

Call for Papers:

A SEAC-JSEAS Initiative

Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference 2024 (AAS2024 @ Seattle)

The Southeast Asia Council (SEAC) of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS) is seeking paper proposals from up-and-coming scholars – **including graduate students** – to join a “JSEAS-SEAC” panel on the topic of “The Presence of the Public in Southeast Asian Studies: Epistemologies and Experiences” (See below for eligibility). We seek to recruit early career scholars from Southeast Asian countries to form a panel for inclusion in the 2024 Annual Conference of the Association for Asian Studies, to be held in Seattle from March 16-19, 2023. Presenters will receive partial financial assistance to attend the meetings by *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*.

The Presence of the Public in Southeast Asian Studies: Epistemologies and Experiences

The impulse to connect academic research with vocational practices and applications beyond the halls of the academe has a long history. Since at least the mid-1990s, scholars began to raise questions about the uncomfortable legacies associated with the origins of North American area-studies, reminding us of Cold War policy needs that partly inspired the funding streams and development of an Asian Studies knowledge production infrastructure. Postcolonial interventions took the history of these epistemological connections further back, linking colonial administrative agendas and contexts to the forms of knowledge that were produced by scholars-officials that would eventually serve as the intellectual foundation for many scholars focusing on Asia. Taken in broad perspective, academic research in the university has often been influenced by the institutional, intellectual, ideological, social, and individual contexts within which we work---reaffirming that our knowledge has always been connected to the societies in which we live.

The call to recognize this relationship between Southeast Asian Studies and the contexts in which it has been produced has served as an important corrective for scholars seeking to address the inequalities, power relations, and hierarchies that are entangled in how our understanding of Southeast Asia---as a place, as an object, as an epistemological field---has been produced and represented globally. A long tradition of Southeast Asian Studies scholarship has addressed these shortcomings through different intellectual conversations over the decades, reflecting a range of intellectual, political, geographical, and ideological priorities that have sought to give voice or attention to those communities, experiences, worldviews, languages, cultures, or spaces that have been marginalized or silenced by earlier approaches. The effort to give voice, recognize, affirm, validate, or contest dominant tropes in scholarship on Asia might be regarded in broad terms as a mission to create a more inclusive and accommodating space within which knowledge about Asia can be studied. An impulse to draw attention to what is not being seen, heard, recognized, felt, or supported has been the at the heart of (SE) Asian Studies’ most significant “turns”.

Drawing from parallel discussions in the interdisciplinary fields of Public History, Public Anthropology, Public Social Sciences and (more recently) Public Humanities, this panel considers the possibility of a “Public Southeast Asian Studies” to consider a framework for thinking about and communicating knowledge about Asia that transcends/bridges epistemological and applicative boundaries between

academic/professional Asian Studies and non-academic knowledge about Asia.¹ It proposes an epistemological space that accommodates the forms of knowledge produced by and for Southeast Asian publics (however defined). The continuing prioritizing of Asian Studies in Asia---stressing the importance of location, local knowledge, local sensitivity, and local referencing in the region---has perhaps not yet provided the elasticity that is required to engage the type of knowledge for and by communities in Asia that continues to be produced beyond and but also in dialogue with the academe. Thinking about a “Public Southeast Asian Studies” as a way of emphasizing engagement through accessible content, messaging, and a range of audiences provides a space that democratizes knowledge production about Southeast Asia and the heuristics that are used to make sense of it.

The Southeast Asian Studies Council and *the Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* invites paper proposals that consider the possibility of a Public Southeast Asian Studies in some of the following ways:

1. *Public Southeast Asian Studies as an Intellectual Calling*: Public Southeast Asian Studies might refer to the intellectual aim of creating a more inclusive discussion for what constitutes “Public Asian Studies” to recognize understandings of Asia that are held and expressed beyond academic frameworks and heuristic devices. Such a framing considers how knowledge, discourses, and practices about Asia are produced and practiced by state, non-state, and private enterprises/assemblages/communities. Recognizing and affirming these sources and genres of knowledge about Asia reflects an intellectual expansion of how (SE) Asian Studies might be made more relevant and connected to society beyond the academe.
2. *Public Southeast Asian Studies as Method*: Public Southeast Asian Studies might refer to the aspiration to recognize forms and practices of knowledge production, representation, and application about (SE) Asia that are found and produced beyond academic settings. This calling has a long tradition and can be understood as an impulse to understand how actors, communities, practitioners outside of professional scholarship construct knowledge, methods, and worldviews about Asia for non-academic audiences.²
3. *Public Southeast Asian Studies as a Form of Knowledge*: Public Southeast Asian Studies might refer to a genre of (SE) Asian Studies meant for “public” consumption, rather than (strictly) an academic audience. This form of Public (SE) Asian Studies recognizes the different narrative styles, symbols, signals, and objectives of Asian Studies content that are produced for and sometimes by, non-academic audiences.³

¹ Susan Smulyan, “Why Public Humanities”, *Daedalus*, 2022. <https://www.amacad.org/publication/why-public-humanities>; Craig Jackson Calhoun, “Towards a More Public Social Science”, *President’s Report*, Social Science Research Council, 2004. <https://www.ssrc.org/publications/toward-a-more-public-social-science/>

² Just as public history might refer to the historical narratives that are conveyed by grass-root practitioners about Peranakan life in Singapore through a private house museum in the historical neighborhood of Joo Chiat, a Public (SE) Asian Studies might be regarded as a way of recognizing similar attempts to craft and disseminate knowledge about “Asia” by and for ‘public’ consumption.

³ Comparatively, public historians are understood to be both those who work in academic settings and those who may work in the public/private sector. Not all public historians are trained in the discipline of history but engage the past via different disciplinary and practical entry points. So, while there is a strong sense of differentiating professional academic historians from non-academic historical practitioners (and the knowledge that is produced

Eligibility and Selection Criteria

We seek papers by Southeast Asian scholars who are early career scholars, advanced graduate students (currently writing dissertations based on original field or archival research), or untenured faculty members (including tenure-track assistant professors, adjuncts, and lecturers, or the approximate equivalent based on the academic tradition from which the scholar is coming). Applicants may be currently enrolled as students in, or employed by, any institution of higher education in the world. However, preference may be given to students or faculty currently based at underfunded institutions in Late Developing Countries (LDC) in Southeast Asia. (Please note that the definition of LDC used by the AAS excludes the following Asian countries: Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of China (Taiwan), Republic of Korea (South Korea), and Singapore). The primary criteria for selection will be the quality of the paper proposals as well as the way selected proposals work together as a viable panel.

1. The panel is intended to be a Southeast Asia-focused panel. Submissions that do not substantively address issues pertaining to the region will not be considered.
2. Paper presenters must submit their papers to Journal of Southeast Asian Studies.
3. To submit a paper proposal, please submit the following, in the order listed below, all in a single Microsoft Word file or PDF document, by **July 15, 2023**:

a. **Applicant's Name, affiliation, and contact information**, clearly indicating applicant's current country of residence.

2. **Paper abstract.** 250 words in the format of the standard AAS paper proposal.
3. **Brief bio-sketch** of 200-300 words describing current and recent scholarly positions, a brief sentence or two about current research, and any significant publications. The model for this should be the standard blurb one sees on a faculty or graduate student website.
4. **Current curriculum vitae.**

e. Please save the file with the following filename convention: **SEAC&JSEAS_ApplicantsFamilyName.doc**

Completed applications should be sent to the attention of Dr. Mairii Victoriano Aung Thwin to the following address: mairii@nus.edu.sg by the **15 July 2023 deadline**. Late submissions will not be considered.

by both groups), it is important to recognize that these distinctions are often blurred and may have a bearing on how we might envision a "public Asianist".