

WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2020

10:00 – 10:15	OPENING ADDRESS
10:00	<p>CAROLA E. LOREA <i>Chair, 15th Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore</i></p>
10:15 – 11:15	KEYNOTE ADDRESS 1
Chairperson:	FONG SIAO YUONG , <i>National University of Singapore</i>
10:15	<p>Using Social Science as a Force for Good: Scholarship on, for, and as Activism</p> <p>MEREDITH L. WEISS <i>State University of New York at Albany, USA</i></p>
10:55	QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION

THURSDAY, 23 JULY 2020

16:00 – 17:00	KEYNOTE ADDRESS 2
Chairperson:	ITTY ABRAHAM , <i>National University of Singapore</i>
16:00	<p>Making the Globe: A Cultural History of Science from the Bay of Bengal</p> <p>SUJIT SIVASUNDARAM <i>University of Cambridge, UK</i></p>
16:40	QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION
17:00	END OF DAY 2

FRIDAY, 24 JULY 2020

16:00 – 17:00	KEYNOTE ADDRESS 3
Chairperson:	CAROLA E. LOREA , <i>National University of Singapore</i>
16:00	<p>World History and the “Seduction of Quantification” – A View from Southeast Asia</p> <p>FAIZAH ZAKARIA <i>Nanyang Technological University, Singapore</i></p>
16:40	QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION
17:00 – 10:15	CLOSING ADDRESS
17:00	<p>CAROLA E. LOREA <i>Chair, 15th Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore</i></p>
17:15	END OF GRADUATE FORUM

KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

Using Social Science as a Force for Good: Scholarship on, for, and as Activism

Meredith L. WEISS

State University of New York at Albany, USA
mweiss@albany.edu

Recent developments globally, from the Covid-19 pandemic, to economic crisis, to political turbulence in so many states, have made clear the salience of popular mobilization. The inequities a pandemic lays bare in access to social services and health security extend also to political empowerment, whether in the case of migrant workers, living under the aegis of states in which they have no say, or minorities confronting structural racism. A much noted global ‘democratic recession’, including across much of Southeast Asia, further limits the space formal politics allows. Activism offers a means of empowerment and voice—but effective activism requires information. Studies of activism comprise part of the knowledge base on which mobilization rests. Those of us who study social movements or ‘contentious politics’ thus have especial responsibility to take the implications and ethics of that research seriously, whether we study our own communities and countries or others. ‘Objectivity’ is less the point—and is likely impossible—than balance, accuracy, self-awareness, and honesty about our aims and intended audiences. In this talk, I will draw on my own experience as a Southeast Asia-focused political scientist who aspires better to understand, but also supports, political participation, ‘active citizenship’, creative self-expression, and ‘engaged scholarship’. Where should one trace the boundary between observation and participation, particularly as an ‘outsider’; how should we operationalize concern for ‘human subjects’ when studying risky politics; how, and how much, might we scale up from grassroots specifics to travel-ready concepts and patterns; and how might we make our work useful for more than testing theories and propelling ourselves through academic hoops?

Meredith L. Weiss is Professor and Chair of Political Science in the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy at the University at Albany, State University of New York. Her research addresses social mobilization and civil society, the politics of identity and development, parties and elections, institutional reform, and subnational governance in Southeast Asia, especially Malaysia and Singapore. Her books include *Protest and Possibilities: Civil Society and Coalitions for Political Change in Malaysia* (2006), *Student Activism in Malaysia: Crucible, Mirror, Sideshow* (2011), and (imminently) *The Roots of Resilience: Party Machines and Grassroots Politics in Southeast Asia*. Her most recent edited volumes are *Toward a New Malaysia? The 2018 Election and Its Aftermath* (2020) and *The Political Logics of Anticorruption Efforts in Asia* (2019). Weiss co-edits the Cambridge University Press Elements series on *Politics and Society in Southeast Asia*, co-founded the Southeast Asian Politics related group of the American Political Science Association (APSA), chairs APSA’s Asia Workshops steering committee, and is on the Southeast Asia Research Group (SEAREG) Council. She received her MA and PhD in Political Science from Yale University and BA in Political Science, Policy Studies, and English from Rice University. She is a proud former visiting research fellow for the Asian Graduate Student Fellowship (AGSF) in 2018.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS 2

Making the Globe: A Cultural History of Science from the Bay of Bengal

Sujit SIVASUNDARAM

University of Cambridge, UK
sps20@cam.ac.uk

Starting from British Madras, travelling across the Bay of Bengal, to the coast of Sumatra and then to Singapore, this paper provides a cultural history of nineteenth-century knowledge-making as an enterprise in making and breaking three concepts: globe, empire and self. It does so by working outwards from early-nineteenth century pendulum-length experiments to determine the curvature of the Earth. It argues that moving across concepts and scales was vital to a regime of big data. Data-crunching involved different sciences and split across territories and sea and land. As the project of making the globe proceeded, for instance from Madras Observatory, imperial settlements could be located precisely as coordinates, for instance British Singapore, and indigenous intellectuals, like Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir (1797–1854), had to find their place in a world of imperial free trade. Global model-making brought about a detachment as people and places were fixed on a globe and it led to the erasure of the indigenous informant, a key figure in recent histories of science. In linking the making of the globe to the fate of intermediary, the argument urges the need to place indigenous agency in the sciences within wider accounts of labour, capital and imperial expansion.

Sujit Sivasundaram is Professor of World History at the University of Cambridge and Fellow in History at Gonville and Caius College. He is also Director of the Centre of South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge and until recently, he was Editor of *The Historical Journal*. His new book, *Waves Across the South: A New History of Revolution and Empire*, will be out later this year. It revisits the age of revolutions from the Indian and Pacific Oceans and from the perspective of indigenous and colonised peoples. His research spans the histories of oceans, culture, science, race, the environment and empires. He is the author of *Islanded: Britain, Sri Lanka and the Bounds of an Indian Ocean Colony* (2013) and *Nature and*

the Godly Empire: Science and Evangelical Mission in the Pacific, 1795-1850 (2005). In 2012, he was awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize for History. He has held the Sackler Caird Fellowship of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and visiting fellowships in Sydney, Paris and Singapore. He is Syndic of the Fitzwilliam Museum and a member of the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee of Cambridge University's inquiry into the legacies of enslavement.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS 3

World History and the "Seduction of Quantification" – A View from Southeast Asia

Faizah Zakaria

Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

faizahz@ntu.edu.sg

Narratives in world history are often captured, shared and substantiated in terms of iconic mathematical graphs. This presentation analyses three of them: the graphical gap between the exponential economic growth of Europe in the 19th century and muted growth in Asia that marked the Great Divergence; the 16 hockey-stick graphs of ecosystem change that constitute geological signs of the Anthropocene and the curve modelling that accompanied many analyses of our present world pandemic. Building off anthropologists Sally Engle-Merry's insights on the "seduction of quantification," I discuss what these figures illuminate and obscure, centralize and hide. How can historians working on Southeast Asia engage with these narratives? The paucity of quantifiable data, relative lack of documentation and dispersed archives pose a challenge to create narratives with measurable parameters. The presentation discusses three ways in which the region complicates, challenges and disrupts these iconic graphs. It highlights how history from Southeast Asia – in particular environmental history – offers alternative ways of valuing the non-human beyond economic parameters, decenters the nation-state as a historical agent and disrupts assumptions of smooth continuity embedded in mathematical representation. With the aim of opening up a discussion on fresh ways to integrate the quantitative and the qualitative, I probe this central question: what is the place of stories in a data-driven world?

Faizah Zakaria is Assistant Professor of History at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), specializing in religion and ecology in modern Southeast Asia. She holds a PhD in history from Yale University, a BSc (Hons) in Mathematics and an MA in Southeast Asian Studies from NUS. Her first monograph *Spiritual Anthropocene: Ecology of Conversion in Maritime Southeast Asian Uplands* is under contract with University of Washington Press (anticipated publication, 2021). This work is based on her doctoral dissertation which has won the Arthur and Mary Wright Prize at Yale and was shortlisted for the best dissertation in the humanities at the International Convention of Asian Scholars Book Prize competition in 2019. She is presently working on a book-length project on the historical construction of charisma in mega-fauna such as elephants, rhinoceros and crocodiles in maritime Southeast Asia, with the support of an MOE Tier 1 grant. She is also a podcast host for the Environmental Studies channel and the Southeast Asian Studies channel at the New Books Network.

ABOUT THE CHAIRPERSONS AND DISCUSSANTS

Carola E. LOREA | aricar@nus.edu.sg

She is Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation Cluster of Asia Research Institute in National University of Singapore. She is interested in oral traditions and popular religions in South Asia, particularly eastern India, Bangladesh and the Andaman Islands. Her research lies at the intersection between oral literature and the anthropology of religion, with a particular focus on sound cultures, folklore and heritage in relation to esoteric religious movements and the ethnography of Tantric traditions. Her monograph *Folklore, Religion and the Songs of a Bengali Madman: A Journey between Performance and the Politics of Cultural Representation* (Brill, 2016) is the result of a four year travel-along ethnography with Baul performers in West Bengal. She received research fellowships from IAS, Gonda Foundation (Leiden) and SAI (Heidelberg) to study travelling archives of songs in the borderlands of India and Bangladesh. She authored several articles on folklore and sacred songs, published the translated works of Bengali poets and novelists, such as *Jibanananda Das* and *Nabarun Bhattacharya*, and has been socially engaged as an interpreter for Bangladeshi refugees for several years. Her current book project is a study on soundscapes of religion and displacement focusing on a numerous, yet understudied community of low-caste religious practitioners called Matua, and their flows of preachers, performers, religious items and ideas across the Bay of Bengal.

FONG Siao Yuong | arifsy@nus.edu.sg

She is a postdoctoral fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. She works at the intersections of media and cultural studies, anthropology and production studies. Before coming to ARI, she taught at Royal Holloway University of London and CIEE London. While at ARI, she is working on her first book on media and authoritarian resilience – on how identity politics help the authoritarian state of Singapore discipline its media. She is also looking to start a new project investigating spaces of criticality in times of crisis in geopolitical China.

Itty ABRAHAM | seaai@nus.edu.sg

He is Professor and Head of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (NUS). Earlier, he was director of the South Asia Institute at the University of Texas at Austin and program director at the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), New York. He was a Fulbright-Nehru senior fellow in 2011 and has received research grants from the US National Science Foundation, Ford, Rockefeller and MacArthur foundations, among others. He has written about nuclear power, criminal borderlands, foreign policy, digital cultures, and postcolonial technoscience. He is currently working on a book on refugees and forced migration in Asia.