

Panel Proposal
for the
11th EuroSEAS conference
Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic
7-10 September 2021

Title:

Making and Un-making Resource Frontiers in Southeast Asia: State Formation and the Commodification of Nature

Convener:

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Panel Description:

The hinterlands and uplands of Southeast Asia have been repeatedly imagined, described and analysed as a frontier. Their alleged untamed wilderness and natural riches have been a powerful trope that served to legitimate population transfers, resource extraction, and the expansion of state control into remote regions, which are inhabited by local groups and where different land tenure rights overlap, producing questions over legitimate access to land and natural resources.

Drawing on recent dynamic and processual understandings of frontiers (e.g. Geiger 2008, Acciaioli and Sabharwal 2017, Cons and Eilenberg 2019), this panel explores processes of frontierization and de-frontierization, highlighting the complex interplay between the commodification of nature and state formation. Recently, Kelly and Peluso (2015) have argued that the production of natural resources is closely linked to local processes of state formation and that the forms of resource control and property arrangements are constitutive of state authority. At the same time, they are important drivers of frontierization and de-frontierization. Formal property rights for example form a basic prerequisite for today's large-scale land acquisitions, pushing processes of frontierization, while the recognition of customary rights in the state legislation, may produce overlapping or competing rights to land or may lead to de-frontierization.

The panel wishes to emphasize the fluidity, complexity, and temporal dynamics of state formation in frontier areas, where competition over resources and land is high, the presence of the state is fragmented and uneven, and new property systems and legal arrangements are in the making. In order to develop a comparative perspective on such frontier dynamics, we invite contributions from different resource frontiers throughout Southeast Asia that explore how processes of resource-making are interrelated with state making projects, how particular state initiatives enable specific processes of frontierization and de-frontierization, and how the people who live in places framed as frontiers, exercise agency in these processes.

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