

Panel proposal EuroSeas 2019.

1. Title: “The government intermediary: the role of middlemen and socio-cultural brokers in past and present Southeast Asia, ca. 1800-2000.”

Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 10-13 September 2019.

2. Conveners: **Bernard Keo** – Monash University

Maarten Manse – Leiden University

3. Description: To many of the ethnic groups throughout Southeast Asia, both historical colonial regimes and contemporary national governments were foreign (Tarling 1998). The drawing of borders (Cribb and Li 2004), establishment of institutions, levying of taxes and other impositions of governance have therefore occurred largely without popular consent or interaction between government and people. To claim territory, elaborate government programs over popular masses, colonial and national governments relied on the paradoxical processes of simplifying complex local circumstances (Scott 1998) while depending upon increasingly complex bureaucracies (Elson 1993, Cribb 1994). Effective communication between colonial officials and their postcolonial successors with regional peasant masses was problematic. Therefore, these bureaucracies, governed by expanding bureaucracies (Elson 1993), of highly-trained, technocratic and self-proclaimed ‘rational’ civil servants carrying out unifying policy schemes, were also characterized by ambivalence, limitations and the incapacity to effectuate these schemes on the ‘colonial ground’, as has been highlighted in more recent literature (see for instance Stoler 2009, Bloembergen 2009, Kloos 2014). Critical were the people, networks and groups in between, who communicated with both. Attention has been called to fluctuations and crossroads in the reality of colonial governance, policy-making and practice, as framed in pluralism in the governance and legal structures of colonies (Benton & Ross, 2013; Yahaya 2009, 2013 & 2015), and shaped by the intermediary role of for instance Chinese, Arabic, and Japanese merchant networks, European industrialists (Bosma 2010 & 2013; Taselaar 1998) and urban middle-classes (Hoogervorst & Schulte Nordholt 2017). Yet, cultural brokers (Geertz 1960) have been addressed individually, but never have they been categorized as a group and studied as the governmental intermediaries they were on the spot. How did local elites, merchants, soldiers, diplomats and others co-determine the colonial agenda? What role did they play in either reinforcing or subverting colonial rule? And what was their fate in the wake of imperial disengagement and decolonization after the Second World War?

This panel aims to reflect on these questions, emphasizing the role of various intermediaries in colonial and national governance and social engineering. We would like to contribute to the growing literature that argues (colonial) Southeast Asian states were not run exclusively by metropolitan officials, but all the more by merchants, industrialists and other migrants, by local political, religious and mercantile elites (see for instance: Benda 1965; Sutherland 1979; Young 1994), and by the general population of both indigenous peoples and migrant populations like the Chinese and Arabs through their *kapitan* or chiefs (see: Lohanda 1996; Kapitein, 2014). We would like to investigate how colonial governing traditions continued throughout the era of decolonization, and how intermediaries fared following the rise of post-colonial nation-states. Doing so will help us move beyond stereotypical ideas of Southeast Asian governance and enhance the general understanding of how states communicated with its subjects.

Session: We opt for a single session (1 x 90 min.: 3-4 presenters).

Bernard will present a paper contrasting the role of the Kapitan system in British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, focusing particularly on problematizing the role of the Kapitan Cina as a form of governance.

Maarten will prepare a presentation on the role of local intermediaries and chiefs in the levying of colonial taxes on Sumatra and Java, depending on the other applicants.

Possible discussants: Both Marieke Bloembergen and Remco Raben have expressed interest to take part as discussant, but cannot confirm yet.