

The 10th New Buds Salon
Shining Future, Imminent Dangers:
Decolonization, Nation-States, Cold War and the Rise of
Authoritarian Regimes in Southeast Asia
November 4, 2019

The first session of the Southeast Asian series of the New Buds Salon co-organized by the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) and PKU's School of Foreign Languages, was held at PKU on November 4, 2019. Henk Schulte Nordholt, a distinguished professor from Leiden University in the Netherlands and director of the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies (KITLV), was invited to give a presentation entitled "Shining Future, Imminent Dangers: Decolonization, Nation-States, Cold War and the Rise of Authoritarian Regimes in Southeast Asia." Teachers and students from Peking University, Tsinghua University, and Beijing Foreign Studies University attended the workshop and participated in discussions. Xie Kankan, an assistant professor of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies of PKU's School of Foreign Languages, moderated the salon. Rao Zhaobin, director of the Institute of China Studies of the University of Malaya, was the commentator.

Based on the latest research, Prof. Nordholt discussed the rise of Southeast Asian nation-states and the strikes they suffered during nation-building between 1940 and 1980, and related this to the Cold War.

Prof. Nordholt started his presentation from the angle of Southeast Asian territory. He pointed out that Southeast Asia

should be studied as a whole, but regrettably, scholars usually only focus on their own target countries, confined by their foreign language abilities. He suggested scholars should get rid of traditional confinement to one field to build a more extensive basis of knowledge.

Prof. Nordholt discussed the process of decolonization of Southeast Asian countries. After World War II, Southern Asian countries declared their independence, one after another. But from 1946 when the Republic of the Philippines was established to 2002 when East Timor became an independent nation, the region underwent a long and uneven process of decolonization. The Kingdom of Thailand was the only country in the region that was never made into a Western colony, but it still suffered from colonialism – under pressure from both the UK and France, Thailand made great concessions in territory, economics and politics.

Prof. Nordholt opined that although different Southeast Asian countries have taken various approaches to realize independence, there are still some common points. First, Japan's occupation played an important role. Second, most countries won independence through "negotiations." Third, rising nation-states basically inherited the territory and borders from the previous colonies.

The Japanese Southward Expansion policy and Japan's occupation of Southeast Asia between 1942 and 1945 after World War II advanced Japan's comprehensive expansion in the region and accelerated the fall of the European colonial rule in Southeast Asia. In addition, with the exceptions of Indonesia and East Timor, countries including Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam,

Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei among others all won independence through negotiating with their previous colonial suzerains and signing agreements. Such negotiations usually lasted for several years and largely maintained previous colonial suzerains' interests in colonized countries.

Rising nation-states in Southeast Asia almost completely inherited the geographical borders demarcated by colonial suzerains in early 20th century. Diversity in ethnicity, religion and language within borders were especially obvious in island regions represented by Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. Although nation-states on the Indochina Peninsula were mostly established by relying on a single strong ethnic group, conflicts caused by ethnicity, religion and other factors are not uncommon. There are deep-rooted contradictions within Southeast Asian countries. The region has been prone to breeding violence, a tendency exacerbated by multiple factors such as the Japanese occupation, nationalist movements and the Cold War. In this sense, violence is the usual way to resolve political issues in Southeast Asia. Correspondingly, the military has become a player that has never been absent from political turmoil in the region.

As for the development of rising nation-states in Southeast Asian countries, Prof. Nordholt said that the nature of the logic within the operation of these rising Southeast Asian states must be understood to have a sense of their development process and their challenges and opportunities. The political power of Southeast Asian countries was highly concentrated during the colonial period. Due to colonists not being able to directly manage such a huge region, they resorted to cooperation with

local elites to access raw materials and local labor, in order to make a high profit. It can be said that both the construction of infrastructure in colonies and the formulation of various kinds of policies saw maximizing profit as their fundamental goal. By contrast, colonial governments' investments in education and healthcare were far from enough. Only a small portion of upper-class elites in the colonies had privileges and were able to profit from such an abnormal economic model, compared with ordinary people who were suffering from oppression. After World War II, Southeast Asian countries awaited development. The first generation of political leaders of rising nation-states, though facing a slew of difficulties, were confident in the future, hoping to modernize the backward societies of Southeast Asia.

However, Prof. Nordholt pointed out that hope is far from enough. The new national leaders faced three main challenges: (1) Transforming the old colonial states they had inherited from instruments of repression into institutions that stimulated popular participation; (2) turning the old colonial economy from exploitation into a motor of development; and (3) turning colonial societies that had been characterized by ethnic and religious cleavages into a unified nation.

Divisions among Southeast Asian countries were formed during the colonial period, with many conflicts being further entrenched after the establishment of nation-states. Politically, the military in the post-colonial period maintained the influence it had under colonialism and was never absent from the political affairs of Southeast Asian countries. Once the defenders of the colonial system, the military changed their role to become the stabilizing power in nation-states after independence, fighting

against rebels and potential separatists in the name of “national security.” Economically, the huge demand for materials such as rubber during the Korean War in the 1950s stimulated the economic growth of Southeast Asian countries in the short term. However, the region still stagnated due to a lack of investment and economic innovation. In addition, smuggling, corruption and other issues were never effectively curbed.

Prof. Nordholt showed a set of caricatures depicting Indonesia falling into a crisis of corruption although it won independence after 350 years of Dutch colonialism and three and a half years of occupation by Japan. Except for some attempts at economic reform, politicians in Southeast Asia seem to have no interest in democracy. They believe that the people do not have enough political awareness to participate in the vote, and therefore need leadership and control. The upper elites generally do not have much interest in democracy. Before colonization, the rulers and the ruled class followed a patron-client relationship. During the colonial period, the Western colonists and the local elites were interdependent. After independence, authoritarianism replaced democracy to become the most common form of regime in the emerging Southeast Asian countries. The dissatisfaction of the people constantly grew, breeding more ethnic, religious and class conflicts.

In addition, Southeast Asian countries faced many other problems. For example, in the process of nation building, a national language and education system needed to be constantly adjusted, national heroes and new symbols of unity needed to be shaped, and new national histories needed to be written. These countries also needed to make efforts in the diplomatic sphere to

gain security by seeking new alliances. Fragile regimes and controversial economic systems also hindered the progress of these emerging countries. Ethnic and interregional conflicts further intensified in this period. Many Southeast Asian Chinese faced the dilemma of having nowhere to go, and residents who lived in the place named by James Scott as Zomia were gradually marginalized by nation-states. These countries used autocratic approaches inherited from the colonial era to try to solve these conflicts, thus fueling conflicts and making the situation even worse.

Prof. Nordholt said that the democratization process of Southeast Asia almost stopped under the backdrop of the Cold War between 1950 and 1970, and incidents of large-scale violence happened one after another in this region. In 1947, a military coup killed the fragile democracy in Thailand. Soon after that, a series of coups or infighting took place in Indonesia, Myanmar, South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and the Philippines. The democratization process ceased, and the authoritarian rule in various places started. Only the Malaysian Federation and Singapore — and from 1971 onwards Indonesia under Suharto as well — maintained electoral democracy under an authoritarian one-party rule (respectively *umno*, *pap* and *Golkar*).

With the spread of the Cold War, Southeast Asia was turned into a large battlefield which saw a concentrated eruption of international confrontations, mass violence and massacres. During the Cold War, a fierce confrontation between two large camps, no country was able to be neutral and leave with a happy ending. Most countries chose to stand on one side and won

support from either the US or the Soviet Union.

With this background, both the military coup in Thailand and the armed forces in Myanmar were warmly supported by Western countries led by the US due to their anti-communist stance. In 1948, the Southeast Asian Youth Conference kicked off in Calcutta, after which a series of armed communist rebellions took shape in the region. The war in Indochina from 1954 till 1975 was the largest and most violent ever fought in mainland Southeast Asia. In Indonesia, an aborted communist coup in September 1965 was followed by the large-scale massacres of communists by the military and Muslim militias. In these incidents, almost all new regimes were established in an extremely violent manner, with supporters of the old regimes exterminated. The fall of Saigon in April 1975 had an important side-effect in Thailand. Economic instability and the fear of a communist invasion fostered a new alliance of the military, middle classes and the monarchy. This inaugurated a new period of authoritarian rule, while many leftists moved into the mountains where they started an armed resistance. In December 1975, Indonesian troops invaded, with American support, East Timor after Portugal had given up the last remnant of its colonial presence in the archipelago.

Violence during the Cold War caused huge casualties in Southeast Asia. The total number of victims has never been established in any detail. A rough estimation however, points at a number between five to seven million victims. This equals the number of Holocaust victims in Europe during World War II. However, Prof. Nordholt said that this tends to be overlooked because most studies focus on separate killings in Indonesia,

Cambodia, and so on, while ignoring the overall impact of the Cold War on the region. The unregistered casualties are countless. He also mentioned that there has always been a lack of attention to the large-scale violence in the Cold War, and the memory of these conflicts and massacres seems to be slowly fading away. These phenomena require our attention.

Authoritarian rule in Southeast Asia reached a climax in the 1970s. Thailand (from 1976), Myanmar and South Vietnam (until 1975) had military regimes; Indonesia had an authoritarian regime with a strong military presence; the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore had authoritarian civil regimes; from 1975 onwards Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos had authoritarian socialist regimes. Following Soviet and Chinese models, socialist regimes emphasized collectivization of agriculture and aimed to invest in heavy industry, but experienced economic decline aggravated by bureaucratic stagnation and a lack of innovation. From the 1970s onwards, the capitalist regimes in the region managed to generate economic growth. Supported by large loans from the US, Japan and the IMF, an alliance of bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen staffed these so-called authoritarian developmental states.

The ending of the Cold War triggered a new wave of democratization at the end of the 20th century. However, with memories of violence fresh in their minds, most Southeast Asian middle classes longed for stability and economic growth and formed therefore a solid basis for authoritarian regimes. They tended to favor authoritarian states in order to gain an economic stake in gradually opening markets. Southeast Asia had rapid growth in economic development during this period but still had

to face all kinds of issues, such as population growth and environmental protection. The democratization process in the region had to go through all kinds of difficulties and progressed slowly. Prof. Nordholt concluded his presentation by saying that the Cold War had a major impact on Southeast Asia. Even now, the region has to tackle a slew of tough issues inherited from the Cold War.

Rao Zhaobin, director of the Institute of China Studies, University of Malaya, said that Prof. Nordholt's lecture was very enlightening. Rao stated that the professor's method, which breaks through geographical boundaries and compares different Southeast Asian countries, is a salutary lesson to discuss. He also mentioned China's part in this process and emphasized the influence of China-Southeast Asia relations on the situation in Southeast Asia. He said that Southeast Asia and China can be viewed within a comparative framework. Although both went through various difficulties and challenges during the nation building process after World War II, China's achievement in realizing the unity of the country and the solidarity of ethnic groups stands out. China has played an important and lasting role in the development of Southeast Asian countries. He said that China and Southeast Asian countries had a dynamically developing relationship during the Cold War. During the Cold War, Sino-American relations, Sino-Soviet relations and relations between China and Southeast Asian countries all underwent huge changes. He emphasized that China's image in Southeast Asia is diverse and complicated, and studies on China's impact on Southeast Asia need to be conducted under specific historical contexts.

The teachers and students who participated in the salon had interactions and in-depth discussions with Prof. Nordholt and Prof. Rao Zhaobin on the role of the former colonial suzerains in the construction of the nation-state, the relationship between Southeast Asian countries and China and the US, and the necessity of authoritarian rule in the development of Southeast Asian countries. Xie Kankan, assistant professor of PKU's School of Foreign Languages, gave a concluding speech. He discussed several key issues from Prof. Nordholt's presentation, reiterating the necessity of studying and viewing Southeast Asian countries as a whole region.

The 11th New Buds Salon
Christianity, Conversion and Overseas Chinese:
Historical Moments in Religious Interaction
November 25, 2019

The second session of the Southeast Asian series of the New Buds Salon jointly organized by Peking University's Institute of Area Studies (PKUIAS) and the School of Foreign Languages, was held at Peking University on November 25, 2019. Barbara Watson Andaya, a professor in the Asian Studies Program of the University of Hawaii and former president of the American Association of Asian Studies (AAS), was invited to participate in the salon and gave an academic report on the theme of "Christianity, Conversion and Overseas Chinese: Historical Moments in Religious Interaction." The salon was moderated by Xie Kankan, an assistant professor from PKU's School of Foreign Languages.

Prof. Andaya is a world-famous scholar in Southeast Asian studies. Her career has involved teaching and researching in Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and since 1994, the University of Hawai'i. In 2000, she received a John Simon Guggenheim Award. Her representative works include *Malaysian History*, *Modern History of Southeast Asia*, *The Flaming Womb: Re-positioning Women in Southeast Asian History, 1500-1800*, and others. Prof. Andaya's current research project focuses on religious interaction in Southeast Asia from 1511 to 1900. In her report, she shared her latest research results, explaining why Christianity developed relatively slowly among Southeast Asian Chinese before the 20th century, but expanded rapidly in the first half of the 20th century.

There has been a lot of research on the spread of Christianity in China, but few scholars have paid attention to the influence of Christianity on overseas Chinese communities. From the 16th to the 19th centuries, Chinese communities in Southeast Asia were valued primarily as a preparatory training ground for Christian missionaries to try to open the door to China. Prof. Andaya conducted a comparative study of the Philippines under the rule of Spain in the 17th century, the Straits Settlement in the 19th century, and British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies in the 1930s. She argued that only under mature historical conditions were foreign religions able to achieve substantial development in the region. Her research aims at sorting out global connectivity in religious exchanges and analyzes religious interaction in Southeast Asia within the framework of world history.

Prof. Andaya showed a print made by Jesuit missionary Giovanni Filippo de Marini SJ after his return to Rome from the East in 1665. It features “IHS” as the symbol of Jesus Christ, which is the Greek abbreviation of Jesus’ name ΙΗΣΟΥΣ. In the print, those portrayed as creeping in the Lord’s grace are believers from Tonkin, Cochinchina, Cambodia, Siam and Japan. This print conveyed the Jesuits’ vision of expecting Christianity to spread everywhere in the East. Interestingly, the books used by missionaries to do missionary work were written in Chinese. Prof. Andaya used this phenomenon as a basis for further analysis.

Manila in the 17th century

When the Spanish began their occupation of Manila in 1570, there were only about 150 Chinese there. By 1600, the

number of local Chinese had increased to about 20,000, most of whom came there across the sea from Quanzhou and Zhangzhou after Emperor Longqing (the 12th emperor of the Ming Dynasty) relaxed the embargo on overseas trade in 1567. Following Spanish demands, the Chinese settled in Parian on the edge of Manila and played an important intermediary role in the Manila Galleon trade across the Pacific Ocean from 1565 to 1815. Silk, porcelain, lacquer painting and carvings from China were transported to Mexico on the other side of the Pacific via Manila, while businessmen from Fujian earned silver from the Americas.

The Jesuits extended their missionary network to China as early as 1552, but other Christian denominations, including the Dominican Order from Spain, had no way in. Therefore, Spanish Dominican missionaries who came to Manila in 1587 regarded Manila as a springboard to spread Christianity to China and first tried to practice converting the local Chinese community.

At that time, in addition to businessmen and craftsmen, some scholars also went south from Fujian to Manila. According to records, a Dominican missionary named Juan Cobo acquired relevant knowledge of Fujian with the help of Fujian literati and wrote *A Record of Almighty True God* (《万能真神实录》) in classical Chinese. The book portrayed God as the creator of all things and recorded how missionaries combined Christian doctrines with natural sciences. Only one copy of *The Record of Almighty True God* remains today and is now kept as a treasure in the National Library in Madrid, Spain. In addition, the interaction between local Chinese and Spanish missionaries was

also manifested in other aspects. For example, in 1593, a Chinese printed *Doctrina Christiana* in Spanish and Tagalog. In addition, Cobo creatively incorporated some animal stories into his propaganda materials. In these stories, he combined the laws of nature with God's creativity, and the relationship between different animals in the food chain was reflected in the magical embodiment of God's creation.

Most Chinese from Fujian spoke Hokkien (Southern Fujian dialect) as their mother tongue. Dominican missionaries believed that dialects could help them attract more Chinese believers, thus creating a missionary channel to China, so they began to actively learn Hokkien. Under the influence of the local Chinese, missionaries used a great deal of Hokkien in an edition of *Doctrina Christiana* printed in 1605, including the unique characters of the Ming Dynasty Fujian dialect. In addition, Chinese in Manila mastered superb carving skills and assisted in the production of a large number of religious statues, which were highly prized by missionaries. These statues became hot commodities in the market. At that time, many religious handicrafts in Manila churches, such as the sculpture of the Virgin Mary and the sleeping Jesus carved in ivory, were made by Chinese.

Due to the efforts of missionaries, some Chinese indeed converted to Christianity, because conversion could bring some real benefits. For example, Chinese Christians were allowed to leave Manila in 1596. Spain exempted the Chinese Christians from extra labor in 1626 and allowed them to not pay taxes to the Spanish rulers for ten years after conversion. However, the effect of these measures was very limited. Ubiquitous

discrimination, taxes and complicated conversion ceremonies deterred most Chinese from Christianity. Spanish colonial authorities allowed Chinese who converted to Christianity to intermarry with local people, and their descendants became the Mestizos group in later Filipino society. By 1662, only about 15 percent of the more than 20,000 local Chinese converted to Christianity. As a result of Spain's racial discrimination policy, Chinese in Manila launched several uprisings in the early 17th century directed at the local Christian churches and missionaries and works of art in the churches became the targets of attacks and destruction.

Generally speaking, although the Spanish made great efforts to preach in Manila in the early 17th century, the historical conditions were not yet mature and the results were not ideal. What was even worse was that according to the records of Binondo Church in the 1880s, only about 4 percent of the local Chinese residents converted to Christianity. The number of Filipino Chinese Christians did not increase significantly until the US occupation in the early 20th century.

Malacca and Singapore in the Early 19th Century

Prof. Andaya turned her perspective to the British Straits Settlements in the early 19th century. At that time, Malacca and Singapore were inhabited by a large number of Chinese. About a quarter of Malacca residents were Chinese or Baba (referring to the descendants of Chinese and Malays), while about 31 percent of Singapore residents were Chinese, mostly from Fujian or Chaoshan. In 1815, the first group of missionaries, represented by British William Milne, arrived in Malacca with their wives and Chinese assistants. Liang Ah Fa, Milne's assistant, helped

translate and print many missionary materials and became the first Chinese priest in the area.

Milne was the chief preacher of missionary activities in Malacca. Similar to Cobo, he firmly believed that Christianity could spread to all parts of Southeast Asia through Malacca and eventually reach China. The difference was that Milne realized the important role of education. He believed that education could help Chinese to better understand and accept the doctrines of Christianity, so he established the Anglo-Chinese College in Malacca. He hoped that the new generation of Chinese would receive education and convert to Christianity, and eventually become clergy to devote themselves to their great mission. Milne printed many books through the college, such as the Bible and his novel *Dialogues between Chang and Yuen*. These books became important tools for his missionary activities outside Malacca.

Another missionary worth mentioning was James Legge. In 1840, he was sent to Malacca by the London Missionary Society of the Protestant Congregational Church to be in charge of the Anglo-Chinese College. Legge maintained a reverence for Chinese Confucianism and traditional culture, and believed that the ancient Chinese classics also contained the spirit of Christianity. In 1843, he moved the Anglo-Chinese College to Hong Kong. Two years later, he returned to England with three Chinese. With the help of one of the Chinese, he established a new church in Singapore.

At that time, the situation in Singapore was similar to that in Manila in the 17th century. Local Chinese seldom devoted themselves to a completely new religious belief at the expense

of abandoning their traditional culture. Many children attending to Anglo-Chinese College hoped to learn business English so that they could do business and inherit their family business. Christianity was not very attractive to them. Although the Singapore Church issued many missionary books in Chinese, the number of Chinese Christians did not increase rapidly. Traditional Chinese culture was still deeply rooted in the overseas Chinese community, and conversion meant the overall reconstruction of their belief system. Many Chinese were unwilling to cut off their cultural and spiritual ties easily. At the same time, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom Movement under the banner of Christianity objectively hurt people's livelihood in China, and anti-Christian sentiment in China spread overseas. In addition, after the Opium War, China was forced to open its ports, allowing missionaries to go to Hong Kong and other places to preach. Prof. Andaya emphasized that the historical environment caused the British missionary activities in the Straits Settlements in the 19th century to encounter similar difficulties to those encountered by the Spanish in previous years.

The Missionary Activities of John Sung

In contrast, the 1930s was a completely different historical period. During this period, the Christian revival movement in East Asia, the rise of Pentecostalism in the US, the downfall of the Qing Dynasty and other factors combined to set up a very special historical stage for the missionary activities of the Chinese religious leader John Sung in Southeast Asia. The Pyongyang Revival from 1907 to 1910 made Christianity spread widely on the Korean Peninsula. Prof. Andaya argued that

scholars need to examine the revival movement in a broader global perspective. In 1906, the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles promoted the development of Pentecostals in the US. Pentecostals emphasized the participation and performance of missionary activities, which had a special attraction to economically disadvantaged groups. In the process of Pentecostal missionary activities spreading throughout the world, China, which was undergoing drastic changes, had become an important destination for missionaries. Western missionaries regarded the downfall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 as a golden opportunity for missionary work. However, Chinese all over the country regarded missionaries as members of colonial forces and were generally hostile to them. At the same time, the spontaneous missionary activities of the Chinese increased the influence of Christianity in China and promoted the construction of churches everywhere.

In 1901, John Sung was born in Putian, Fujian. His father was a pastor of a local Methodist church. His family was deeply influenced by the Christian renaissance movement at that time. John Sung took an active part in sermon activities when he was very young and became a minor celebrity in the local area. In his youth, with the support of missionaries, John Sung went to the US for further study. He obtained a doctor's degree in chemistry from Ohio State University and then went to New York-based Union Theological Seminary to study theology. During this period, attracted by the debate between Christian fundamentalists and modernists, and influenced by gospel music, he gradually created a new set of missionary methods. In the 1920s, the famous American female missionary Uldine Utley

used singing to preach, leaving a deep impression on John Sung. It was worth noting that John Sung's experience of studying abroad in the US did not make him feel close to Western missionaries. On the contrary, he believed that only after the Western missionaries left China could the churches in China develop further. John Sung returned to China in 1927 and soon formed the Bethel Worldwide Evangelistic Band, which became well known in Southeast Asia in a short time. During this period, Southeast Asian Chinese were experiencing multiple difficulties. In British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, a local anti-China wave stimulated the rising nationalism of Chinese, but the Chinese also became the target of the nationalism of indigenous people. The Great Depression of the global economy caused many mines and plantations to close down, and the colonial demand for labor also declined. The colonial government strictly controlled Chinese immigrants and many people faced the risk of deportation. The combined effect of these factors caused local Chinese churches to lose a large number of believers. The churches could not make ends meet and their financial situation was becoming worse and worse. They were in urgent need of a new dawn to save them. It was against this background that John Sung was invited to preach in Southeast Asia.

John Sung's missionary work was similar to a "theater-style" sermon. He could explain obscure doctrines with vivid performances and interactions. For example, he asked the audience to carry a small coffin, put a stone symbolizing original sin into the coffin, and added a stone into the coffin when the audience admitted a sin until the audience could not stand. After that, he slowly took out the stones. He used this

process to embody the purification and rebirth of the soul. In addition, John Sung could also sing songs in Malay or Hokkien. His dramatic missionary style showed the influence from Pentecostal and gospel music in the US. The local media reported on John Sung's missionary activities one after another, calling his upsurge in local areas a miracle, believing that his sermon provided a healing harbor for the suffering Chinese community.

John Sung's sermon, to some degree, bridged the gap among Southeast Asian Chinese caused by different dialects. In the "theater" where he delivered sermons, Chinese people from areas with different dialects could share the same sacred emotions and a common "Chinese" identity. It was also in this process that John Sung's religious preaching was organically combined with the rising nationalism of the local Chinese. In addition, he stressed that conversion to Christianity did not conflict with the preservation of cultural traditions, and encouraged Chinese churches to be more accepting of Chinese folk traditions. This proposition was warmly welcomed by the Chinese community in British Malaya and Dutch East Indies.

Based on the above three cases, Prof. Andaya further compared and examined the spread of Christianity among the Chinese community in Southeast Asia. She pointed out that Christians are still a minority group among Southeast Asian Chinese, and the analysis of the change of their beliefs must be carried out in a specific historical context. Historians should also pay special attention to the historical environment in which people lived. She believes that the study of the history of Chinese Christianity in Southeast Asia can bring us a lot of

enlightenment. It is necessary for us to comprehensively consider various factors that affect religious and social changes, especially to put them into the perspective of globalization and comparison.

**The 12th New Buds Salon
Crisis and Promise:
Rebalancing Southeast Asian History among Communities,
Nations and Beyond
December 10, 2019**

The third session of the Southeast Asian series of New Buds Salon co-organized by the Institute of Area Studies, Peking University (PKUIAS) and School of Foreign Languages, Peking University was held at PKU on December 10, 2019. Maitrii Aung-Thwin, associate professor of Myanmar/Southeast Asian history at the National University of Singapore, was invited to give a presentation entitled “Crisis and Promise: Rebalancing Southeast Asian History among Communities, Nations and Beyond.” The salon was moderated by Xie Kankan, an assistant professor of the Department of Southeast Asian Studies of PKU’s School of Foreign Languages.

Aung-Thwin first reflected on his study and teaching of Southeast Asian history, a field that he has long been engaged in, before sharing his latest research. He believes that an inclusive history course should have enough space for accommodating different people’s world views, different people’s notions of the past, and different experiences of their own sort of histories.

Aung-Thwin pointed out that the idea of “community” in the salon’s topic is not only a term that can be used to describe a group of people, but can also be a method of thinking about Southeast Asian history, and perhaps Myanmar history in particular. When people think about Myanmar, it’s very easy to think about Southeast Asia. For instance, people would think of ASEAN and the integration of ASEAN from the perspective of “community.” This is also a major use of the term “community.”

But community can also mean other things as well. For instance, people used to talk about communities and crises, and say crises in communities are due to social, economic or political reasons. Sometimes the word has to do with marginalized communities. Whether these are defined by ethnicity, religion, gender, class, where they live or their own particular experience, the term communities is often used to as a general term to talk about a whole range of particular experiences. There are also communities of promise. The term can be used to talk about the promise and the aspiration of a community, whether it's at a very small level or a broad level. People can talk about a national community, a regional community, or just even a local community. These are all different ways to consider the history of Southeast Asia.

Singapore celebrated the 200th anniversary of its establishment in 2018. Conventionally, its history begins with Sir Stamford Raffles, a British colonial officer. Hee was not the focus of the celebration. Instead, the much of the celebration was about rethinking other community factors in Singapore history. For example, one group put up multiple statues to represent different experiences in the history. These statues included key Malay figures, local Chinese and Indians, and so on. Therefore, there is still a contested notion of what Singapore is as a community.

In Myanmar, there are ongoing questions about the past and the future as a national community. While ASEAN countries come together and push forward integration as a region, Myanmar is coming up against impulses and processes that are much more local and national in character. So although the

country is going along its path of developing as a nation state, the Myanmar people keep asking a series of questions: What does it mean to be a Myanmar person? Who belongs and who doesn't belong to the country? What histories represent the nation, and what histories do not? Who is included in these stories? Who are not?

In a picture of Filipino hero Lapu-Lapu, one can see a Magellan historical marker in the background. Magellan's crew traveled around the world in the 16th century. But he never made it around the world, because he was unfortunately killed in the Philippines. In a surge of nationalism and a surge of trying to define who they were, the Filipinos put up the statue of Lapu-Lapu [whose men killed Magellan] to inaugurate Lapu-Lapu's role and the Philippine people's role in their own history.

Aung-Thwin said that the examples bring up the question of national history, and how researchers think about it. He said that there is a way to solve the question of national history by accommodating national history alongside other branches of history.

From the perspective of works of national history, what were their functions? Why were they written? And why are they still prevalent today? The national histories hope to replace colonial histories, which basically told the stories of colonial empires in Southeast Asia. The structure of the table of contents, the important periods, and the very chapter titles were often drawn out of the experience of the Europeans in Southeast Asia. So when independence after World War II emerged, there was an impulse to rewrite history books to allow local people to regain their place in history. Many national historians replaced

European actors with local indigenous national actors. These histories tended to emphasize the internal dynamics of the country, its structure and priorities. This was an intervention forcing people to think about Southeast Asian history through these national histories. But many, especially in the West, felt that national histories fell short of representing comprehensively wider experiences. And many others challenged the national histories because they marginalized or excluded many minority groups defined by ethnicity, religion, class, gender, location, experience, or politics. These national histories also tend to ignore the histories of non-state narratives that are not connected to the central government or the key elites. This also comes down to spatial representations, in the sense that stories and experiences of those living in rural areas or the peripheral areas are often not included or treated in a balanced way compared to the stories of the majorities. Aung-Thwin said that this criticism was accurate, and this was also a reaction in the West to American history as well. The approach to solve this problem is to deal with the relationship between national history and regional history.

Aung-Thwin said although area studies started to develop in North America, different versions appeared in other parts of the world, not necessarily following the North American style. For example, here at PKU language and cultural vocabularies were prioritized, and this was the basis for understanding regional history. To understand local languages, world views and experiences, one needs an interdisciplinary perspective through languages, literature, theater, the study of societies, and anthropology among other approaches.

In the last year or two, there's been a push toward Asian studies. A saying goes that the historical narratives of both nation and region are no longer useful for relative studies, insisting that Southeast Asia as a region or as an intellectual unit has no legitimacy. Basically the argument is that if you treat the units -- nation and region -- as containers, you will not recognize the flows that go across the regions — the dispersion of culture and people, the circulation of ideas, the trade routes, commodity routes and so forth. But as historians are saying: Why are we stopping at this imaginary border? Why aren't we looking at the connections the map might show of fishing routes that are crossing East and Southeast Asia? Societies and cultures are not contained by these units. It is material culture and economic flows that create territory, not the other way around. Territory doesn't create or contain material culture. So it's a very provocative approach. It means opening up the regions at the very least.

Aung-Thwin said when we're thinking about the writing of Southeast Asian history, it's kind of a problem because Southeast Asian history already is implying that the nation or the region exists. So how do we deal with that? How do we account for the multiple forms of social organization across time, such as villagers, kingdoms, hamlets, monasteries or business associations? How do they become a part of a national history? How do we accommodate their experiences within a national history or within a regional history? He said that solutions for these problems are related to how we treat national history and regional history. Aung-Thwin said his topic for the salon is using community as the framework of history. Community formation,

a history of communities, allows for the fluidity of these communities. It also allows us to address the problems we have named. Using community as the framework for writing about history is to include rather than discard national history, because the concept of nation is still very important to many countries.

Aung-Thwin pointed out that community is actually a very old idea that goes back to late 19th century. It's very much part of the sociological tradition. The history of community formation provides a narrative structure for talking about pre-modern and modern history. People often are pretty good talking about pre-modern Southeast Asian history, the interaction between China and Southeast Asia, India and Southeast Asia, the influences from these groups, and Westernization and Islamization and their influences on Southeast Asia. It's just when we get to the colonial period, boundaries start to appear, and that challenges and confuses us. Community accommodates the full range of experiences and affiliations. The idea of community allows people to look at the different ways they live and have lived, including broader or other communities they may be part of. This allows us to go very deep into micro histories, such as the history of a town or even of a small group, or of a university. It can also allow us to scale up and talk about broader regional communities. Taking Myanmar as an example, Aung-Thwin talked about community history contending with national history and regional history, elaborating more about community as a method and the potential of community as an idea. He said that if one chooses a particular social space, like a local shopping market, the way people interact, especially the women, is perhaps different from

the women's interactions in their families. So when we're studying the history, territories may limit our narratives.

Researchers engaged in the national history of Myanmar include Maung Htin Aung, who wrote *A History of Burma*; Than Tun, the famous historian and father of modern Myanmar history; and Thant Myint-U, who wrote *The Making of Modern Burma*. It can be seen that there's still a place for national history in area studies. Notably, since 1988, there were so many histories been written about other groups in Myanmar that the history of the state and the history of the majority became marginalized. This is odd because usually it is minority groups that get left out in history. But at least in the English language, there is so much attention on the periphery and on the minorities that Aung-Thwin decided to write a history of the community of Myanmar. But the problem was that national history is focused on political centers and elite majorities. For this reason, the nation was the only historical subject, and everything was leading up to the nation. The narratives therefore prevented privileged unity, cohesion, a linear trajectory, and very sequential changes. This led to a single trajectory of history writing. This history was written because Myanmar at the time was not unified and was not moving along a linear trajectory, so the concept of nation was still important. It actually became a reflection of the times.

Aung-Thwin said that area studies is seen as a way of scaling up and recognizing the dynamics, patterns and processes that are identified as part of a region. Take for example regional trade that went beyond the nation state, or traveling of missionaries and Buddhist travelers. These are processes that

regional scholars are interested in and find to be really important.

But these are not the contents of area studies. Another angle in area studies is a focus on mobility and minority studies, as a way of getting beyond the nation. For instance, a great deal of work has been done on migration studies to show the movement of peoples across national boundaries. And this has been important to the history of a country. But meanwhile, in some particular nations, internal migration or seasonal migration, as well as the changes of the seasonal monsoons across the region and and so forth, are all important factors that affect the writing of history.

Another approach more recently is borderline studies, not focusing on the story of the center and the state, but looking at those areas and communities along the frontiers. Such studies require researchers to think about not just the ways people cross borders from one point to the other, but that this entire region has its own center and that it has its own relationships. So this has provided other scholars of history a way of writing a different type of national history. This has been also interesting for Asian studies as well. It begs the question: Where would you study if you are studying the boundary?

Aung-Thwin said that some problems exist in the current practice of history research. First, a history is still contained within a binary framework, which is either the center or its periphery; either the majority or the minority. History never combined these elements, and it has prohibited parallel experiences. History doesn't allow us to talk about nation-building while at the same time talking about community

formation at the sub-national level.

Taking ASEAN for instance, how do these countries start to come together, and how are the three ideas of integration, infrastructure and identity reflected in history? Second, the current practice of history research also fails to provide a framework to explain coherences and the differences at the same time. Scholars nowadays always talk about the differences, the variations, the cleavages, and the divisiveness. But 20 or 30 years ago, they would be talking about the constancies. How should we talk about both of them? Third, the current practice of history research doesn't historicize the nation, without putting the nation within the context of a broader history. It's only sitting there by itself, as if there's nothing to precede it, and there's nothing to follow it. So, such an approach fails to recognize the nation within the broader historical context of Southeast Asia. A nation is a government system, and is in relation to other government systems.

But the approach to area studies also drew criticism. It believes that we can divide Asia into these neat colored areas so that the green of Eastern Asia won't mess around with the orange of Southeast Asia, or that the pink of Southern Asia won't be integrated with the blue of Central Asia. Area studies believes that these are all separate parts that can't be blended. But historically, this wasn't the case. In fact, some are suggesting that area studies was a Cold War program and funded for Cold War reasons. In terms of the US position, the US needed to define and understand the places where they were confronting their adversaries through training language experts, and so forth. But in fact, they were like Orientalists during the

old colonial period who were gazing at Asia from afar and making judgments about it. This led Asia to be regarded as a regional unit. Region and regionalism froze, and only culture and society are put into these neat containers.

What inter-Asian studies propose is that we should open up the regions. Instead of thinking about the regions as containers, think of them as more fluid or with a lot of “holes.” The regions are nodes in a broader network and a network of circulating societies. We should be focusing not on defining the region per se, but defining the actual flows. So it’s focusing on what’s connecting the regions, as opposed to what’s defining these regions. But there are also some of the problems here. For example, inter-Asian approaches tend to privilege maritime experiences. Merchants and traders are traveling by sea. This approach tends to focus on the spaces in the cities and the polities that are on the coastline or tied into a broader maritime world. People in the more agrarian societies in the states that are tied to different types of economies and different types of lives don’t have this type of circulation. Where do they come in? Where do they fit in inter-Asian studies? So it doesn’t really explain those types of societies that are not as mobile. These civilizations actually came out of agrarian civilization, not at the exclusion of trade, but with agriculture as their central base. And this also accounts for variation and differences, the mixing of languages, the mixing of identities, but it doesn’t account for each unit. So this inter-Asian model is not necessarily the way out of things.

Aung-Thwin said his solution is to use “community” as a method for research. The “community” here is basically a

territorial-based form of social organization. It is an idea of space which represents a social connection of some sort, which can be big, can be small, and can be connected by beliefs, economics, or kinship. It can represent a broad tradition or an ideal relation. It is basically the sense of belonging and identity that draw the community members together. Research of community is interdisciplinary, which allows us to think about the things that actually bind people. Is it economics or personal relations? Is it coercion? Is it marriage or kinship? So researchers can work from historical, social, political, economic and perhaps anthropological perspectives. Community allows researchers to look at the ways in which ethnicity, class, polity and religion help to form and define what a community might be.

A community can be regarded as part of the established order, like a government, but it can also include other groups, a non-government order, a state or a non-state, and so on. Notably, a community is often expressed in different ways and through different ideas, which also allows people to talk about how to explain conflicts. Usually, when you have contested ideas of community and when people don't see eye to eye about a particular issue within a group, whether "we belong" or "you don't belong," "they're being taxed too much" or "not being taxed enough," community may choose different ways to express this. Some people may choose to express it through the language they use, the clothing they wear, or the rituals they participate in. All these expressions are ways of understanding community. At the same time, it allows us to also look at different communities across time from ancient times to

contemporary times, and look at the ways the different communities were formed and organized, how they rose, and how they fell. Sometimes they would change even as they were coming together. It allows us to look at and engage in different types of evidence, material performance, and literary culture as a way of this expression of community. Talking about the field of Southeast Asia through scholarship, scholars are actually forming a community in some ways. It allows us to accommodate different ideas in scholarship. So even if I disagree with you about how we should be thinking about Myanmar history, we're still doing the same thing, and we're still talking about a community, so it enables us to find bridges across our differences and enables comparison across different forms of social activities groups. So, that is the potential of community.

Aung-Thwin said that when he teaches his class about creating history that's framed by community, he starts with the early urbanized communities across the region, and then classical states, the stories of ports and cities that emerged, and the colonial community that merges into a national community and a regional community. The community provides a framework that's not dependent on borders and it keeps flowing. This allows us to talk about those communities who are always in movement from migrants to people on the move, and also those who stayed pretty much the same place. It's inclusive and allows us to talk about different groups, either within a nation or a region or across them based on languages, religions, class, education, gender, location, and so on.

Aung-Thwin said that he is a mixed Burmese-Filipino. His

father had his origins in the Mon and Karen ethnic groups. His grandmother had a British father who was also mixed. His mother is Spanish and Mexican mixed. So if talking about the Burmese in a very inclusive way, this should include both the Burmese community and communities that include all these lineages. Such an approach doesn't challenge the concept of the "nation." It just allows more space to talk about it and explore different world views. It can showcase the different views of the world from the eyes of those on islands and those in the lowlands. Those in the cities are also very different from those out in the countryside. They have different priorities.

Research on communities allows us to look more broadly across civilizations, instead of be confined to Asian values. For a Euro-Asian group, a community framework offers a basis and space for us to look at Myanmar interactions.

To look at Myanmar within the Asian world order, the following questions need to be thought about. How do we think about Myanmar in terms of interactions? How do we think about the different social groups? How do they form common experiences and define what Myanmar is? What form of governance are they going to have? Who's going to be included? What does the rule of law mean? It can mean very different things to different communities.

Aung-Thwin said that researchers should look at both internal differences and variations in different communities and the way they are connected. People who feel differently need to be recognized, and one should also look at minority grievances and pay attention to the willingness of all members of the community as a whole.

Aung-Thwin concluded the salon, saying that the potential of historical research based on communities is that it accommodates different experiences, priorities and affiliations, and also allows people to talk about identity in historical ways. It incorporates cultural forms and meanings. It allows historians to look at books, literature, dance, clothing, and other things that they sometimes don't look at. Prof. Barbara Andaya once said history can be written, and it can also be balanced, woven and sculpted. The historical texts we create could be diverse, and so this approach allows researchers to accommodate how people think about themselves as communities and their world views, and allows historians to synthesize. This kind of historical research includes perspectives from the center, the periphery, the margins, the minorities and the border lands, and also explains national cohesions, promise and conflict.