

## 27th Aseasuk conference, Durham University

7–9 September 2012

With the bonus of sunny weather and the attraction of a cathedral city, the 27th Aseasuk conference (2012) hosted by Durham University was attended by more than 60 delegates from Britain, Europe, Asia and Australia. The last time that an Aseasuk conference was held in Durham was in 1995.

On the first evening, delegates were able to see the award-winning documentary, *Enemies of the People*, about the perpetrators of death (from foot-soldiers to Nuon Chea aka Brother Number Two) for the Khmer Rouge. Thet Sambath, an investigative journalist with the Phnom Penh Post spent ten years' of weekends befriending and recording the interviewees which broke 30 years of silence. Claudia Merli led the discussion and issues included whether the word 'genocide' could be applied to the killings when it was class-based, and other ethical points affecting researchers such as that the material gathered by Thet Sambath for 'historical knowledge' which he refused to hand over to the prosecutors of the Khmer Rouge trial was in any case appropriated by them.

Other highlights for the conference participants included a reception at Durham University's Oriental Museum where participants were able to see the travelling photographic exhibition, 'Islam, Trade and Politics across the Indian Ocean' that looks at trade links between Ottomans, Turks and Southeast Asia. The exhibition arose from a British Library sponsored research project of the same title which was administered by ASEASUK and the British Institute at Ankara (BIAA).

There were three other workshops: a museum one led by Craig Barclay and Claire Sutherland on collections and interpretation (see below), a gamelan workshop led by Paul Fletcher, and a publications workshop with Gerald Jackson (NIAS), William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Pauline Khng.

The dinner on Saturday evening was accompanied by music from the Durham Gamelan Society and dances by international performer Ni Madé Pujawati.

Aseasuk warmly thanks Durham University colleagues and student helpers for organising the event efficiently and with much humour and would like to mention in particular: Jonathan Rigg, Claudia Merli, Claire Sutherland, Craig Barclay, Rachel Grocke, Charlotte King, Wasana La-orngplew and J.J. Zhang.

The following reports from convenors cover the 10 panels and the museum workshop.

### **States, minorities and borders in Southeast Asia**

Convenor: Claudia Merli (Durham University)

This panel explored the accommodation of ethnic diversity as a challenge that many countries in Southeast Asia deal with in the process of nation-building. Demarcation and maintenance of geographic and ethnic borders have been investigated by the presenters engaging historical and contemporary perspectives. At stake are the multi-layered meanings of intersecting politics, identities, and locations. Roy Huijsmans (International Institute of Social Studies, the Hague) and Tr?n Th? Hà Lan (Medical Committee Netherlands-Vietnam) presented a paper on 'Youth, the state and ethnic identity in the Lao-Viet borderlands', focusing on how young unmarried people of Pa Koh and Van Kieu ethnicity perform different linguistic abilities in relation to different identity contexts in the mountainous borderland, once non-state space, that Van Schendel (2002) termed Zomia. Nowadays, the presence of the state remains unclear and in-progress on the Lao-Viet border and is perceived differently by young people on both sides of the border. State institutions such as school and youth unions doubtlessly impact on the formation of individual and ethnic identities; nevertheless, young people perceive keenly the tension between ethnic identity and national territory, with the state becoming, in a sense, a sponsor of ethnic identity.

Yi Li (SOAS) examined the 'Transformation of Yunnanese community along the Sino-Burmese border under colonial rule'. She reflected on the dual process of demarcating the territorial border between China and Burma and enforcing ethnic boundary and political orientation among the frontier inhabitants. The permeability of the Sino-Burmese border which allowed free movements of personnel, goods and capital, and the intrusion of explorers reporting on Yunnanese hospitality and culinary culture, turned into a rigid boundary with the British annexation of Burma in 1886. The establishment of the colonial administration pushed the Yunnanese to adopt a migrant identity in this new, multiethnic colonial state. On the other side of the border, the Chinese feared the threat of British colonial expansionism. Yi Li vividly illustrated the iconic and architectural representations of the Yunnanese community in Mandalay and lower Burma as it is recorded in photographs from archives.

The presentation of Kun-hui Ku (National Tsing Hua University) on 'The legal status of Pingpu in Taiwan and Sino-Native in Sabah' drew a comparison between the differing politics for the recognition of minority status fielded by the two groups (of colonial creation), and the corresponding nation-states' responses with limitations on recognition in Taiwan and non-limitation in Sabah. The Pingpu submitted their case to the United Nation Human Rights Commission in 2010, following rejection of their request of inclusion to the Taiwan's Council of Indigenous People. Their plea needs to be considered in relation to the growing number of new groups recognised in the past decade (Thao, Truku, Kavalan, Sakizaya and Sediq). In Malaysia, the Sabah constitution grants recognition of native status to anyone who can trace back to native ancestors, providing the category of 'Sino-Native' for those Chinese of native mixed marriage.

The panel closed with Claudia Merli's presentation 'State, minorities and borders in Thailand'. She went through the construction of certain images of people living at the periphery of the Thai nation-state by means of statistics and visual presentations of statistics in government documents. People living in the border provinces of Thailand, in the north, northeast and south were historically perceived as politically troublesome (the northern minorities prone to the influence of communist insurgency, or the southern irreducible separatists). These areas are nowadays marked as problematic in terms of excessive population growth and fertility rates, defying the family planning programmes. Identity was here explored as a means to organise peoples in groups by way of bio-political measures.

### **Displacement and resettlement in Southeast Asia: everyday practices and perspectives**

Convenors: Becky Elmhirst (Brighton University) and Liana Chua (Brunel University)

In this panel, speakers were invited to consider the small-scale workings, effects and experiences of displacement in the lives of Southeast Asian populations. Our starting point was to view displacement – both forced and voluntary – as having played an especially prominent role in the political, socio-economic and cultural developments of the last half-century. However, rather than focus on wider processes of commodification and dispossession, the panel considered the quotidian experiences of displacement and resettlement through a series of fine-grained case studies from settings across Southeast Asia.

Lesley Potter's (Australian National University) study of 'Oil palm and the new transmigration in Indonesia: examples from Kalimantan' discussed the Indonesian government's most recent iteration of its transmigration resettlement programme. She described a new paradigm guiding transmigration that includes greater involvement of the private sector (i.e. oil palm estates) and a desire to create 'spatial affinity' by the creation of new towns and cities. A central focus for Lesley's paper was a review of experiences in older and newer transmigration sites in Kalimantan, where newly settled transmigrants experience tremendous hardship. Her paper showed how, following political decentralisation in Indonesia, some of these difficulties have become even more pronounced, pushing many transmigrants to attain livelihood security through increased mobility and flexibility.

In her paper on 'Moralities and modernities: shifting meanings of migration in a liminal Sarawakian space', Liana Chua used a closely woven ethnography to show how the meaning of migration is

contested in four Bidayuh villages being resettled by the state to make way for a new dam. Historically, migration has been seen by Bidayuh as a productive force, creating social and moral relationships between people and communities. Conversely, resettlement as envisaged by the state has had destructive effects, removing a sense of the reproductive potential of land, whilst also pitting villagers against each other. What is evident is the gradual and somewhat haphazard dismantlement of the spatio-temporal social and moral relationships that were historically embodied by the landscape. What earlier forms of migration produced, the resettlement scheme is now throwing into question.

Jennifer Alexander (ANU) and Fam Shun Deng explored the resettlement of the Lahanan long house community displaced by the construction of Sarawak's Bakun hydro-electric dam in their paper 'Contextualizing development: the politics of hope and renewal in the Bakun Resettlement Scheme, Sarawak'. Covering changes that had been experienced since 1987, the paper highlighted people's responses to displacement, and showed how resettlement and renewal in the following years aroused a different set of emotions founded upon nostalgia, the reassertion of local community identity and the struggle to survive in the new location.

Resettlement for a large scale infrastructure project was also a theme underpinning Narae Choi's (University of Oxford) paper on 'Impacts of displacement and resettlement on urban livelihoods and communities: a case study of the railway project in Metro Manila'. It drew a comparison between those that had been relocated to the suburbs from informal homes alongside the railway line in Metro Manila, and those who had fought to achieve security of tenure, allowing them to remain in the city. In this context, mobility emerged as a coping strategy for those resettled, as people transited between Metro Manila and the relocation site, re-establishing even more precarious housing arrangements in the city. Return of this kind suggests that relocation is not simply a change of place of living, but total detachment from a complex web of long-term resource arrangements and social relations. Those that had remained in the city and had evaded relocation were in a better situation than those relocated.

Staying with the Philippines, Bernadette Resurreccion's (Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand) paper on 'Gender, floods and mobile subjects in low elevation zones of Quezon Province' also focused on the urban poor, this time in relation to displacements caused by cyclone damage and subsequent flood events in the area. Some of her respondents have been relocated to two resettlement sites, but continue to travel in order to maintain farmlands and in search of work. Hanging over their lives is a constant need to 'make a move'; in such a context, the ability to be 'mobile' marks a form of social differentiation, between those with and without the ability to live and work in multiple places. This contrasts with other local meanings attributed to immobility, where the possibility of fixity is an index of privilege. In the context of disaster relief and preparedness, the meaning of mobility is contested as institutional responses to disaster reinforce an aspiration for fixity, which may undermine the prospect of mobility as part of a coping strategy.

Deirdre McKay's (Keele University) paper – "Conforming to" place – development projects and the everyday performance of the state in the northern Philippines', also explores the ways in which everyday practices of development projects and programmes work to cut pre-existing mobility. Mobility and the extension of kin networks between places are important in creating communities and maintaining livelihoods within Ifugao society. Her paper described how the workings of particular development projects demanded 'presence' and 'fixity' in ways that contradicted peoples' mobility and the extension of their lives between different places. She shows how development initiatives paradoxically have the opposite effect to fixity, leading to accelerated mobility and emigration for work outside the country.

The final paper returned to Indonesia, where Becky Elmhirst's paper on 'Living with displacement and resettlement: morality, intimacy and multi-local ties in Lampung' described how 'settlement' in a local transmigration project is made possible only through serial and successive migration, as those resettled build livelihoods from across different locations. The paper focused on how such multi-local arrangements were made possible through emotional ties and forms of cooperation within the intimacy and interdependence of the family, recasting the importance of kinship ties. Holding these

cooperative ties together is achieved through a range of 'family making' practices, which include religious festivals that require a return, and also material practices that signal the 'presence' of an absent family member in the form of mementos and photographs.

Whilst the papers offered very different perspectives on the question of resettlement and displacement, a common thread was the interplay and tension between fixity, which often underpins state-led forms of displacement and resettlement, and the necessity of mobility, which is either threatened by the exigencies of resettlement or is reworked as people respond to resettlement failures. What might be referred to as 'state simplifications' are a central factor in resettlement schemes: in focusing on everyday practices and perspectives, the papers and ensuing discussion were able to highlight how the politics and practices of mobility beyond the state are central for understanding how displacement and resettlement is experienced and conceptualized on the ground.

## **Political and economic developments in Myanmar**

Convenors: Jurgen Haacke (LSE) and Richard Vokes (Postgraduate Institute of Management, Sri Lanka)

### Session 1

Jurgen Haacke's presentation was on 'Explaining the shifting consensus on US Burma Policy: the role of policy entrepreneurs', which examined the shift in US policy on Myanmar under the Obama administration towards one of 'pragmatic engagement'. It discussed the usefulness of several theories to account for this shift. Apart from geopolitical and economic factors the presentation highlighted the role played by key individuals keen to move beyond a simple sanctions-based approach.

Akkanut Wantanasombut (Chulalornkorn University) spoke on the 'Ant army: a significant mechanism of the Thailand-Myanmar smuggling trade'. He looked at the extensive legal and illegal trade across the Thai-Myanmar border and the people involved in this 'ant army'. He examined the reasons for the growth of this trade, the way it is financed, as well as its role in channelling remittance income back to Myanmar from Thailand. The presentation can be found at **Error! Hyperlink reference not valid.** login: akkanut@gmail.com; password: handsome\_AK

Richard Vokes's 'Agriculture and rural development in the "new" Myanmar: prospects and challenges' questioned the extent to which the agriculture sector represented a 'low hanging fruit' that would respond rapidly to the ongoing reforms. While noting the sector's very considerable potential and its importance to improving livelihoods, a number of key challenges facing the sector were highlighted.

In 'A Myanmar-like political reform process in Vietnam? Exploring the possible', Xuan Loc Doan (Aston University) argued that despite growing pressure from below as economic growth had slowed, Myanmar-style political changes in Vietnam were unlikely in the foreseeable future given the nature of the regime, the lack of any recognised opposition and the lack of outside pressure.

### Session 2

This was more of an open discussion, led by Jurgen Haacke and Bo Bo, a Burmese PhD student (SOAS). The need to re-legitimise the regime, reduce Chinese influence, and prepare the economy for the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015, were all discussed as factors that could help to explain the timing of the reforms. The speakers touched on the serious disagreement between legislators and the Constitutional Tribunal over the status of parliamentary committees and its members as well as other political developments. The limited experience of the opposition and the risk of it being seen as increasingly part of the system were noted in the discussion, and that further economic problems, such as land grabbing were emerging. The continued intense suspicion between the majority population and the minorities was also seen as a key challenge going forward, although it was noted by some that most of the minorities would accept a federal union as long as this embodied

meaningful autonomy. Issues of growing inequality and the continued dominance of the army in both politics and the economy were also highlighted. It was surmised that while foreign investment was looking to exploit Myanmar's rich natural resource base, the fact that all such investment had to be undertaken in a joint venture with local business interests, was likely to entrench the existing elite.

### **Modern Southeast Asia in trans-regional and interdisciplinary perspective**

Convenor: Pingtjin Thum (University of Oxford)

This panel produced four papers which studied Southeast Asia from perspectives which reached beyond national and disciplinary borders. The first two papers focused on mainland Southeast Asia, and the second two on the Malay world.

“To cross or not to cross?” Trans-boundary border development in the Greater Mekong Sub-region’, presented by Gianluca Bonanno (Kyoto University) focused on the development of border areas along the Sino-GMS borders, and in particular the establishment of border towns with hybrid characteristics with their own economic and social patterns. This, in effect, has created new communities with distinct characteristics that separate these towns from the states that surround them. Bonanno explored the possibility of these hybrid identities as the basis for new broader sub-regionalisations. At the same time, he noted how these increased interactions and interdependence has not come freely and have sometimes been enforced upon these towns, whether through coercion or fear of isolation. This has disrupted indigenous livelihoods and the social fabric of these communities.

Thorn Pitidol (University of Oxford) presented ‘Ineffective by assumptions? The real experiences in promoting community participation in rural Thailand’. Pitidol examined the concept of communitarian participation in a region of rural Thailand.

Exploring how the discourse of community participation shapes the practice of community development programmes, he noted how these programmes were shaped by very different expectations at the elite and community level, and argued that communitarian democracy should allow its adherents to assert the value of their collective identity and claim authenticity. This pointed to a paradoxical vision of democracy in which communitarian democracy was suggested as real democracy but at the same time became a way to reinvent a limitation to democratic participation.

Awang Azman Awang Pawi (Universiti Malaysia Sarawak) spoke on ‘Between fact and fiction: rethinking Hang Tuah as Malay(sia) hero’. Using a variety of approaches, he deconstructed the concept of Hang Tuah as mythological hero. In particular, he discussed the politicisation of the myth and its inextricable linkage with modern Malaysian politics. The ways in which Hang Tuah has been politicised illustrates the pre-occupations of Malaysian politics. This led to a broader discussion of politics, and the usage of mythology for political gain.

Maria Pakpahan (University of Edinburgh) closed the panel with ‘A tale of two countries: Indonesia – Malaysia in facing the challenge of secularism, demands for democracy and the national identity saga’. In it, she discussed how religion and nationalism have, on the one hand, become deeply intertwined in the lives of Indonesians and Malaysians; but on the other, how demands for religiosity are easily sidestepped through creativity, neglect, or simple ignorance in the two states. From this, Pakpahan addressed the relationship of religion with democratisation, comparing the orientations and directions pursued by Malaysia and Indonesia.

### **Threatened orders: environmental, social and ideological**

Convenor: Greg Bankoff (University of Hull)

The aim of this panel was to examine challenges to the established human order in Southeast Asia across a range of disciplinary perspectives that included environmental, biological, social and ideological among others. Four speakers rose to the challenge to produce a very lively and diverse discussion. The first speaker, Jeyamalar Kathirithamby-Wells (University of Cambridge) presented an overview of human responses at historic moments in Javanese history when the stability of the 'natural order' was challenged. She argued that the ways in which various societies attempted to reconstruct stability by ordering human affairs in harmony with nature have intersected inadvertently with scientific ideas and evolving popular notions of environmental conservation. David J.H. Blake (University of East Anglia), the second speaker, examined the role of the current monarch of Thailand, Bhumipol Adulyadej, through the lens of Karl Wittfogel's hydraulic societies thesis. Drawing from empirical data collected during fieldwork conducted in the northeast of the country, he concluded that the king's power over water resources development was manifest but perhaps more decentred than Wittfogel's original model suggest. The third speaker, Dinita Setyawati (SOAS), explored comparative government forest policies in Indonesia, the Philippines and Malaysia. She showed how a combination of community involvement and strict government monitoring was the most effective means of restoring environmental integrity. The final speaker and panel coordinator, Greg Bankoff (University of Hull), chose to examine threats to the built environment posed by earthquakes and the different forms that seismic architecture have taken to mitigate the risks. The panel was well attended and some intellectually challenging questions posed by the audience to the speakers.

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

Convenor: Annabel Teh Gallop (British Library)

This particular panel has been held at every ASEASUK conference since 2003 in Leeds and will be the last on its theme. Seven papers were presented, with three speakers from Malaysia, one from Brunei, and three from the UK .

The first session focused on epistolary studies with a presentation from Hasyim Musa (Universiti Putra Malaysia), of a paper jointly written with Assoc. Prof. Adi Yazran Abd. Aziz of the same university, entitled 'An endearing epistle from a Dutch colonial governor to a Malay ruler in his dominion'. The paper presented a newly acquired Malay manuscript letter in the National Library of Malaysia (MSS 4049), from the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia to the ruler of Sambas, dated 1848, and analysed the constituent elements of this letter. In his paper entitled 'Malay in Nusatenggara Timur, an 1899 example', Ulrich Kratz (SOAS) introduced a brief sealed Malay document written in 1899 containing an agreement between two local rulers of Sumbawa. The evidence of this document suggested that that at the turn of the 20th century Malay was still functioning as the medium of negotiation and diplomacy among the ruling elite of Nusantara. Annabel Teh Gallop then spoke on 'Ottoman influence on Malay diplomatics', discussing a few recently discovered 19th-century letters in Arabic written by rulers of Malay states to the Ottoman emperor in Istanbul, requesting help against foreign aggressors. The epistolary protocol applied to letters written in Arabic was evidently different from that for those written in Malay, and this paper questioned the extent to which scribes in royal Malay chanceries were aware of Ottoman diplomatics.

The second session was opened by Haji Wan Ali Wan Mamat (International Islamic University, KL), who spoke on 'The Jawi script of the Terengganu Inscription: a study on palaeography and orthography'. The 14th-century Terengganu Stone is renowned as the earliest known inscription in Malay in the Jawi script, and Dr Haji Wan Ali presented some new insights into the forms of letters and the spelling system of this important inscription.

The next three papers all concerned Malay literary texts. Ampuan Haji Brahim Haji Tengah (Universiti Brunei Darussalam) spoke on 'A preliminary study of a traditional Malay manuscript, Silsilah Kerajaan Sambas dan Brunai', currently held in the Brunei History Centre. He gave a synopsis of the contents of the text and its version of the genealogical links between the sultans of Brunei and those of

Sambas, and compared this with the royal genealogy found in the better known Silsilah Raja-Raja Berunai, first edited and published by Amin Sweeney in 1969. In her paper, 'Historical criticism in Malay historiography from 16th to 19th century', Tatiana Denisova (Academy of Islamic Studies, University Malaya) discussed the 'criteria of reliability' used by Malay authors of historical texts to convey the relative veracity of their sources. The last paper, presented by Vladimir Braginsky (SOAS), entitled 'The theme and variations: Turkish motifs in traditional Malay literature', identified four distinct categories of traditional Malay texts which included Turkic and Turkish motifs and images. The first group consists of early works translated from Persian which include Turkic characters or in which the action takes place in Istanbul. The second group is based on literary reconsiderations of the historically true episode of the Aceh embassy to Turkey. Particularly interesting is the third group which includes fantastic narratives of the Raja of Rum and 'political myths' of the origin of almost all Malay dynasties from Turkish ancestors, while the final, late, group narrates Russo-Turkish wars.

### **Sexualities in contemporary Southeast Asia: Thailand and Singapore as case studies**

Convenor: Jun Zubillaga-Pow (King's College London)

The study of sexual and gender minorities in Southeast Asia is a relatively new foray into academic institutions. Most of the research on this topic has focused on the maritime polities of Indonesia and the Philippines. With the recent publication of *Queer Bangkok* and *Queer Singapore* by Hong Kong University Press, the subsequent pair of countries covered in this panel thus reflects current academic interests vis-à-vis the turn of events in the region.

In his paper, Atit Pongpanit (Naresuan University) eked out the paradoxes between Thai Buddhist merit-making and the heteronormative shame of being different in the film *It Gets Better* by transgender filmmaker Tanwarin Sukhapisit. Next, Art Mitchells-Urwin (SOAS) introduced a Lacanian scheme of work for his imminent fieldwork. Steering clear of the well documented stories of Thailand's kathoey's or the same-sex nightclubs, he is interested in finding out how the locals view gay pornography despite its illegal status in the country. This paper shares an experiential theme with the next couple of presentations, which discussed how Singaporeans negotiate the postcolonial criminalisation of homosexuality. While Jun Zubillaga-Pow substantiated an argument of racial discrimination among the same-sex communities via online blogs and other information-sharing media, Simon Obendorf (University of Lincoln) exemplified a patriotic form of same-sex allegiances with the rise and fall of nationalised festivities, legalities and homophobic conscription. Questions on methodologies, terminologies and ethics were raised at the end of the panel, for which the participants would like to thank ASEASUK for their very generous sponsorship and hospitality.

### **Continuity and change in Southeast Asian performance**

Convenor: Dr Margaret Coldiron (University of Essex)

The panel set out to explore the changing face of performance in Southeast Asia past and present and invited papers that would examine both traditional and emerging performance forms and the impact of globalisation, new media, tourism and the traffic of transnational performers and performances. The six speakers presented work covering a wide range of material from both mainland and island Southeast Asia.

The first set of papers examined transcultural influences and innovations in Indonesian performance. Matthew Cohen (Royal Holloway, University of London) set the tone with a paper on 'Multiple modernities and the performing arts in Indonesia', which explored the way that the diverse performance cultures of the Indonesian archipelago have interacted not only with one another but also with the wider world for centuries. Drawings and photographs demonstrating an astonishing array of hybridity in all branches of Indonesian performing arts, from brass bands in 18th-century Batavia to

Japanese-influenced propaganda during the independence struggle, gave evidence of cultural interaction in performing arts that swirled between Indonesia, Europe, India, China and Japan. Colonial influence and tourism were, of course, important but touring performers, theatre companies and circuses from Europe and elsewhere in Asia also visited the archipelago giving rise to imitation inspiring the development of new forms. Thus Javanese groups performed Chinese Opera while hybrid genres like ketoprak and drama gong emerged. In addition, Indonesian performers toured with gamelan music and traditional performances that inspired and transformed ideas and practices in European music and theatre. The impact of new media (in this instance gramophone recordings and early cinema) hastened the processes of modernisation long before the internet and YouTube. The presentation refreshingly challenged the old binaries of 'traditional versus innovative, local versus national, indigenous versus cosmopolitan' and stimulated new ways of thinking about inter- and trans-cultural interactions both past and present.

Jun Zubillaga-Pow followed with a paper on "The transcultural turn of the Sundanese angklung in Singapore and Germany" examining the social and musical phenomenon of Sundanese angklung performance outside Indonesia. Amateur angklung groups in various German communities represent a rich mixture of nationalities and ethnicities brought together through a mutual interest in this traditional Sundanese instrument. The ensemble nature of the performance gives rise to strong social bonds and is not necessarily spurred by an interest in Indonesia or its culture. The situation in Singapore is made more complex by the added element of politics and social engineering with angklung used in education as a means of encouraging 'harmonious' interaction in an ethnically diverse population.

Tiffany Strawson (Plymouth University) presented a reversal of the usual analysis of transcultural Southeast Asian performance with a paper on Grup Gedebong Goyang of Bali, a contemporary comedy ensemble comprising four white, middle-aged, expatriate women who perform in the Balinese language in a variety of contexts from traditional ceremonies to Rotary-sponsored charity events and on Bali TV. The group's unusual facility with the complexities of the local language creates both an alienating and a bonding effect with their Balinese audiences. The content of their material is designed to appeal especially to women, whose lives and interests are not usually addressed. The political nature of much Gedebong Goyang's act is unusual and trades on their privileged position being both inside and outside of the culture.

The second group of papers all addressed traditional dance-drama forms in Thailand, Cambodia and Bali. The little documented genre of Balinese gambuh, a court dance-drama form, was the subject of Margaret Coldiron's paper based on ASEASUK-funded field research conducted in 2010. The paper addressed much contested issues relating to the history of the form and attempts at its 'preservation'. It compared the work of four ensembles examining variations in performance styles and differing perceptions of the cultural and religious significance of gambuh performance. This is ongoing research which it is hoped to continue with more extended fieldwork examining the largely undocumented traditions of gambuh performance in North Bali.

Phakamas Jirajarupat (Royal Holloway) charted the modernisation of traditional Thai performing arts through the example of Dr Seri Wangnaitham's adaptation of the novel Phuchanasibtid, performed as a hybrid dance-drama form, lakhon phanthang. Phakamas considered the increasing popularity of the piece and its interaction with a changing social and cultural landscape as it was translated into other media, including film and television, and the response of traditional Thai performers to working in a new idiom of popular performance.

Finally, the independent scholar and journalist Denise Heywood traced the revival of the Cambodian classical dance tradition after the fall of the Khmer Rouge in a paper titled 'From ritual to entertainment: traditional dance performance and tourism in Cambodia'. It drew on research that contributed to her book (Cambodian dance: celebration of the gods) and went on to examine the contested and problematic role of tourism in both preserving Cambodian classical dance and undermining standards of performance and traditional associations with ritual.

## **Sovereignty, spirituality and nationality in SE Asia**

Convenor: Claire Sutherland (Durham University)

This panel set out to explore how individuals negotiate a sense of identity and belonging in an era of porous borders and globalisation. It asked how they make meaning of contested sovereignty in the likes of the South China Sea, and how spiritual practices and religious observance intertwine with nation-building and myths of ancestry. It explored these questions from interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on both theoretical literatures conceptualising contemporary Southeast Asia and empirical studies of community practices across the region.

Lim Peng Han (Loughborough University) spoke on 'The Southeast Asian Peninsular Games 1959–75: celebrating sports and imagining nation-building' looked at the Games' historical contribution to nation-building through its athletes, iconography and media coverage.

Alex Grainger (SOAS) went on to discuss 'Colonial conceptions of sovereignty in Portuguese Timor', tracing their legacy in a Foucauldian analysis of contemporary attitudes to housing.

Edyta Roszko (University of Copenhagen) presented a paper on, 'The South Sea dispute: how "global" conflict becomes "local" and how "local" fishermen become global players' which studied the impact of the territorial dispute on an island community and its strategies for resisting or co-opting state policy.

Finally, independent scholar, Thanh Nguyen's paper 'Maritime cults: Vietnamese identity development through spirituality' explored the intercultural connections found in Central Vietnam's border regions through a case study of whale cults and their political importance in relation to government control of the communities that practise them.

The subsequent discussion identified a common theme linking all the papers, namely that of performing sovereignty. The papers identified individuals' responses and in some cases, their strategic resistance to official framings of state sovereignty through the medium of sport, home-building, fishing, ancestor worship and gender roles, among others. This was agreed to offer interesting new perspectives on sovereignty and the participants discussed the possibility of a future joint publication.

## **Open panel: inter-disciplinary perspectives on power, authority and rights in Southeast Asia**

Convenor: Jonathan Rigg (Durham University)

This panel contained five papers which, while from different disciplines, coincidentally all dealt with the broad theme of 'power'.

It opened with Monica Janowski's (SOAS) paper 'Human heroes, power and stone in the highlands of Borneo'. In this well crafted presentation, Monica recounted the story of Tukad Rini and Aruring Manapo Boong, the ideal couple for people living in the Kelapang valley in the Kelabit Highlands. Stories told about them are part of a larger corpus of stories about people living in a time described as 'joining with power' (getoman lalud). They are believed to have gathered, manipulated and utilised the life-force or power of the cosmos, lalud, for the benefit of their kin and followers. Aruring Manapo Boong embodies the ideal female – growing rice successfully – and Tukad Rini the ideal male – ranging across the cosmos to make war and take heads, and defeating a powerful spirit tiger. Marks in stone associated with Tukad Rini's activities are scattered across the landscape in the Kelapang valley. Drawing on fieldwork carried out over the past twenty years, Monica recounted the stories told

about Tukad Rini and implications that can be drawn to the way in which humans should live in the cosmos and with each other.

Lindsay Lloyd-Smith's (Sogang University, Seoul) paper 'The emergence of secondary burial in Southeast Asia' also drew on decades of work in Borneo, in this instance at the Niah Caves in Sarawak. Traditional communities of Southeast Asia have taken centre stage in pioneering anthropological studies of secondary burial. A concept underlying its concerns the symbolic link between the transformation of the corpse into dry bones, and the preparation of the soul for the journey to the afterlife. In his paper, Lindsay sought to explore the questions: how, when, and why did the practice of secondary burial emerge? Using a re-analysis of the spatial and temporal patterning in burial practice at two Neolithic cemeteries (3500 and 200 BCE) at the Niah Caves, his paper explored the transformation of funerary rituals that occurred c.1000 BCE which led to full secondary burial.

Wasana La-orngplew's (Durham University) paper was entitled 'Land grabs, land deals and the rubber boom in the Lao uplands', in which she explored the recent expansion of rubber in Luang Namtha province against wider debates over global land grabs. The fieldwork highlighted the complex and diverse processes of land control by which land deals are secured. Her research shows that investors employ different strategies to gain control over land. Most local investors do not have sufficient political and economic power to seek formal permission for large-scale investment. Instead they operate below the radar of the state, largely hidden from observation. Though the scale of villagers' land loss was much smaller than the areas being seized by rubber companies, the fact is that it remains permanent land loss with major implications for villagers' access to agricultural land in the long term, and therefore on the future of small farmers' livelihoods. Such land deals are common in Luang Namtha and have been largely ignored in the literature.

Yue-Yi Hwa (Oxford University) drew together recent political dynamics in Malaysia and Singapore in a paper entitled 'Competing voices: authoritarian regimes and middle-class mobilisation in Malaysia and Singapore'. The question she addressed in her presentation was: 'Why have recent years seen cross-cutting mobilisation against the hitherto stable authoritarian regimes in Malaysia and Singapore? In contrast to predictions of stability in the literature, Yue-Yi argued that pro-democracy pressures have developed in each country with the emergence of a middle class that is neither ideologically nor financially appeased by the regime. She investigated this question using process tracing within each case, from the 1965 secession of Singapore from Malaysia to the present, with a variety of sources including census and voting data; economic policy documents; and party and government speeches.

The final paper was by Sharon Advincula Caringal (University of the Philippines) and entitled 'Spratly Islands: implications on regional stability and maritime security in the Asia Pacific region'. Sharon observed that the complex territorial dispute between China and the Southeast Asian nations over the Spratly Islands could undermine regional stability and maritime security. The island group is strategically located, rich in marine resources, and in oil and natural gas. In the past several decades, piecemeal solutions and palliative measures have been adopted but a lasting settlement has yet to be agreed upon by the claimants. In the light of China's growing economic, political and military build-up, various calls have been made for international organisations like the United Nations and Asean to moderate the dispute and facilitate multilateral talks. Her paper provided an incisive account of the potentialities and vulnerabilities of the Spratlys in the context of China's increasing assertiveness.

Museum workshop: developing the use of museum collections to support teaching and research in Southeast Asian Studies

### **Convenors: Craig Barclay (Oriental Museum) and Claire Sutherland**

The workshop, organised around an object handling session, facilitated a lively exchange of views between subject specialists and museum professionals. Durham University's Oriental Museum has a relatively small collection of artefacts from Southeast Asia. When the museum was founded in 1960,

acquisitions were focused on supporting teaching and research priorities within the University's Department of Oriental Studies. Southeast Asia was not central to this collecting policy. As a result, objects in the collection have been acquired largely through donation rather than as a result of deliberate collecting and reflect a willingness by previous curators to look beyond the core remit of the museum at that time. Today the museum has a remit to support teaching and research right across Durham University, the UK and internationally. The University has also committed to completely redeveloping all of the museum's permanent galleries. During 2014, level 2 of the museum will be refurbished to accommodate new displays ranging from the Himalayas, through South Asia and into Southeast Asia. Museum staff were therefore keen to explore three main issues: How the Southeast Asia collection can be used to support teaching and research at Durham and within the wider Higher Education community, how the new displays can be used to highlight current issues and research topics in Southeast Asian studies and finally, areas for future collecting. The session was structured around a series of questions related to these themes. Participants' reactions and suggestions were also triggered by handling a selection of objects from the collection. The workshop, which was followed by a guided tour of the museum, did a great deal to raise the Oriental Museum's profile among Southeast Asianists, while providing its curators with a wealth of expertise and insights on how to develop the museum's collecting and exhibition strategy for Southeast Asia. This will flow directly into the Museum's redisplay of its Southeast Asian collection in 2014.