Southeast Asian Natures:
Defining Environmentalism and the Anthropocene in Southeast Asia
March 13, 2018 | UCR Palm Desert

Sponsors: UC Riverside Center for Ideas and Society (http://ideasandsociety.ucr.edu)
UCR Southeast Asia Program (http://seatrip.ucr.edu)

Organizers: David Biggs, Christina Schwenkel and Hendrik Maier

Over one hundred fifty years ago, naturalist Alfred Russell Wallace journeyed through the islands of Southeast Asia, drawing from the region’s rich biodiversity to co-discover with Darwin the theory of natural selection. However, even at that time he noted how forests were quickly giving way to colonial clear cuts and species from one island were showing up in the markets on another. The Anthropocene, an era in which human activity has become a dominant shaping force in ecosystems, global climate and species histories, was already underway. Wallace’s environmentalism was also deeply contingent upon imperial networks of travel and communication; the ensuing wars of empire and decolonization left many eco-cultures in tatters.

One hundred fifty years later, a critical challenge faces policymakers, intellectuals, scientists and others to articulate new notions of environmentalism that may redefine complex intersections of ecology, history, and culture. As people and governments struggle to articulate locally meaningful responses to Anthropocene problems, scholars, artists and activists play important roles in identifying ideas of nature, ruin, sustainability and health that resonate locally and inter-regionally. As literary critic Raymond Williams once noted, the word “nature” is one of the most complex in the English vocabulary. How do these ideas fare in translation?

“Southeast Asian Natures” asks participants to consider the complexities of nature and its changes in the many different languages and ecologies of Southeast Asia. The workshop is open to the public but has very limited space. Please contact David Biggs (dbiggs@ucr.edu) to reserve space by February 1, 2017.

This workshop emphasizes works-in-progress and will feature four panels.

9:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.
Representations and Ritual
Prof. Hendrik Maier, UC Riverside, Moderator

Kathleen Baldanza, Penn State. Miasmic Mists of the Mountains: Disease and Medicine in the Vietnamese Highlands

Cheryl Swift and Jason Carbine, Whittier College. Biodiversity and Religious Spaces in Contemporary Myanmar
C. Michele Thompson, So. Connecticut State. *The Vietnamese Buddhist Monk Physician Tuệ Tĩnh and Manipulation of the Physical Environment of 14th Century Dai Viet*  
Vu Tu Quyen, Vietnam Institute of Culture and Arts Studies, Hanoi. *Health, Ritual And Performance - A Folk Festival Of Laha People.*

Faizah Zakaria, Yale. *Spiritual Anthropocene: Religious and Environmental change from the North Sumatran Uplands.*

11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Space, Spatial Practice and Power  
Prof. Christina Schwenkel, UC Riverside, Moderator

Bradley Cardozo, UCLA. *Climate Justice, Sustainability, and Resilience in the Philippines in the Anthropocene.*

Amy Dao, Columbia. *Risk and Potentiality in the Anthropocene: Responses to Salinization in the Mekong Delta*

Sarah Grant, CSU Fullerton. *The Future is NPK: Vietnamese Coffee and the South-Central Highlands Environment*

Tuyen Le, UCLA. “*Toi Chon Ca/I Choose Fish*”: Protests for a Cleaner Future.

12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m. (box lunch for participants)

1:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.  
Histories, Ecologies and Flows  
Prof. David Biggs, UC Riverside, Moderator

Mitch Aso, SUNY Albany. *Vietnamese Workscapes.*


Jonathan E. Robins, Michigan Tech. “*Suited To Malaya*: Oil Palms, Forest Land, And Colonial Capitalism In Malaysia, 1910-1960

3:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. (tea break)

3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.  
Animal Natures, Animal Lenses
Prof. Celia Lowe, U. of Washington, Moderator

Pam McElwee, Rutgers. *Thinking through the Anthropocene in Southeast Asia: Animals, People, and Landscapes.*
