different associations with “wild nature” through Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism and other Asian religions. The western idea of wilderness, as landscape valued for its lack of human use and influence, often meets with confusion and uncertainty in eastern society and many other ‘Old World’ cultures. This requires careful exploration, translation and adaptation if global goals of nature conservation and landscape protection (including safe-guarding ecosystem services and cultural values) are to be realised in the rapidly expanding economies of SE Asia.

This panel will focus on the potential significance and value of the wilderness concept in SE Asian countries from multiple perspectives including environmental philosophy, environmental aesthetics, environmental history, nature writing, sociology, geography and ecology. By comparing the wilderness idea and traditional eastern ecological wisdom, this panel will consider the difficulties and possible approaches to better understanding and promoting the wilderness concept within a SE Asia setting, and thus help create the foundations for new visions for wild(er)ness and protected areas within the region that are sensitive to social and cultural settings. The panel will additionally help develop links between ASEAS and the WILD Foundation in the run-up to the 11<sup>th</sup> World Wilderness Congress (WILD11) that will take place in China in late 2019.

### **Convenors:**

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