Roundtable Euroseas 2024

Listening to Sound Histories in Southeast Asian Studies

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Historical sound recordings made in Southeast Asia have become increasingly accessible to people living in Southeast Asia and around the global. These recordings include music, speeches, the environment, private voice messages, and documents of everyday life. Listening back to recordings made during the colonial and postcolonial eras has provided access to historical aspects muted by visual and written documents. These sounds are now often included in projects, presentations, performances, and exhibitions dealing with music, film, visual art, and theatre, as well as politics, history, economics, the environment, and science. Studies of sound and listening histories in Southeast Asia open new avenues for inquiry in these various fields and disciplines. The scholars in these varied disciplines would benefit from learning each other’s established and novel approaches and findings within these newly accessible materials. This roundtable brings into dialogue the role of sound and listening in these various transmedia experiences related to Southeast Asia and its diasporas to address issues of affective, networked, and critical agency.

At UvA, we have been hosting projects like the Decolonizing Southeast Asian Sound Archives (DeCoSEAS) transnational research project over the past several years which allows for dialogue among scholars from throughout Southeast Asia, Europe, and North America. This network of mainly music-oriented scholars could continue to benefit other fields of history, social science, and religion as these sound collections contain more than just music. In this roundtable participants will be asked to present short descriptions of recent work or disclosed materials involving historical sound recordings made in Southeast Asia. They will then be asked to discuss the role of listening in their projects, particularly in comparison to methods seeing or reading, and if or how listening has allowed for ideas, methods, or theories to be rethought.