

EUROSEAS 2019

Laboratory Proposal

Title:

Bourdieu, Religious Fields and Social Power in Mainland Southeast Asia

Conveners:

Benjamin Baumann (Assistant Professor, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Erick White (Assistant Professor, Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan)

Inspired by Stanley Tambiah's seminal ethnography of spirit cults and the religious field in Northeast Thailand, scholars of religion in mainland Southeast Asia have since the 1970s intermittently deployed the idea of the "religious field" to analyze religious diversity, hierarchy and opposition within particular national settings. Scholarship about the religious fields of Southeast Asia, however, has rarely engaged with Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theorizing of social fields or the subsequent work on social field theory which has flowed from his work. This laboratory will ask scholars of religion in Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos to bring these two trajectories of scholarship into critical conversation. What theoretical, analytical and methodological similarities and differences unite and divide the conceptualizations of a religious field by Tambiah and Bourdieu? How can the conceptual vocabularies and analytic models of Bourdieu and others theorists of social fields enrich the interpretation of religious structures, hierarchies, complementarities and contestation in modern and pre-modern Southeast Asia? What are the limitations of applying sociological theories of social fields in Southeast Asia given that they have primarily emerged and been applied to societies of the modern industrial Christian West? How does the unique historical, religious and socio-political dynamics of colonialism, nation-building and the revival of various religious traditions in Southeast Asia suggest productive ways in which Bourdieu's theorizing of social fields need to be revised and re-imagined in a global era?

This laboratory will establish a dialogue between junior and senior scholars of religion, anthropology and sociology who research contrasting domains, fields and dynamics of social power and religiosity in contemporary mainland Southeast Asia. By thinking comparatively both within national settings and across the mainland region, the laboratory seeks to develop a more robust, critical and nuanced conceptual and analytic vocabulary through which to advance the

comparative study of religious pluralism, social power and historical agency in Southeast Asian and beyond.

Our format is innovative as it doesn't require participants to write full-fledged papers in advance but rather short position papers of 800 words, summarizing their main responses to the laboratory's theme relating to their own work. These position papers will be distributed in advance and collectively discussed at the beginning of the laboratory, serving as a shared point of reference for the subsequent open-ended conversation.

The two laboratory organizers are both junior scholars, who will coordinate the writing process of the individual papers and edit the journal special issue that is the intended outcome of the laboratory. The entire discussion during the laboratory will be videotaped, with the video distributed to all participants to serve as a point of reference during the subsequent drafting of journal essays. The participants will meet again to form a panel at the AAS in 2020 in order to present and discuss their finalized papers, prior to their submission to a major journal.

Confirmed participants:

Benjamin Baumann, Assistant Professor, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / Thailand

Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, Research Fellow, French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS, Paris) / Myanmar

Céline Coderey, Research Fellow, Asian Research Institute, National University of Singapore / Myanmar

Niklas Foxeus, Research Fellow, Department of Ethnology, History of Religions and Gender Studies, Stockholm University / Myanmar

Boike Rehbein, Professor, Institute of Asian and African Studies, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin / Laos

Erick White, Assistant Professor, Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan / Thailand

Through a call for papers we will seek out additional participants with expertise in Cambodia. Due to scheduling conflicts, those scholars we initially contacted are unable to participate.