

# CALL FOR PAPERS

## Centre for Asian Legal Studies

Researching State and Personhood: Law and Society in Southeast Asia

National University of Singapore, Faculty of Law † 15-16 December 2014

**Please circulate this call for papers widely.**

The Centre for Asian Legal Studies (CALs) is pleased to solicit proposals for participation in a conference entitled, *'Researching State and Personhood: Law and Society in Southeast Asia'*. The conference will be convened by Asst. Prof. Lynette J. Chua, together with Prof. Andrew Harding and Prof. David Engel (State University of New York, Buffalo), and will be held at NUS in Singapore on 15-16 December 2014. Abstracts must be for work that is original and has not been published previously.

Scholars who would like to participate in this conference should submit an abstract of 150 words and a biographical sketch of 100 words by April 15, 2014. Proposals should primarily focus on research located in one or more of the following: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar (Burma), Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste (East Timor), and Vietnam. Priority will be given to proposals based on fieldwork. Funding may be available for those who are selected (no separate funding application is required). Decisions, including funding availability, will be announced by June 15, 2014. Complete versions of all conference papers must be submitted by November 15, 2014.

A major publication is anticipated. The *Asian Journal of Law & Society* will consider selected conference papers for a special issue.

### **What is law and society in Southeast Asia?**

Law and society research entails the interdisciplinary study of normative processes and institutions that shape social relationships, interactions and conflicts. In many regions of the world – but not in Southeast Asia – scholars have formed law and society organizations to exchange ideas and collaborate across disciplines. These scholars do not necessarily have formal legal training nor do they engage in doctrinal analysis of the law as lawyers and judges do. Law and society research tends to view law as embedded in its social and cultural contexts and draws on a variety of empirical methods, such as ethnographic interviews, surveys, and historical and archival research.

Moreover, the very concept of law in this type of research includes not only formal legal institutions, legal actors and legal texts but also informal normative structures. For example, law and society studies have examined law and law-like behavior, norms, and relationships in agricultural and fishing communities, rural and urban neighborhoods, corporations, workplaces, religious groups, and migrant populations. In such studies, researchers have explored issues related to family, work, language, the natural environment, land and property, concepts of rights, disputes, gender and sexuality, activism and much else. Clearly, the scope of law and society research goes far beyond the technical concerns of lawyers, judges and many conventional legal scholars.



Centre for Asian Legal Studies  
Faculty of Law

## What is meant by *state and personhood* in Southeast Asia?

Southeast Asia is made up of states, which purport to confer rights or access to formal institutions on persons and social groups who live within their borders. However, researchers have persuasively demonstrated that the concept of the state is problematic. Peoples of Southeast Asia may sometimes embrace and other times resist the view that state institutions are the exclusive source of social norms and practices. Indeed there are many communities in the region that exist outside or beyond the reach of the state – in the highlands, forests and remote islands. Within these communities, laws and institutions of the state may play a particularly limited role. Even in urban areas where state institutions are more visible, they are not always regarded as authoritative. People may challenge or avoid the reach of the state, including its formal laws and regulations, and rely instead on informal normative structures, such as local rules and customs, religious teachings, or other historically rooted practices. Therefore, this conference is meant to question the concept of the state in relation to other forms of social ordering in Southeast Asia.

From the perspective of the state, legal rights and entitlements are distributed according to one's official status such as citizen, permanent resident, immigrant, refugee, or undocumented persons. However, these categories may have highly variable meanings or significance to different groups and individuals in Southeast Asia. Even the concept of the "individual" may be problematic. Papers for this conference should critically examine the concept of "personhood," and the role of law, if any, in its definition. And, of course, legal definitions should be understood to include not only state law but also the non-state norms and practices discussed above.

## Conference Aim

Many scholars write about issues related to state and personhood in Southeast Asia but often do so within the boundaries of their disciplines. They may fail to take advantage of opportunities available to those who are willing to engage in interdisciplinary exploration. In particular, they may not recognize important legal implications of the issues they study.

This conference is premised on the assumption that state and personhood in Southeast Asia can be fruitfully investigated by drawing on the broad interdisciplinary perspectives of the law and society field. Scholars studying Southeast Asian cultures and societies have too often avoided coming to terms with "law," which they regard as the exclusive domain of legal specialists. Their research may be highly relevant to the field of law and society even though they may not view their own work in these terms.

This conference proceeds on the premise that, "Law is too important to be left to the lawyers." It aims to build bridges across disciplinary divides and bring together scholars from diverse academic fields and locations in the region to forge new connections and consider new directions for socio-legal work.

***The submission form including abstracts of proposed papers and bio-data should be submitted by email to [cals@nus.edu.sg](mailto:cals@nus.edu.sg)***

### **Important Deadlines**

**Submission of Abstract:** 15 April 2014

**Notification of Acceptance:** 15 June 2014

**Full Paper Submission:** 15 November 2014

**Conference:** 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> December 2014