

Bordering the Unknown: Imagination and Liminal Space across Southeast Asian Frontiers

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This panel aims to connect with recent developments in the study of frontiers, initiating debates on the ambiguous relationship between frontiers, territoriality and space. Whereas some conceptualizations of the frontier have largely focused on aspects of territoriality, we wish to engage with the more transient aspects of spatiality. Frontiers are often regarded as the edges of territorial control: of people, land and resources. Such an approach frequently associates with the position of encroaching states, entrepreneurs or settlers, in which “frontiers [literally] *take place*” (Rasmussen and Lund 2018: 388). It has been noted, however, that the agency of local communities at the frontier is often neglected in this perspective.

In this panel, we wish to engage with emic points of view in regard to frontiers and frontier space: Are there local notions of the dichotomy between the ‘centre’ and “out-of-the-way places” (Tsing 1993)? How do people at the ‘periphery’ negotiate ‘remoteness’? How are ‘marginal’ realms composed of their own inner and outer edges? And how is frontier space “anchored in the imaginative” (Cons and Eilenberg 2019: 12), generating notions of distalgia and experiences of liminality?

Based on Victor Turner’s rendering of liminality, we regard frontier space as “in-and-out” of linear territory. Space at frontiers constitutes realms of the “in-between” filled by visionary ideas of (local or international) development, notions of alternative realities or a utopian longing. This might include the spatial imageries of local cosmologies as much as the mental ‘mapping’ of novel realms such as airspace, waterways and ‘nature’ more generally.

We invite papers that engage with frontier spatiality across all parts of Southeast Asia. The panel welcomes contributions from different disciplines, encouraging both ethnographic case studies and conceptual interpretations of the frontier as a symbolic sphere.

References

Jason Cons & Michael Eilenberg

- 2019 “Introduction: On the New Politics of Margins in Asia: Mapping Frontier Assemblages”, in: Jason Cons and Michael Eilenberg (eds.), *Frontier Assemblages: The Emergent Politics of Resource Frontiers in Asia*, Oxford: Wiley, pp. 1-18.

Mattias Borg Rasmussen & Christian Lund

2018 "Reconfiguring Frontier Spaces: The territorialization of resource control", *World Development* 101: 388–399

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing

1993 *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-way Place*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.