

NARRATING SOUTHEAST ASIAN WORLDLINESS

Friday, October 24, 2014

A one-day symposium organized by
the Center for Southeast Asia Studies, University of California-Berkeley
& the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University

3335 Dwinelle Hall, UC Berkeley

Description:

Recent research in historical sociology and anthropology has attempted to broaden the frame of Southeast Asian Studies beyond the parochiality of studies of national areas by focusing on historical connections and circulations of culture, religion and commodities within Southeast Asia and between the region and the wider world. This symposium focuses on worldly Southeast Asian networks and narratives from the period spanning the rise of modern nationalism to contemporary globalization, their ethico-political consequences and their broader implications for theorizing worldliness. There will be sessions on Southeast Asian world literature, labor migration and the relationship between nationalism and internationalism.

Paper Titles and Abstracts

Ilustrado Politics and World Literature

Caroline Hau, Kyoto University

Miguel Syjuco's Man Asian-Prize winning novel *Ilustrado* (2010) is the first literary work written by a Filipino (other than Jose Rizal's *Noli me tangere*) to achieve worldwide recognition. This paper analyzes the historical origins and changing meanings of the term "ilustrado" in Philippine literary and nationalist discourse and looks at the politics of reading and writing that have shaped international and domestic reception of the novel. While foreign critics praise *Ilustrado* for bringing the Philippines to the attention of the world and for making Philippine literature—long marked by its obscurity if not absence from the world republic of letters—a part of world literature, Filipino critics invoke the persistent trope of "the return of the native" to nationalize the novel and domesticate its diasporic author who is himself an ilustrado. *Ilustrado*'s thematization of the fraught position of the "Filipino" cosmopolitan-nationalist intellectual similarly makes use of the "return of the native" trope while seeking to resignify the hitherto class-bound concept of "ilustrado" by expanding the term to include the itinerant Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). But the experience common to OFWs of multiple re-turns suggests that these flows—whether human or cultural or economic—can no longer be so easily contained within or channelled exclusively to the "nation", even as Filipino elites no longer have the privilege of claiming to be the key actors in the Philippine economy and society.

Telling Tales of the World

Pheng Cheah, University of California at Berkeley

Postcolonial world literature in the normative sense is literature that is concerned with the re-worlding of the world against Old and new World colonialism and neo-

colonialism and capitalist globalization. Focusing on Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War* (1988) and Timothy Mo's *Renegade or Halo*² (1999), this paper explores why novels from and about postcolonial Southeast Asia that can be described as world literature are obsessed with the pre-modern narrative form of the story. What is the temporality specific to the story and why is it a necessary supplement to the teleological time of narratives of national revolution and the temporality of an outsider worldly ethics that refuses tribalism?

Beyond Colonial Miseducation: Internationalism and Pedagogy in American Era Philippines

Lisandro Claudio, Kyoto University

In 1966, the radical nationalist historian Renato Constantino published the polemical "The Mis-education of the Filipino," which argued that American education suppressed nationalist sentiment. This paper reassesses Constantino's essay using the work and intellectual biography of scholar/politician Camilo Osias (1889-1976), the first Filipino to write a textbook during the American period. Through his work, I explain how the American educational system did not necessarily suppress an established nationalism, but instead reflected the tensions of a nation-in-progress. Part of the struggle to forge a new nation was the problem of internationalism, or how the nation sought to establish its place in the global community of nations. Theoretically, the paper will serve as a critique of contemporary postcolonial "empire studies," which reduce the postcolonial subject to one that "resists" imperial hegemony through "hybridity." Such cliched language, I contend, occludes the broader intellectual trends that informed the work of early 20th century Filipino intellectuals--trends as vast as American pragmatism and Wilsonian internationalism.

Alien Romance in Hong Kong: love and sexuality in the literary narratives of Indonesian overseas workers

Jafar Suryomenggolo, Kyoto University

This essay reads Tarini Sorrita's *Penari naga kecil* (2006) and Maria Bo Niok's *Geliat sang kung yan* (2007), two pioneering works by Indonesian overseas workers, to understand the impact of labour migration in workers' lives. It analyses how Indonesian female domestic workers are sharing their stories and experiences about seeking love and romance in urban-capitalist Hong Kong, in the context of how globalization has challenged their perceptions and sensibilities. It shows how these narratives, as a literary subject, have become part of the workers' collective efforts to actively define the world they live in and to pursue self-autonomy.

Indian Ocean Worlds in the Philippines: Lascars, Sepoys, and the British Occupation (1762-64)

Megan Thomas, UC Santa Cruz

This paper traces connections between Luzon and India during the Seven Years War, as embodied by British forces sent to Manila in 1762. The British forces included, among others, sepoys, topasses, lascars, "caffreys," and French deserters, all embarked from Madras and veterans of Anglo-French conflicts in India. They were sometimes difficult for their commanders to control, and when they did things like plunder or desert, they employed strategies common to the struggling subaltern

soldiery of India's militaries, those attached to European as well as those attached to Indian powers. The paper traces the travels and strategies of these military subalterns, outlines the imperial ambitions that provoked them, and reflects on what futures seemed possible from this historical vantage point that subsequent national and regional histories occluded.

Migration, Diaspora, and Burma: Wendy Law-Yone's *The Road to Wanting*

*Tamara C. Ho, Associate Professor of Gender and Sexuality Studies
UC Riverside*

The Road to Wanting (2010) maps the Burma-China-Thailand region as a interracial contact zone, fraught with compressed temporalities, speculative capitalisms, and heterogeneous intimacies. Wendy Law-Yone's third novel explores human trafficking and illuminates counterhegemonic forms of relationality through the serial displacement of the protagonist Na Ga. Asian/American work on migration and human rights and feminist ethnographies of minority populations in China have mapped libidinal economies and gendered semiotics in nuanced ways. My presentation puts this scholarship in conversation with how Burmese diasporic author Law Yone articulates Na Ga's shifting positionality -- as simultaneously primitive and modern, local and universal, native and transnational. Focusing on Na Ga's relationships with other minority characters in the Yunnan-Myanmar borderlands, my reading foregrounds how *The Road to Wanting* critiques essentialized ethno-political categories (e.g., Chinese, Burmese, Yi) and highlights transnational currents of imperialist and neoliberal exchange. Law-Yone's polyphonic rhetorical play underscores the fabricated and performative nature of ethnoracial identities while generating alternative paradigms for transnational encounters. *The Road to Wanting* might then be read as narrating a kind of situated Southeast Asian worldliness as the novel imagines a transnational feminist community characterized by multilingual communication, embodied solidarity, and border-crossing affective affinities.

Cross Cultural Legacies of the Buddha's Second Coming: Disenchantment and Enlightenment at the Center and Periphery of Spanish Christendom

John Blanco, UC San Diego

One of the great curiosities of Spanish Golden Age Literature concerns the inspiration behind the famous play by Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *La vida es sueño* (Life, a Dreaming Sleep) [1635], which many consider to be not only Calderón's masterpiece, but also one of the great European works of theater in the seventeenth century. Among the various stories, legends, and histories that served as an inspiration to Calderón, certainly the most famous was the exemplum of Saint Josaphat: an Indian prince who apparently lived during the early Christian centuries; and who relinquished his wealth, family, inheritance of kingship, and pagan religion in order to embrace Christianity and follow his spiritual pastor Barlaam (also formerly canonized) into the desert. The popular story of Barlaam and Josaphat was translated into Tagalog by Jesuit missionary Antonio de Borja in 1712. Neither Calderon nor the Jesuits, however, realized that the legend of St. Josaphat was not based on a Christian saint, but rather on Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha or "enlightened one." In this paper, I trace the inspiration to both Calderon's play and Borja's translation to the Jesuit attempts to reconceptualize Christendom in light of a new, emerging concept of the world in the West. By examining Jesuit debates on human

freedom, casuistry, probabilism, and God's "middle knowledge," I show how Jesuit spirituality defines the underlying logic of the Spanish and colonial Latin American and Philippine "baroque" mentality.