

Encounters with Southeast Asian agri-food heritage at home and abroad

Conveners

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Panel Format – Single Session

Carefully moderated panel with emphasis on making the theme expansive and accessible for the audience through short and provocative presentations, including ample discussion space.

Panel description

The destabilization of foodways in Southeast Asia, which is variously a response to globalization, lifestyle change, and disruptions to natural resource bases, is being mirrored by a golden age of culinary interest abroad. While much of this is a consequence of “traveling cultures” sparked by migration and the maturation of diasporic communities (Clifford 1997), decades of effort to cultivate culinary soft power (i.e. gastrodplomacy) have also contributed to the rising profiles of Southeast Asian cuisines outside the region. This has often prompted a culinary reevaluation of domestic cuisines, as various aspects of dietary wisdom are rediscovered abroad in light of global food trends. Fermentation, edible wild plants, heirloom crop varieties, botanical ingredients, and famous regional foods have become rallying points for younger generations’ interest in local food ways. Materially, the deterritorialization occurring for historical, indigenous agri-food systems is more frequently being followed by globally anchored reterritorialization, in which food heritage construction is increasingly an intentional (rather than defensive) process, driven by young people, social media, chefs, and global institutions (James Farrer, various; Tomlinson 1999). This phenomenon is also visible in the rise of food studies and gastronomy programs in higher education, which problematize linear conceptualization of culinary evolution.

This panel seeks to gather research evaluating the global circuits and domestic anchoring of Southeast Asian cuisine and food heritage. Diasporic influences are among the most obvious drivers here and we welcome contributions on this topic. However, we are equally interested in lesser-researched drivers of domestic agri-food valorization, such as feedback from gastrodplomacy, renewed interest in food literacy and foodie-ism, responses to newer forms of food journalism or research, or culinary decolonization among emergent middle and upper classes (Inglis and Gimlin 2009). We welcome contributions that help to chart a course forward for critical food studies in/about Southeast Asia.