

EUROSEAS 2021 PROPOSAL

7-10 September 2021

Venue: Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic

<https://www.euroseas.org/call-for-panels-2021/>

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(1) Title

Burma's First Democratic Term: Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy, and the Western Imagination

(2) Convener

Ryan Hartley, PhD

Lecturer, Tohoku University (Japan)

(3) Panel description

For decades, Myanmar and its international figurehead, Aung San Suu Kyi, have held a special place in the international community and especially within the Western imagination. The country's strange, astrology consulting, human rights abusing military leadership, coupled with the general post-Cold War trend in East Asia to shift away from Communist command economies, earned the country the warranted but often over-used title of one of the last 'hermit kingdoms'. This dark image was consistently highlighted further by the contrast with the saintly, unifying, democratising figure of Aung San Suu Kyi who suffered numerous challenges in the service of bringing the Burmese people a democratic and peaceful Burma. This role rose Suu Kyi up - particularly within the liberal Western imagination - to a position as torch-carrier for the validity of the inevitable march towards that 'end of history', if slow to get there, liberal high-mark.

Yet, five years after her 2015 election win that brought her party, the NLD, and herself to the country's political pinnacle, progress has been slow, even unchanging. Suu Kyi's status within even some quarters of that formerly fawning liberal imagination has slipped, and she is beginning to be seen in the sort of terms formerly reserved for the military junta she replaced. Myanmar has a semi-functioning democracy, Suu Kyi is for all intents and purposes in charge, and the country's various politico-economic systems are opening up to internationalisation. There is now blame to easily apportion, raising questions that call for a clear-eyed, critical, empirical analysis of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD's first five years in office in order to answer.

This panel aims to pull the scales from our audience's eyes and critically evaluate Suu Kyi and the NLD for the first time; not as campaigning seers of freedom and democracy, but as that most dull but necessary actor - political leaders. How successful has Myanmar's first democratic term been? What has changed and remained the same? And

also, how can we locate Suu Kyi and Myanmar's significance within the liberal Western imagination; and how such idealism is potentially damaging to Myanmar.

(4) Sessions

Single or Double sessions are possible, preferably a double. These can be separated by (a) politics and (b) socio-economics. Each participant has their individual theme addressing the first five years of Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, in addition to considering how this theme is affected by Myanmar within the foreign 'gaze'.

SOCIO-ECONOMICS

Ryan Hartley, Tohoku University - International Political-Economy and Myanmar

Tin Tin Htun, Temple University - Gendering Democratization in Burma/Myanmar: The Quest for Gender Equality and NLD era

Tuwanont Phattharathanasut and Will Brehm - Education and Nationalism in Myanmar: Political Rhetoric vs Policy Reality

POLITICS

Jeffrey Kingston, Temple University - Parties and Interest Groups

Donald Seekins, Meio University - The Many Faces of Buddhism on Politics in Contemporary Burma/Myanmar

Roger Huang, Macquarie University - The Tatmadaw Marches on: A Disciplined Military in an Undisciplined Society

(5) Optional: discussant.

None, I prefer more audience engagement with Q/A