

Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Postcolonial Southeast Asia

Conveners:

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Abstract:

While Furnivall rightly pointed out that postcolonial societies needed to cultivate a common social will to maintain order among diverse communities in a plural society, his vision of nationalism elided the possibility of conflict and violence in the imposition of the dominant vision of the nation. In contrast, Partha Chatterjee, from a postcolonial perspective, understood very well the partiality of the project of nation-building, and how the interests of certain ethnic and religious communities, even if they are imbibed as part of the nation, may be marginalized in the national imaginary.

In this vein, these ethnic and religious communities are understood as minorities – not because of their lesser numbers, but because of their lesser positions within the nation. We propose a double-session panel to examine and compare the condition of ethnic and religious minorities across different parts of postcolonial Southeast Asia. Ethnic minorities can include Chinese, Indians, Rohingyas and other historically migrant communities brought to Southeast Asia by colonial fiat, or indigenous communities dominated by new postcolonial political masters. Religious minorities can include groups in non-dominant positions, such as Christians in Malaysia and Muslims in the Philippines, or minor sects within dominant religious communities, such as the Ahmadiyah and Shi'a communities in Indonesia. In comparing these minority groups across postcolonial Southeast Asia, the panel will seek to deconstruct the experience and meaning of being minorities, and articulate the multi-vocality of postcolonial nation-states.

Format: Double-session – one focusing on ethnic minorities and the other focusing on religious minorities, to be chaired by Yew-Foong Hui and Ahmad Najib Burhani respectively.

Prospective panelists are: Melissa Crouch (University of New South Wales); Dian Diana Binti Andul Hamed Shah (National University of Singapore); Syamsul Maarif (Gajah Mada University). Three more panelists are yet to be determined, but may include the conveners.

Discussant: 1 discussant per session to be determined.