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Winter
2019/2020

Berita

Malaysia/Singapore/Brunei Studies Group Association for Asian Studies

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Letter from the Chair

AAS 2020 and our MSB events are coming up — March 19-22 in Boston

This year, MSB at the AAS is focusing on Malaysia at 2020—as well as the anticipated 2020 Singapore Election.

Two of our four MSB-sponsored panels focus on aspects of Mahathir's *Wawasan 2020* (Vision 2020) and the Malaysia that emerged since he coined the slogan. Another focuses on the first year of Pakatan Harapan's leadership after the surprising 2018 General Election. And finally, another examines possibilities for the next Singapore election, which will likely occur in 2020.

Malaysia's political future and Mahathir's vision will also engage us at our annual MSB Business Meeting at 1:15 on Saturday, when we welcome Terence Gomez from the University of Malaya as our keynote speaker. Terence will speak about Malaysia's new political economy under Pakatan Harapan, focusing on new state-business ties, including those arising from China's extensive investments in the country, as well as the Government's new policies, including the recently launched Shared Prosperity Vision, 2020-2030. *You won't want to miss this very current update.*

Then, Saturday evening, we will be hosting a catered reception (with a cash bar) from

7:30 to 9:30 pm, where you can meet and talk to Terence, and the growing group of young scholars (and 'old hands') who share an interest in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei. All are welcome and we very much hope to see you there.

This is the first time we are sponsoring a catered reception in place of a restaurant dinner, and hope that our stalwart members (and others) will help MSB defray the cost of the catering by contributing the amount they would have spent on that meal. You can add the cost to your membership fees, payable at the Business Meeting (member dues are \$20 per year for faculty/\$10 a year for graduate students and independent scholars), or by visiting the AAS Committee Membership page via www.asianstudies.org.

Finally, if you aren't on our Facebook group (Official Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group [MSB]), or, if you aren't receiving updates from our Google Group, please let me know. And please continue to send us your updates, information on your research and publications, field reports, and articles for future issues of *Berita*.

Patricia Sloane-White, MSB Chair
(pswhite@udel.edu)

MSB Studies Group Business Meeting
Keynote Speaker: Edmund Terence Gomez
March 21, at 1:15 PM - 2:45 PM
Hynes Convention Center: Room 205, 2nd level

MSB Studies Group Reception
Catered, Cash Bar, and Open to All
7:30 PM - 9:30 PM
Location: Sheraton: Fairfax B, 3rd Floor



MSB Group Events at the AAS Conference 2020, Boston, MA (March 19-22)

MSB Group Business Meeting and Reception at the AAS Conference 2020

The Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Studies Group (MSB) Annual Business Meeting will be held at during the AAS 2020 on Saturday, March 21, 1:15 to 2:45 at the Hynes Convention Center: Room 205, Boston Sheraton Hotel (the conference hotel). The meeting will include a special address by Professor Edmund Terence Gomez, Professor of Political Economy at the Faculty of Economics & Administration, University of Malaya (UM).

That night, at 7:30 to 9:30 there will be a reception to meet scholars who focus on the MSB region, including special guest Terence Gomez, the members of MSB sponsored panels, and current members of the MSB Studies Group.

Members and non-members are welcome at both events.

Panels Sponsored by MSB Group at the AAS Conference 2020

1.) Organized Panel (MSB-Sponsored):

Singapore's Next General Election: Return to the contentious 'New Normal?'

3/20/2020 11:15 AM - 1:00 PM; Sheraton, Berkeley, 3rd Floor

Organizer:

Kai Ostwald (University of British Columbia)

Discussants:

Lily Rahim (University of Sydney, Australia)

Elvin Ong (NUS, Singapore)

Kirsten Han (New Naratif)

Steven Oliver (Yale-NUS College)

2.) Organized Panel (MSB-Sponsored):

'Collisions, Contradictions, and Camp: Revisioning *Bangsa Malaysia* through Malay Performing Arts'

3/20/2019 09:00 - 10:45 AM; Hynes Room 312, Level 3

Organizer:

Joseph Kinzer (Harvard University)

Chair:

Patricia Hardwick (Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris)

Paper Presenters:

Adil Johan (UKM, Malaysia)

Lawrence Ross (UM, Malaysia)

Joseph Kinzer (Harvard University)

3.) Organized Panel (MSB-Sponsored):

'Revisioning 2020: Wherefore Culture, the Arts and Everyday Life in Mahathir's Vision?'

3/20/2019 1:30 - 3:15 PM; Sheraton: Berkeley, 3rd Floor



Organizer:

Cheong Soon Gan (University of Wisconsin-Superior)

Paper Presenters:

Sarena Abdullah (USM, Malaysia)

Mary Susan Philip (UM, Malaysia)

Cheong San Gan (University of Wisconsin-Superior)

4.) Panel Session (MSB Sponsored):

'Mahathir's Tales: Narrative(s) and Resistance(s) in New Malaysia'

3/21/2019 5:15 - 7:00 PM; Hynes: Room 204, Level 2.

Organizer:

Sophie Lemiere (Harvard University)

Chair:

Joseph. C. Liow (NTU Singapore, RSIS)

Paper Presenters:

Maznah Mohamad (NUS)

Vilashini Somiah (UM, Malaysia)

Jonathan Yong (University of Cambridge)

Sophie Lemiere (Harvard University)



Article

A FRESH LOOK AT FISH THROUGH A BRIEF HISTORY OF FISH HEAD CURRY

Geoffrey K. Pakiam
ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute

Among the various dishes canonized in Singapore's official intangible heritage inventory, fish head curry is probably the country's most iconic. The dish consists of a glistening head carved from a large white-fleshed fish, such as the red snapper (*ikan merah / lutjanus spp.*), red sea bream (*kurisi merah / pagrus major*), sea bass or grouper (*ikan kerapu / ephinephelus spp.*), immersed in a spicy stew laden with mucilaginous plants like okra and brinjal. Like the Thanksgiving turkey in the United States, fish head curry has become the centerpiece of many celebratory meals in Singapore, accompanied by a long train of savory and sweet side dishes. Unlike the turkey, however, the curry is encountered all year round in restaurants and eateries across Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and beyond. One could, in theory, enjoy fish head curry every week if one's appetite and wallet permitted. I suspect that many diners today are content to keep their outings to Thanksgiving-like intervals.

Journalists and writers to date have credited Marian Jacob Gomez, a Malayalee from Kerala, with inventing the dish shortly after he established an eatery along Singapore's Sophia Road in 1949. In these accounts,



Fish head curry at Muthu's Curry, Race Course Road, November 2019. Author's photograph ©.

Gomez decided to blend an item thought to be popular with local Chinese gourmands – an imposingly large fish head – with his more traditional Keralan-influenced curries. The dish eventually inspired other Singapore eateries to offer their own charismatic versions of fish head curry. These offshoots were distinguished primarily by variations in ingredients and preparation methods, with versions associated with Peranakan Chinese and Chettinad-style cooking particularly well-known in Singapore today. The current consensus surrounding fish head curry's origins thus reinforces an orthodox nationalist reading of Singapore history; one where the city-state's central position at the crossroads of Asia has enabled it to cultivate a resilient national identity rooted in cultural hybridity, commercial innovation, and material prosperity.

A Gomez-centric tale of fish head curry has many strengths, not least its recognition of sub-regional ethnic affiliations in Singapore. However, shifting our focus to the wider historical context in which the dish arose sheds light on a richer if not equally gripping



story: one that links the rise of Singapore as a crucial node in Asia's drive to feed its burgeoning hungry masses, with the political and environmental trade-offs involved in achieving this goal during the twentieth century. From this angle, fish head curry's ascent would have been impossible without unprecedented supplies of fresh fish from foreign waters; a moderately prosperous urban clientele; and an incipient restaurant culture that encouraged cooks to experiment with new dishes for different audiences. With interest in food security on the rise, the story of fish head curry serves as a timely reminder that masterly cooking is still needed to bridge the gap between what is available and what people willingly eat.

Unequal Meals

One of the gastronomic highlights of fish head curry – namely, the tender, dainty morsels of flesh hidden within the fish head itself – depends on fish whose fresh state was a prized luxury until recent times. As late as the second half of the twentieth century, the overwhelming majority of Southeast Asia's population still subsisted on diets based largely on dried seafood, rice, spices, and fruits, especially coconuts. While the region was blessed with inlets cradling unimaginably large populations of marine life, distance, seasonality and the sheer size of individual catches limited how much fish could be consumed fresh. Much was consequently dried, salted, and/or fermented for future consumption. The distinction between haves and have-nots was not primarily between who could and could not access marine-based protein regularly, but between who could and could not eat a

wide variety of seafood, served as fresh as possible.

Since the thirteenth century CE, Singapore has conformed to this broad Southeast Asian pattern, with a few caveats. Rice was mostly if not entirely imported, leaving the island's *orang laut* to pursue fishing and seafood preservation as one of Singapore's earliest known domestic industries. Half a millennium later, Singapore still had a reputation for provisioning the crews of visiting ships with fish, potable water and timber. Following the establishment of a new trading post in Singapore in 1819, Southeast Asia's pre-existing commerce in seafood and salt quickly began to be re-routed through the island colony, cementing its status as the center of Southeast Asia's expanding fish trade by 1910.

This vast flow of marine biomass, together with the island's rapidly rising migrant population – many of whom took to local waters, using traditional techniques to fish for a living – ensured that Singapore's resident population was exposed to an impressive assortment of fresh and preserved seafood, even if few could afford to eat most of what was on offer. In the late nineteenth century, Singapore's working classes partook on average two meals a day, consisting mostly of boiled rice and 'a small morsel of dried fish,' usually Indian mackerel (*kembong* / *rastrelliger spp.*) caught in the Gulf of Siam. In contrast, Europeans and upper-crust Asians at the time regularly enjoyed a substantial portion of fresh meat or fish on their tables. At least twice daily, they tucked into Spanish mackerel (*tenggiri* / *scombridae spp.*), pomfret (*barwal* / *pampus argentus* /



parastromateus niger), mullet (*jempul / liza spp.*), or some other similarly tasty fish found in Singapore's local markets (J. H. M. R., 1895).

As late as 1948, the underlying pattern of preserved fish for the poor and fresh fish for the rich seems to have barely shifted. When Japanese-owned fishing fleets began using fossil fuel-powered boats to capture, freeze, and transport thousands of tons of fresh fish from more distant waters to Singapore's shorelines between the 1910s and late 1930s, wealthier consumers were the primary beneficiaries. Tinned sardines, introduced during the same interval, were a convenient protein source for the less well-off who could actually afford them, but remained alien to most daily diets.

The notion that more residents could enjoy a daily regimen that included fresh seafood (as well as pork, chicken, beef or mutton) only started becoming a reality following the Second World War, in line with Singapore's steadily growing proportion of salaried middle-class Asian residents. Salt fish correspondingly became less of a low-cost protein staple and more of a high-grade condiment for local Asians. By the mid-1950s, Singapore's fishermen were reported to be exploiting the island's inshore waters to their maximum intensity. A few local producers who had both the means and will were already journeying to distant seas abroad.

Mysterious Merah

Rising incomes alone did not guarantee that more locals would consume fresh fish. Perhaps the most spectacular example of this dissonance occurred in 1952, when

Singapore's Department of Fisheries, concerned about growing fresh fish shortages in Singapore, led an attempt to sell off boatloads of red snappers (*ikan merah*), caught offshore and frozen on powerful trawlers imported from Hong Kong. Despite the island's growing population and wealth, the scheme was an abject failure. Even at a quarter of the going price of white pomfret (*barwal puteh*), *merah* was generally shunned by Singapore Chinese housewives, forcing fish dealers to re-export much of the catch, rapidly deteriorating, to markets in Johor. Together with insufficient cold storage facilities at existing Singapore markets, Chinese apathy towards offshore frozen fish rendered the Singapore-registered trawler operations commercially unfeasible. The episode pushed Singapore's fishing authorities to forsake a cherished vision of local food sovereignty for the reality of uneasy dependence on nationalist governments in Peninsular Malaya and Indonesia, whose territorial waters still teemed with the kinds of inshore fish long familiar to Singapore consumers.

Singapore households seem to have shunned the offshore catch out of habit and practicality. In the 1950s, buying dead fish was still seen as risky and potentially unhygienic, given how quickly catches putrefied in island Southeast Asia's warm climate. More powerful quick-freezing techniques, gradually introduced to Singapore's fishing industry during the same decade, helped preserve fish caught outside of Singapore's waters more effectively. However, they also transformed seafood in ways that made it difficult for housewives to use time-tested methods of inspecting fish



eyes, gills and body texture to evaluate freshness at the market. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, offshore fish like red snappers, groupers, and sea breams were far too large for an Asian household to cook and consume quickly, a typical concern when domestic refrigerators and ice boxes were still luxuries in the 1950s. Where household incomes permitted, cycling through a variety of live fish, small enough to be cooked and eaten whole – like pomfrets, mullets, or scads (*selar kuning* / *selaroides leptolepis*) – remained a trusted and familiar method for preparing safe, nutritious and tasty meals at home.

How then did a fish like the red snapper become a core ingredient in Singapore's fish head curry? Part of the answer lies in understanding why *ikan merah* was a popular food fish in other contexts. Along with the threadfin (*ikan kurau* / *polynemus spp.*), *merah* was a staple of British Singaporean households before the Japanese Occupation, most of whom were wealthy enough to employ local servants to carry out marketing and cooking tasks before the Second World War. As hardy, lean-fleshed fish, both *merah* and *kurau* could withstand prolonged handling prior to sale without losing excessive taste and color, making them a suitable choice for conservative buyers (*merah*'s striking red skin color also made it instantly recognizable in markets and on dining tables). *Merah* and *kurau*'s creamy mild-tasting flesh, unlike that of dark-tissued fatty fish, attracted housewives trying to recreate familiar European recipes in a tropical setting, using local white fish fillets. The same features that caused middle-class Asian housewives to reject

fresh *merah* and *kurau* as staples – their large size and bland taste (especially *merah*) – made them handy for elaborate meals in hotels, restaurants, banquets (including Chinese ones), and well-off households accustomed to cooking and eating fish steaks coated in rich sauces. Indeed, *merah* before the 1950s was highly-priced, and in such demand that Singapore's inshore red snapper stocks were already heavily depleted by the late 1920s, turning the fish into a commodity predominantly sourced from the wider Malay World.

Restaurant Ecologies

To exploit and celebrate a fish like *merah* within Singapore therefore required an underlying 'culinary infrastructure' (Pilcher, 2016), one where commercial establishments helped adapt seafood to shifts in popular taste. Restaurants played a leading role in these transformations. Like Singapore's now-celebrated street food hawkers, casual diners often competed on price and flavor, serving a relatively large customer base drawn from different socio-cultural groups. Unlike street hawkers – who were obliged to specialize in a particular dish due to their itinerant nature and low overheads – restaurants by definition commanded more resources and could offer a variety of dishes on the spot. The likelihood that some customers would reject dishes unfamiliar or novel to them could be hedged against by continuing to sell more 'traditional' fare. Restaurants were therefore generally better-positioned to innovate and offer new dishes that challenged preconceptions of good food.

The dining scene that introduced fish head curry to Singapore residents in the 1950s



included a growing restaurant cluster serving cuisines derived from various Indian sub-regions. A few eateries were strictly vegetarian, while others included seafood, chicken, and mutton in their offerings. Similar eateries had sprung up as early as the 1920s within and around Singapore's Indian-dominated Serangoon Road area, serving migrants looking for a taste of home or food they could access. Some, including Gomez's original cookshop at Sophia Road, offered commercial lodging for bachelors, a fairly common phenomenon in Singapore's male-dominated migrant society until the 1950s. Their location was also supply-driven: commercial survival and staff well-being depended on being near *Tekka Pasar* / Kandang Kerbau Market, where the raw spices, fruits, vegetables, rice, meat and fish needed to recreate familiar Indian cuisines could be purchased daily, and earnings sent back home.

Yet from their inception, restaurants within the orbit of Serangoon Road's ethnic enclave were quasi-public entities, attracting middle-class customers from other cultures in search of culinary novelty. The new clientele in turn helped drive culinary shifts. This phenomenon is still observed in migrant-run restaurants around the world today (Rawson and Shore, 2019). It was certainly true for Gomez, whose Sophia Road address made it easy to enlist customers frequenting the middle and lower-middle-class areas of Wilkie Road, Middle Road, and perhaps even those from more upmarket Orchard Road. At the outset, Gomez's clientele appeared to consist of Keralan Indians, Chinese, British and Jews, including professionals and civil servants.

One former Chinese regular claimed to have been attracted by the sheer range and quality of 'Indian' offerings. Some dishes were apparently Keralan 'curries' laden with thick cuts of meat or fish slices, while others were derived from other regions of India. One of Gomez's most outstanding early preparations seems to have been a Malayanized version of *korma*, known locally as *korma kuah* (literally 'korma sauce'). Little else is known about it, save that Gomez's *korma kuah* stayed popular long after fish head curry had been added to the menu, allegedly in 1950.

Details of fish head curry's early reception are scanty but revealing. The dish was eventually deemed sales-worthy enough to inspire rival versions. In 1951, Hoong Ah Kong, a former kitchen hand, set up an eatery at neighboring Selegie Road specializing in 'Indian' dishes. Clearly angling for the same kind of ethnically-mixed clientele frequenting Gomez's Curry Shop, Hoong began selling fish head curry in 1955-56, toning down the spices in his own recipe. Hoong initially added large heads of *ikan tenggiri* and *kurau* to his curry bowls, before substituting them with *merah* heads from 1965 onwards. Lower input costs almost certainly mattered, although whole *merah* was already much cheaper than either *tenggiri* or *kurau* by the mid-1950s. Given that *kurau* heads were sometimes seen as tastier and more succulent than those of *merah*, Hoong may have been trying to find more ways to earn loyal customers when starting up.

While nothing is yet known about which fish types Gomez used in his original fish head



curry recipe, a landmark review of the Gomez Curry Shop in 1973 found it relying solely on red snappers and groupers to satisfy fish head curry enthusiasts (by then, however, the eatery had relocated to nearby Selegie House, and was under new management). By this time, several other eateries touting *ikan merah*-based fish head curry eateries had already opened in Singapore, including two assam-flavoured versions staffed by outstanding Malay cooks: Encik Abu Bakar at Red Lion Restaurant (Redhill Close) and an unnamed cook whose 'Malay stall [stood] in the hawker center below the flyover which bridges Thomson Road and Whitley Road' (Oon, 1974). After just two decades, fish head curry had come of age.

On its own, fish head curry did not change the way Singapore residents perceived and consumed seafood in general. Rising incomes, fossil fuel-powered industrial fishing, a briskly expanding restaurant scene and the growing influence of popular food writing all played critical roles in breaking down taste barriers from the 1950s onwards. When seen from a *longue durée* perspective, the dish is nonetheless emblematic of a rapid, major shift in local diets: one in which fresh protein became much more accessible within several decades. While a full account of how Singapore's population grew to appreciate both fish heads and curries remains to be told, Singapore's quest for seafood is an intrinsically valuable aspect of local heritage. The history of Singapore's relations with marine life will only grow in significance as overfishing, marine pollution and the climate crisis continue to unfold.

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Biographical note

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Article

‘MY SECOND HOME’ AN INTERVIEW WITH ROSE CHEW, TICKETING OFFICER OF THE SINGAPORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, 1990–2016

Jun Kai Pow

Research Fellow in Asian Heritages
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The stars of any show have always been the musicians and actors, who dazzle on stage in

front of large groups of audiences. Backstage, supporting staff – those ensuring the smooth operations and good financial health of the artistic production – appear to be less important. These administrative and logistic personnel have always performed essential roles within the local music and arts scenes, but unfortunately have been largely forgotten. This essay is an attempt to bring the minor players within the cultural sector back into our historical consciousness. It addresses a glaring lacuna within the discipline of history and adheres purposefully to what I consider to be a form of ‘minor history,’ that is, a narrative of an auxiliary minority.

The protagonist of our story is Madam Rose Chew, the long-serving ticketing officer at the Victoria Concert Hall. Growing up, Rose was your next-door girl, someone who enjoyed reading and tailoring. Coming from a Cantonese-speaking family, she was enrolled at Bedok Primary and Siglap Secondary, both of which were English-medium schools. Upon graduating, she worked first as an assembly line worker putting camera parts together at the Rollei factory. After that, she became an office administrator for the *Medical Digest* publication company. Working within a residential apartment, Rose was in charge of the subscription and sales of the magazine, as well as dealing with customer service through post and phone. When there was too much work to do, she would stay overnight at the workplace.

What might seem like an ordinary transition from blue-collar- to white-collar-work was in fact a necessity as Rose’s physical



condition had been deteriorating. Rose was infected by the Polio virus during an epidemic in the early 1950s and is today physically impaired. There was no medication at that time and, having suffered from bouts of high fever and a bad fall, the teenager was hospitalized on-and-off for three years. She had to eventually rely on a pair of clutches to travel around. Such an arrangement restricted her to certain job locations, which had to be accessible for her.

Through her membership with the Handicap Welfare Association, she was invited to interview for the job of ticketing officer with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra in 1990. Her job involved taking bookings as well as sending out the subscription orders. In the early days before the Internet, a ticketing operator would have to answer phone calls, process the credit card payments and mail tickets out to the customers.

Every day, Rose took down the names, addresses, telephone and credit card numbers of the callers in an A5-size exercise book for recording purposes. Unfortunately, these sales records had all been disposed, or else they would have provided us with interest insights into the habits of book-keeping as well as the demographics of Western classical concert patrons of the 1990s and 2000s. The latter Rose revealed were mostly local Chinese or Caucasians based in Singapore. Her bilingual capability thus put her in a good position to communicate with the customers.

To send the tickets out, Rose inserted the requested orders into envelopes bearing the SSO logo, sealed them and passed them over to the 'office boy,' who would bring them to

the post office. If the dates of the show were too close, customers would have to go down to the box office to collect the tickets themselves. Occasionally, some customers would call up claiming that their tickets were misplaced. Rose would then suggest that they waited a few more days before calling back.

Other than lost tickets, there were also other instances where customers expressed their dissatisfaction, such as the case of the long queues just before the start of the concert. Twenty years ago when I was an avid teenage concert-goer, I remember there were indeed some patrons, who would take the opportunity to acquire tickets for subsequent shows, indirectly hindering the others, who wanted to purchase tickets for the concert that very evening. In the end, it was Rose who bore the burden of having to hurry through the ticketing process. At times, the wrong tickets would be printed and the entire process had to be repeated, further slowing down the ticketing operations.

Rose also explained that the seats in the middle and along the aisles were very much preferred to those at the corner as the aisle seats provided ample leg room as well as the ease of movement. Regular visitors to the concert hall were highly aware of particular audio-visual clarity from certain seating positions.

At the start of each annual season, there would be a high volume of orders from regular subscribers and Rose would have to stay back till late in the evenings and weekends to complete the ticketing. Certain seats reserved for the regular subscribers



had to be processed in advance before they were released to the general public. During the early nineties before the advent of the computer, the paper tickets consisting of three portions had to be printed out by large machines. Rose would then laboriously write down all of the 880-odd seat numbers on the tickets with a pen. Then she allocated the advanced orders by tearing off the respective tickets and striking them off the seating plan.

When the ticketing company SISTIC started to computerized their operations, Rose went down to the HQ for two days of training. She found the computerized process more convenient and less prone to making mistakes. She could easily tally the day's account with the debit and credit card machines. Moreover, whenever shows get cancelled, an instant refund would be made via the bank. This was unlike the past when customers exchanged paper tickets for cash with their names and ticket prices recorded by Rose.

Apart from some members of the public, Rose also made friends with some musicians from the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. Some would purchase tickets from her or collect complimentary tickets for themselves. While she had gained some knowledge through free cassettes, compact discs and conversations, Rose remained uninterested in Western classical music. The few times she heard the orchestra in concert was during the 'Familiar Favourites' or 'Christmas' concerts, where she would sit either backstage or on the last row of the circle seats and slipped away just before the intermission.

Her loving husband, who did the cooking and household chores, would be waiting for her at home with dinner. She spent the evening watching English or Chinese drama on television or reading story books borrowed from the library, her preference for which included romance and horror. On the weekends, she would bake cakes or watch movies, such as Chinese wuxia or Disney productions. Her favourite music, nonetheless, are the Chinese oldies. She could rattle off a list of singers, many of whom had faded out of popular parlance: Zhou Xuan, Yao Lee, Pan Xiu Qiong, Qing Shan, Wang Ching Yuen, Wu Gang, and many others.

Even when the Singapore Symphony Orchestra moved to the Esplanade for rehearsals and performances after 2002, Rose stayed put at the box office at the Victoria Memorial Hall. She claimed that her workplace had been her 'second home' for over 25 years. For six days a week, rain or shine, she would hop onto the buses – SBS 229, CCS 8 or SBS 107 – and trekked towards work and home on a pair of walking sticks.

When I saw her again recently, she was selling tissue papers at the neighbourhood train station. She told me that she was also working part time as a guest officer at the local ActiveSG gym at the Enabling Village. Her hours were irregular and ad hoc, but she was allowed to sit on an office chair with wheels, providing her the ease of moving between the front desk and back office. I supposed the self-proclaimed workaholic has found her 'second home' once again.



MSB Member News

Dr. Jun Kai Pow, a cultural historian in music, gender and sexuality in twentieth-century Malay World, has been selected for three consecutive fellowships for the Academic Year 2019/2020: Research Fellow in Asian Heritages at the International Institute for Asian (University of Leiden), Affiliated Fellow at KITLV (University of Leiden), and Digital Fellow at the National Library Board (Ministry of Communications and Information, Singapore)

Sarena Abdullah, PhD, has been busy since her first contribution in *BERITA* in 2015. She is the current Deputy Dean (Research, Innovation and Community-Industry Engagement) at the School of the Arts, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and a Research Fellow at Centre for Policy Research and International Studies (CENPRIS) USM. She was awarded the inaugural London, Asia Research Award, by Paul-Mellon Centre, London and Asian Art Archive, Hong Kong in 2017 and recently published her research in *British Art Studies*, Issue 13. Being an art historian by training, she has been active in the College Arts Association (CAA) conference as part of the CAA-Getty International and Reunion Program in the last few years. Her book on Malaysian art entitled *Malaysian Art since the 1990s: Postmodern Situation* (2018) has recently been published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. She is also the co-editor for a recent publication of Southeast Asian Art entitled *Ambitious Alignments: New Histories of Southeast Asian Art 1945-1990* (2018), pub-

lished by the Power Institute and the National Gallery Singapore.

Dominik Müller has been appointed Professor of Cultural and Social Anthropology at Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Germany, where he became Speaker of the Elite Graduate Program 'Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures' (SDAC). Together with Marco Bünte, Professor of Political Science at FAU since 2019 (previously Monash University Malaysia), he is establishing a new Southeast Asia-related research and teaching agenda at FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg.

Publications

Tamir Moustafa
Simon Fraser University, Canada

Constituting Religion: Islam, Liberal Rights, and the Malaysian State

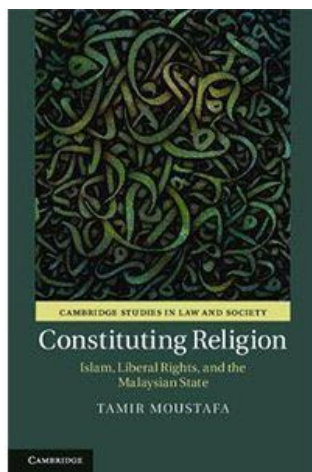
Most Muslim-majority countries have legal systems that enshrine both Islam and liberal rights. While not necessarily at odds, these dual commitments nonetheless provide legal and symbolic resources for activists to advance contending visions for their states and societies. Using the case study of Malaysia, *Constituting Religion* examines how these legal arrangements enable litigation and feed the construction of a 'rights-versus-rites binary' in law, politics, and the popular imagination. By drawing on



extensive primary source material and tracing controversial cases from the court of law to the court of public opinion, Tamir Moustafa theorizes the 'judicialization of religion' and the radiating effects of courts on popular legal and religious consciousness.

Constituting Religion is an open access, free text, available:

https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/888E17F4ACC3739CE1AA443FD07C9BA8/9781108423946AR.pdf/Constituting_Religion.pdf?event-type=FTLA



Mohd Irwan Syazli Saidin
National University of Malaysia (UKM)

The Arab Uprisings and Malaysia's Islamist Movements Influence, Impact and Lessons

This book examines the attitude of Malaysia's Islamist movements – The Pan-

Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS); The National Trust Party (AMANAH); The Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (ABIM) and the Malaysian Muslim Solidarity Front (ISMA) – towards the Arab Uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa.

It analyses the perceptions of Islamist movement activists, politicians and members in Malaysia towards the 2011 Arab Uprisings, popularly known as the 'Arab Spring.' A questionnaire based-survey as well as in-depth interviews with activists and leaders ranging from individuals in opposing political parties (PAS and AMANAH) to non-government Islamist organizations (ABIM and ISMA) informs the findings of the book. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, the author analyses how the events impacted the activism, political approach and attitudes of the members of Islamic movements towards the issues of regime change, civil disobedience, political revolution, democracy, Islamism and political stability. The book demonstrates that Malaysian Islamists are mainly in support of free and democratic elections as a medium for political change as opposed to overthrowing the previous BN-led regime via civil disobedience, street demonstration or 'revolution.'

A novel approach in examining the connections between Islamic movements in Southeast Asia and the Middle East and Africa, this book will be of interest to academics in the fields of Politics, History, Social Movements, Political Islam, Middle Eastern Studies and Southeast Asian Studies



Ostwald, Kai

'Four Arenas: Malaysia's 2018 election, reform, and democratization,'

Democratization.

DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2020.1713757

MBRAS Open Access Publications

The Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society publishes a series of monographs and a series of reprints.

(see <https://www.mbras.org.my/>)

Paul Kratoska, Hon. Editor, MBRAS writes:

'We are gradually digitizing our older titles, many of which are out of print, to be placed in libraries as e-books; printed copies of these titles will also be available. A limited number of MBRAS books will be open access publications. The first is a reprint of the MBRAS edition of W.W. Skeat's *Malay Magic: Being an introduction to the Folklore and Popular Religion of the Malay Peninsula*.

(available at

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvj2ttc>, or simply search for MBRAS Malay Magic.) (There are other free e-editions of Skeat's book, but the MBRAS version includes notes made by Skeat after the book's publication, and an Introduction by John Gullick).

Our second OA title will be a new edition of Peter Carey's *Babad Dipanagara: A Surakarta Court Poet's Account of the Outbreak of the Java War (1825-30)*. This volume, which includes

a Romanized version of the Javanese text, a translation into Indonesian Malay, and an English translation, has just been uploaded to JSTOR and should be available before the end of January.'

Symposium Discussion in Harvard Law School's Newly Launched Journal of Islamic Law on Brunei's new Islamic Penal Code

In January/February 2020, Harvard Law School's Program in Islamic Law (PIL) plans to publish the inaugural issue of its new *Journal of Islamic Law*. It will include a Symposium discussion on Brunei's Islamic penal code, including contributions by Mansurah Izzul Mohamed, Adnan Zulfiqarm, MSB Editor Dominik Müller, and a foreword by PIL Director Intisar Rabb.

More information:

<https://pil.law.harvard.edu/journal-forum/>

Also available via the PIL's 'ShariaSource'
https://www.shariasource.com/Journal_of_Islamic_Law/forum

Job Opportunities**University of London, SOAS**

Job openings in Social Anthropology and Fellowship in Film Studies ('Decolonising Screenworlds').

More information:

https://jobs.soas.ac.uk/fe/tpl_soasnet01.asp?newms=srs&fbclid=IwAR04vqKAeWfN4VA0mASoINeiNJKsuDZoYhBoC5eyAAVtneJjrGGZzXP7S4o



Harvard University, Program in Islamic Law (PIL) Fellowship 2020/21

(previously hosted researchers from and/or working on Southeast Asia)

The Program in Islamic Law at Harvard Law School invites applications to its 2020-2021 Fellowship Program (due Jan. 31, 2020). Research Fellowships are designed to provide an intellectual home to promising young scholars in Islamic legal studies to advance their own research and to contribute to the intellectual life of the Program and the Harvard community. Successful applicants will have completed an advanced degree (JD, PhD, SJD or the equivalent) before the start of the fellowship, and plan to pursue a scholarly research agenda in Islamic law that engages legal history, law and society, or comparative law approaches. Fellows will receive stipends of \$40,000 for an academic year. Deadline: January 31, 2020.

This year, PIL also welcome applications for new Data Science Fellowships. Successful applicants for the Data Science Fellowships will have completed an advanced degree (MS, PhD, D.Eng.) in computer science or related field, and plan to pursue a CS project in digital humanities or data science related to Islamic historical or legal sources that can be completed in one semester or year. Examples include discrete projects in NLP, data visualization, and text-mining. Deadline: January 31, 2020.

More information:

<https://islamiclaw.blog/2020/01/02/fellowships/>

Calls for Applications: M.A. & PhD Programs

M.A. and PhD-level:

*Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD),
Institute of Asian Studies: M.A. and
Ph.D. in Asian Studies*

The Institute of Asian Studies (IAS) at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) is accepting applications for the August 2020 intake to the M.A. and Ph.D. programs by research in Asian Studies.

The deadline for submission is 31 January 2020.

Please click here for information about the M.A. and Ph.D. programs and links to the application and scholarship information:

<http://ias.ubd.edu.bn/phd-asian-studies/>

*Interdisciplinary M.A. and PhD-level
Program:*

*Elite Graduate Program 'Standards of
Decision-Making Across Cultures
(SDAC)' Friedrich-Alexander University
Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Germany*

Headed by sinologist Michael Lackner and MSB Editor Dominik Müller, the international Elite Graduate Program 'Standards of Decision-Making Across Cultures (SDAC)' at FAU Erlangen-Nürnberg (Germany) offers students an exceptional study program, rooted in an anthropological and cultural studies

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perspective on matters of choice, embedded agency and decision-making, while being radically inter-disciplinary in outlook – with introductory modules in Philosophy, Sociology, Economics, Political Sciences, Anthropology, Human Rights, Asian Studies, alongside various regional and transdisciplinary modules. During the two year-long program, each student spends a semester at Peking University (PKU). The program offers a regional specialization (East- and Southeast Asia) alongside a not regionally defined training in trans- and intercultural competences. Within the program, students can pursue personal research interests through optional modules and personal mentoring and supervision programs.

Since 2020, the program also offers the possibility of pursuing a PhD degree in Cultural and Social Anthropology.

The SDAC-program is generously funded by the Elite Network Bavaria (ENB), with highly qualified international teaching staff, a small teacher-student ratio, and students from all over the world. German public universities do not generally charge study fees, beyond a modest administrative fee each semester.

The call for applications for the next cohort (starting in Oct. 2020) is currently drafted, the deadline will be in mid-June (selection interviews take place shortly afterwards). Interested students are invited to contact the Program Speaker, Dominik Müller
Dominik.m.mueller@fau.de

Call for Papers

Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs (SAGE Publishing)

JCSSA is a double-blind peer-reviewed academic journal published by the GIGA Institute of Asian Studies, Hamburg. Aside from the print edition, JCSAA is also available online as an open access journal. It presents key research and professional analyses on current political, economic, and social affairs in Southeast Asia, with listings in major indexes. It invites submissions for research articles, book reviews and special issue proposals.

For further details see:

<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/saa>

Editorial Information

BERITA is the official publication of the Malaysian/Singapore/Brunei (MSB) Studies Group.

A part of the Association of Asian Studies, we are a cross-disciplinary network of scholars, students, and observers with research and other professional interests in Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei.

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Berita is available through the new Ohio Open Library at:

<https://ohioopen.library.ohio.edu/berita/>

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