

Memory, Heritage, Commemoration, and Contestations in Southeast Asia Single Panel Proposal for EUROSEAS 2021

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Panel Convener

Abstract

Despite being a playground for colonizers, great powers, and dictators, the terrain of Southeast Asian memory remains to be underexplored in the literature of memory and heritage studies. As many of the events in the region's turbulent past move beyond the primary sources of survivor testimony and on to what Marianne Hirsch refers to as the postmemory, attention must be focused on the vestiges of Southeast Asian pasts, represented by built heritage and commemoration practices. The papers in this panel explore the nexus of memory, heritage, and commemoration in Southeast Asia by looking at the region's industrial heritage, war memorialization, and the contestations brought about by remembering and forgetting in the present. We hope to interrogate the politics and practices related to memory and heritage in Southeast Asia in hopes of contributing to the "memory boom" (Schumacher, 2015) the region rightfully deserves.

Papers

Memories of industrial pasts in colonial Southeast Asia: Studies of industrial heritage in Dutch Indonesia, Spanish Philippines, and British Singapore

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The recognition of industrial heritage that usually take the forms of museums carved out of physical locations of a dynamic industrial activities in the past like old factories, mining sites, and industrial infrastructures can be informed by certain ideologies that are decisive in the stories and information that such places would contain. For societies like East Germany for example, industrial heritage is important in terms of legitimizing the regime whose ideology is centered on the achievement of the working class that propelled its industry. In the midst of industrial rut due to the recent changes in the international division of labor, Britain for example, is said to highlight their industrial supremacy in the world during their pioneering years through various industrial heritage sites found in various location in the country.

This paper takes a look at industrial heritage of formerly colonized Southeast Asian countries namely Indonesia, Philippines, and Singapore. Having been occupied by three different colonial powers, this paper seeks to explore both similarities and differences in the way that their *colonial* industrial past are being memorialized through specific industrial heritage sites. The locations studied in this paper are the Ombilin Coal Mining Heritage in West Sumatra, Museo El

Deposito in Manila, and the Former Ford Factory in Singapore. By scrutinizing the content of these heritage sites and museums, this paper intends to demonstrate the way in which historical actors in the respective industrial past that is being memorialized in each of these sites are represented in terms of the role, contribution, and ownership ascribed to them in the advancement, innovation, and interaction that occurred in these periods of industrial pasts.

Heritage, politics, and war in Southeast Asia: World War II memorialization in Thailand and the Philippines

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While Japan's imperialist adventure in Southeast Asia during the World War II is considered as a distinct period of hardship, starvation, violence, and oppression, it is also an important albeit contentious juncture in the history of the region, setting off nationalist movements and accelerating the struggle for independence. The war left an indelible mark in the region's national identities that is apparent in the representation and memorialization of World War II through heritage in the region, such as monuments and memorials. But how is the war memorialized in a region that had varying experiences and interpretations of the past? Why is memorialization more vibrant in some and restrained in others? This paper explored the politics behind the production and memorialization of the war by examining Thailand's *Victory Monument*, an ambiguous memorial to Thai war heroes, and the Philippines' *Shrine of Valor*, a historical shrine complex dedicated to Filipino and U.S. soldiers of World War II. Highlighting or silencing remembrance is a matter of politics, agenda, and the benefits that commemoration brings to the state. By analyzing heritage sites such as monuments and memorials, this study illustrated that downplaying or highlighting commemoration served state aims—in Thailand, the inward justification and outward restraint were borne out of the challenging positions the state has taken in the past, while in the Philippines, memorialization as a state enterprise was undertaken to serve state agenda.

Nuancing an academic institution's identity through heritage and public history: Insights from the University of the Philippines Diliman

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By reviewing selected activities and projects launched by the University of the Philippines to commemorate its transfer to its flagship campus in Diliman, Quezon City, this paper aims to reflect on the place of heritage and public history in the context of an academic institution. As the Philippine's national university, UP traces its long history back to its original foundation in 1908 under the purview of the American colonial period. In 1949, the university embarked on a major transfer of its main campus from its original site in Manila to Quezon City. Since then, the

University of the Philippines Diliman has been the main campus of the University of the Philippines System.

Being the premier academic institution in the Philippines, the history of the UP is inextricably linked to the national narrative of Philippine society. As such, its place in influencing discourses and important conversations regarding Philippine politics, culture, and society rests on its own rich history and reputation. With this in mind, it thus brings merit to also look into how the academic institution constructs its identity and presents it for public consumption and scrutiny. The occasion of UP Diliman's commemoration of its 70th year in 2019 saw an institutional effort at harnessing heritage and public history. The year 2019 also presents an interesting time to hold such commemorative activities especially when seen in light of the oppositional stance of many faculty, students, and alumni of the university against the current Philippine presidency. The calls to defund the university accompanied with it being painted as a hotbed of communist insurgency complicates the conversation about UP's complex relationship with the state. How UP presented itself through its commemoration activities could thus strike further conversations on the intersections of heritage, institutional memory, and public history.

The politics of nostalgia and the Marcos “Golden Age” in the Philippines

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The increasing incidence of disinformation and historical revisionism in the Philippines promoted romanticized recollections of Ferdinand Marcos's martial law (1972–1981). While many Filipinos remember the era for its horrors and atrocities, alternate narratives circulated online claim that Marcos's rule made the nation “great” and that several groups and institutions conspired to distort the people's memory, serving the purpose of Marcos's political enemies. These narratives, when shared by Marcos and Duterte supporters, echo a desire to return to a fantastical “golden age.” This article investigates the nostalgia for the Marcos “golden age” and its role in the larger Marcos propaganda network. It exposes the systematic and sustained circulation of whitewashed memories of Marcos's martial law in online communities, as well as the techniques that turn the Marcos propaganda into a basic grammar that frames people's articulation of their frustrations and aspirations. The study found that nostalgia sets the stage for the expression of polarizing phrases, hate speech, and conspiracy theories, which complete the “grammar” of the Marcos propaganda.