



**SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES REGIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM
(SEASREP)
CALL FOR PAPERS**

**HYBRID COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: IDENTITY
FORMATION, EVOLUTION AND TRANSFORMATION**

The SEASREP FOUNDATION invites scholars from Southeast Asia to participate in this research project leading to a publication.

BACKGROUND

When nation-states in Southeast Asia began to take shape, ethnic identity emerged as a prominent concern on the very eve of independence. While the dominant indigenous ethnic group quickly assumed the role of leadership, it did not take long for more fundamental questions to surface, such as who or which group(s) constitute the indigenous and on what grounds (lineage? language? religion? ethnic affiliation?). In his *Imagined Community*, Ben Anderson argues that all nations are creole in nature, highlighting the hybrid nature of nations ranging from the United States to Brazil all the way to Southeast Asia.

In the region hybridity has tended to be interpreted in terms of contrasts: groups on the one hand who are indigenous, local, home-grown and on the other, non-indigenous or foreign-infused groups whose ethnic 'purity' was doubtful. Yet in the process of settlement, some of the ethnically hybrid came to be accepted as part of the newly defined indigenous communities, while others were disfranchised or placed in positions of disadvantage owing to their distinctive non-indigenous ways and identity.

Hybrid communities in Southeast Asia vary from country to country as do their processes of hybridization. The *peranakan* in Malaysia are indigenous communities who were infused with either Arab, Chinese or Indian blood. The same term is also used in Indonesia, especially among those with Chinese blood. But among Indonesian Chinese, the same term also means those who were born locally and adopted the indigenous way of life. Malaysia and Singapore also have the *baba* and *nyonya*, whose hybridity initially sprang from mixed marriages between Chinese men and indigenous women and later shifted toward the adaptation of indigenous cultural practices, including the use of the indigenous language, Malay. In East Malaysia, the Sino-Native who had long existed in the country, became a new category in the 1951 census.

In Vietnam, the Ming Huong community who descended from inter-marriages between Chinese refugees from the Ming Dynasty and Vietnamese women, began to assimilate into the Vietnamese community but remained apart from the Vietnamese. In the Philippines, the infusion of Spanish as well as Chinese blood created a distinctive community known as the *mestizo*, whose ranks included some of the most illustrious Filipino nationalists such as Jose Rizal and Emilio Aguinaldo, whose helped establish the Filipino nation. In Myanmar, the Anglo-Burman group of mixed lineage gave them advantages in

public service during the colonial era; similarly, Eurasians in most Southeast Asian states were also privileged.

Many of the hybrid communities actually produced very rich cultures on their own. The *peranakan* of Indonesia produced a large corpus of literature; so did the *baba* of Malaya and the *mestizo* of the Philippines. In terms of language, the *Kristan* Portuguese of Malacca speak a peculiar kind of Portuguese language that incorporates many local words into their corpus of lexicon. The Ming Huong temples in Vietnam are quite distinctive from the usual Chinese temples.

Changes began to take place in the post-colonial era when indigenous elites began to assert themselves and in the process, marginalized those who were categorized as non-indigenous, including many of hybrid background. This led to a feeling of disenfranchisement and loss among some hybrid communities. Nonetheless, certain hybrid communities who were able to adapt to the changes were accorded indigenous status. As post-colonial states commenced a life as independent nations, new ethnic policies were put in place, creating new challenges for hybrid communities, including space for negotiation and adaptation. Some hybrid communities were able to thrive under the new national government as changes in the identity of hybrid communities took place and new categories emerged while old ones underwent transformation.

Despite their long standing cultural heritage and their long residence in their respective countries, the hybrid communities continued to face new and complex challenges. The question of acceptance by both indigenous and non-indigenous communities dominated much of their existence. Tussles of identity between indigenous and non-indigenous status also remains a recurring problem, which has resulted in different treatment and reactions from different hybrid communities. For these reasons the project on hybrid communities in Southeast Asia is a subject worth investigating.

GOALS

The project generally aims to interrogate the historical and contemporary role of hybrid communities in countries comprising the region, the evolution of their identities and the prospects for sustaining hybrid identities in the face of national identity-building. In particular, the project seeks to:

- Trace the origins and development of hybrid communities;
- Examine the idea of hybridity in national identity;
- Analyze different types of hybrid communities and the sustenance of their identities;
- Investigate interactions among hybrid communities, the state and other ethnic groups; and
- Situate hybrid communities within the larger context of Southeast Asia.

Papers that address the following questions are welcome.

- How are hybrid communities in Southeast Asia defined? What theoretical concepts—indigenous/insider, extraneous/outsider,

assimilation/segregation, integration/disintegration, adaptation, transformation—explain their existence and evolution?

- What traits do hybrid communities have in common across Southeast Asia?
- What roles did hybrid communities play during the colonial era and how have these roles changed in the post-independence era? How did they relate to the state during these historical periods?
- How do hybrid communities contribute to nation-building? What challenges do they face as citizens of a nation that is inclined toward a single national identity and as members of distinctive hybrid communities with layers of identities, social affiliations, and cultural norms and practices?
- How do hybrid communities dealt with acceptance or stereo-typing?

PARTICIPANTS

The project coordinator and general editor is Dr. Danny Wong Tze Ken, Professor of History at the University of Malaya. Interested contributors from the social sciences and humanities are invited to submit a concept note of 500-800 words on or before 15 July 2016 to seasrep@pltdsl.net

Thirteen contributions will be accepted based on the concept notes and the coherence of the proposed topics taken as a whole. Writers will have until the first week of March 2017 to submit and present their papers in a workshop to be held in Bangkok, Thailand. The papers to be presented should be from 6,000-8,000 words including citations, references, and tables, if any, following the APA format.

The workshop is intended to:

- Solicit comments on the papers in order to help the authors improve and revise them;
- Organize the flow of the papers to ensure a cohesive manuscript; and
- Set deadlines and other editorial policies.

After the workshop, authors are expected to revise their papers, comply with the project deadlines, and work closely with Dr. Wong and the copyeditor. The collaboration between contributors and editors is crucial in order to ensure that the manuscript is as polished as possible before it is submitted for review to a publisher. Participants in the project are expected to commit to such collaboration.

SEASREP will provide for the participants' budget airfare, accommodation, and meals during the workshop.

For further inquiries, write Dr. Danny Wong Tze Ken at dwongtk@gmail.com or dannyw@um.edu.my