Euroseas Conference 2024

**Accepting inequality in precarious Southeast Asia.**

Discipline: anthropology, economic history, political science.

Area: all region

**Proposers:**

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Egalitarian moral ideals are acknowledged as universal throughout Southeast Asia: states as well as individuals consider all human beings equal, meaning they are entitled to the same rights regardless of their gender, social/religious/ethnic belonging, or appearance. However, it is also widely experienced that inequality exists at all levels of society. In fact, parallel to egalitarian moralities, most people explicitly and/or implicitly accept a certain degree of inequality (discrimination, oppression, exploitation, insecurity and vulnerability). They do not contrast it either in practices or in ideas and emotions and/or are compliant with some hierarchy.

In this panel, we focus on the individual and social acceptance of inequality and examine practised forms of social and personal hierarchy, which in turn can be seen as natural, traditional or inevitable. In this respect, 'acceptance' can be used as an analytical tool, the antithesis of the fortunate term 'resistance'.

More precisely, we will consider the forms of practical and symbolic acceptance of inequality in contexts of poverty, spatial marginality and exploitation in neoliberal Southeast Asia. We will compare local practical notions (thoughts, plans, ideas, objects, actions) of both inequality and its resolution or transformation.

We look forward to contributions that address contexts of poor labour and social and cultural conditions of exclusion (post-carceral life, disability, environmental or ethnic-based exclusion, both in cities and remote areas) and that focus on embodied practises of inequality that include habits, ritual practises, mobility and labour.

We take a multidisciplinary approach and value the use of different contextualised sources to answer questions such as these:

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- How is a person’s or group’s lack of opportunity defined in their own words (“We can’t do this, we can’t go there, we don’t want to do that”)? Is this idea expressed in words, does it refer to material objects such as housing, clothing, technical instruments? What embodied forms does it take?

- How does such a definition relate to broader pictures (state, gender, religion, economic power)? This includes, for example, making sense of economic powers in a labour context, the development of collective or individual strategies for coping with hardship, joining religious groups, trade unions, artists' groups…

- What is the imaginary of discrimination and what is the imaginary of just hierarchy that the persons under consideration refer to? This includes, for example, seeing oneself as young/old, man/woman/other, traditionally entitled or dispossessed.

Examples: How does a Vietnamese industrial worker perceive her hardships, what general view of herself, her present and future life does she develop and share? How does a former convict enter a “free” life, who does he/she relate to, what social structures does he/she rely on, what words does he/she use to describe them?

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Papers should be based on specific research, including textual research. The examples in the proposal are drawn from the applicant’s field research. Key literature in the relevant disciplines will be shared among participants before the panel.

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