

CALL FOR PAPERS

Conference on Historical Fragments in Southeast Asia: At the Interfaces of Oral History, Memory and Heritage

Organised by Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and Singapore Heritage Society
23-24 June 2010

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, together with the Singapore Heritage Society, is revisiting oral history in Southeast Asia two decades since it co-organised the first conference. *Historical Fragments in Southeast Asia* will bring together the latest oral history and ethnographic research on the region and explore its links with two exciting fields which investigate the same content in different ways, namely, memory and heritage studies.

Historical Fragments in Southeast Asia serves as an important platform to explore the interfaces between oral history, memory and heritage and formulate new ways of approaching Southeast Asia's fragmented pasts. Traditional oral history work in the region, which seeks to retrieve what Paul Thompson called 'the voices of the past' to complete or contest historical narratives, has largely been concerned with questions of objectivity and reliability. Memory studies, by contrast, has attempted to analyse the deeper politics and subjective meanings of the fragments that people remember or forget. Both oral testimonies and memories are also closely connected with the emerging and topical field of heritage in its intangible, cultural and everyday forms.

Important note: Proposals should make an attempt at this preliminary stage to consider oral history's convergences with memory and/or heritage and not merely situate the discussion within the originating discipline or methodology. Proposals should be centered around oral history or ethnographic work. We welcome submissions from, among others, historians, anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, architects, public officials, activists, and social workers, as well as approaches from academic and advocacy perspectives.

The conference organisers are pleased to be able to offer partial financial support to participants, although they are also encouraged to seek funding from their home institutions. Selected papers from the conference will further explore the interfaces between the three fields and will be published in what we hope to be a path-breaking edited volume.

Submission of Proposal

Those interested in presenting a paper at the conference are invited to submit a proposal which includes a working title, 500-word abstract, CV, and an indication of your funding requirements by **14 December 2009** to Dr Loh Kah Seng kahseng@iseas.edu.sg.

Suggested Themes

Crisis of Memory. What and how Southeast Asians remember or forget are often narrowly channeled into narratives of loss or nostalgia. What are the influences of major historical and contemporary forces on oral history such as colonialism, developmentalism, urbanism, architectural modernism, cosmopolitanism, and globalisation? What will these

developments mean for the forms of heritage that Southeast Asians can adopt? What is the impact of Internet technologies in rendering oral histories and individual memories public?

Politics of Memory. Oral history remains a deeply contested field in an era of Southeast Asian nationalism. What are the influences of the official mass media and the prerogatives of nation-building and social engineering on memory? What are the silences or social rumours of the past? What is the role and impact of the political biography and the official myth in the region? Does oral history affirm or contest dominant narratives? Does it accentuate historical agency and empower the informants?

'Difficult' Heritage and Identity. The nation-state remains the primary organising actor in Southeast Asia. Yet, there are important forms of memory, heritage and identity which exist outside or even in direct opposition to the national paradigm, along the divides of locality, gender, ethnicity, class, age, among others. How can communities and oral historians attempt to recover these interstitial, everyday or local forms of heritage and memories that exist 'between the cracks' or 'out of sight' of the dominant paradigm? How should we negotiate between national, transnational, community, and local identities?

Trauma and Reconstruction. Since World War Two and the subsequent decolonisation which has transformed Southeast Asia, political conflict, economic crisis, natural disasters, epidemics, and social upheaval have been marked features of everyday life in the region. How have memory and heritage been affected by these developments and does oral history help redress the personal and social traumas experienced in the process?

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