

FIGURES OF MODERNITY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

April 23-24, 2010

Yale Organizer: **Erik Harms**, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology
International Collaborators: **Joshua Barker** (University of Toronto) and **Johan Lindquist** (Stockholm University)

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

We live in a world populated not just by individuals but by figures, people who loom larger than life because they alternately express and challenge conventional understandings of contemporary social types. Such figures are important because they serve as anchors for local, national, and transnational discourses about contemporary social life and its futures. Like Raymond Williams' analysis of keywords in modern social thinking, an analysis of the "key figures" of a given social formation can provide unique insights into ideological formations and their contestations.

This workshop will consider a wide range of contemporary figures that populate the social and cultural imaginaries of contemporary Southeast Asia. These include figures such as the activist, the NGO worker, the street vendor, the rural DJ, the slum leader, the investor, the soldier, the mountain village head, and the scientist. These and other such figures reveal creatively constituted subject positions that embody, manifest, and to some degree comment upon, a particular historical moment in the complex articulation of large-scale processes that are shaping the many countries of this region of the world. With engaging clarity, these figures reveal processes of commodification, class formation, globalization, religious change, and political conflict; thus offering us an ethnographic method for considering Southeast Asian modernity that is at once both specific and comparative.

WORKSHOP FORMAT

The two-day workshop is free and open to the public. The workshop will be organized around a series of sessions dealing with each country of modern Southeast Asia. Country editors will present short, ethnographically rich essays written by emerging scholars in Southeast Asian studies that detail how particular figures of modernity come to illuminate the broader processes that are shaping each respective country and the region at large. During the workshop, each country editor will take thirty minutes to present a general introduction to the figures they have assembled, as well as to share a selection from their submissions. Each country presentation will be followed by a ten-minute commentary offered by another country editor and a thirty-minute discussion period with the audience. In the final session we attempt to conceptualize the project as a whole, particularly in relation to China and India.

Friday, April 23 2010- Saturday, April 24

Welcome: Erik Harms, Yale University

Introductory remarks on *Figures of Modernity*: Joshua Barker (University of Toronto) and Johan Lindquist (Stockholm University)

Speakers by Country:

Cambodia	Jonathan Padwe (Yale University)
Laos	Jerome Whittington (Dartmouth College)
Indonesia	Joshua Barker (University of Toronto) and Johan Lindquist (Stockholm University)
Thailand	Jane Ferguson (Australian National University)
The Philippines	Smita Lahiri (Harvard University)
Burma	Yin Hlaing KYAW (City University of Hong Kong)
Vietnam	Erik Harms (Yale)
Singapore	Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied (National University of Singapore)
Malaysia	Richard Baxstrom (University of Edinburgh)

Roundtable Discussion led by China and India specialist **Xiang Biao** (Oxford University)

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