

*Title:* SOUTHEAST ASIAN NOTIONS OF “DEBT OF GRATITUDE”

*Convenor:* Rainier A. Ibane, Philosophy Department, Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

*Invited Participants:* Leovino Ma. Garcia, Philippines; Suwanna Satha-Anand, Thailand; Andre Ata Ujan, Indonesia

*Abstract:*

In *Inside Southeast Asia*, Niels Mulder broached the idea of “debt of gratitude” as a central pillar in Thai, Filipino, and Javanese/Indonesian moral universes (1996, 235). He proposed the moral registers of *nii bunkhun*, Th; *utang na loob*, TF; *utang budi*, I; and *utang kabecikan*, J; as parallel touchstones of conscience among these cultures inspite of their different religious contexts. This panel discussion will call upon representatives of these cultural traditions to discuss the various shades of meaning of this idea from philosophical and historical perspectives and to bring out their repercussions to their contemporary practice of politics. Three philosophers, representing major thinkers from these countries, may also discuss and compare this notion from Buddhist, Islamic, and Christian perspectives. It is envisioned that this comparison can be expanded to include philosophers from other Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia and Vietnam.

At its best, Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize Winner for 2021, described this form of indebtedness as “a system of paying forward” from the past into the future. At its worst, however, this indebtedness is monetized as a form of reciprocal transaction that puts the disadvantaged sectors of society at the beck and call of their wardlords who expect the former to repay the latter for favours that were granted during their time of need. This range of meanings are not only practiced during contemporary times but are deemed to be rooted to the pre-colonial social structure of “village societies” when clans ruled fiefdoms over slaves and underlings (dela Costa, 1967, 7). Mulder traces this ideology to the centrality of the mother as the epitome of the moral order wherein a collective and relational consciousness is cultivated in contrast to the demands for autonomy and individuality that characterize Western cultures (*Ibid.*).

*Bibliography:*

Suwana Satha-Anand, “Individual Ethics: Properties and Lightness of Body and Mind” *Philosophy Manual: A South-south Perspective* (Paris: UNESCO, 2014): 146-148.

H. dela Costa, S.J., *Asia and the Philippines* (Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1967).

Roque Ferriols, S.J., *Pambungad sa Metapisika*, (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1991).

Roque Ferriols, S.J., *Utang na Loob sa mga Ninuno at sa mga Bata* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2022) forthcoming.

Leovino Ma. Garcia, “Utang na Loob or Passing on Grace,” *Elan Section, Philippine Daily Inquirer* (2004).

Fika Hidayani, “The Principles of Sharia Economic Law in Tasyrihah al Muhtaj Manuscripts by K.H. Ahmad Rifa’i” *Karsa: Journal of Social and Islamic Culture*, Vol. 26 No.1 (Bandung: Institute of Islamic Studies, 2018): 23-46.

Ibane, Rainier (Ed) *Southeast Asian Wisdom Stories for Sustainable Development* (Pasay City: UNESCO National Commission of the Philippines, 2012),

Niels Mulder, *Inside Southeast Asia* (Kuala Lumpur, The Pepin Press, 1996).

*Proposed time frame:* A total of ninety (180) minutes with two parts of 90 minutes each. The first part will be divided into three 15 minutes of presentations, followed by ten minutes of commentaries by the next presenter. A ten (10) minute synthesis will then be provided by a rapporteur. The second part will be composed of ten (10) minute rejoinders from other Southeast Asian Countries who will be invited to express the similarities, differences and reactions from the perspective of their own cultural circles. Education and social science specialists will be most welcome to join the discussion.

*Format :*

Three presenters will be given 15 minutes each to read their paper. After each presentation, the next panelist will comment on the previous presenter for 10 minutes until they are able to make one round of presentations and commentaries. A rapporteur (possibly John Giordano of Assumption University of Bangkok) will synthesize the similarities and differences of the notions of “debt of gratitude” among the discussants for ten minutes.

Ten minute rejoinders will be made (online or video from Cambodia (Chan Reoun Pa), Laos (Phinith Chanthalangsy), Vietnam (Bui duy Thanh Mai), Malaysia ()), among others. A Question and answer period with the audience will then ensue after the presentations. A book project of selected papers is envisioned as a future endeavour of this extended panel discussion.