‘Male Modernity’, Puritanism, and the Southeast Asian City

| 5 November 2013, Tuesday, 7:00 - 8:30pm | National Library Building, The Pod Level 16 |

SPEAKER: Professor Anthony Reid, The Australian National University
DISCUSSANT: Professor Jane M. Jacobs, Yale-NUS College, Singapore
CHAIRPERSON: Professor Mike Douglass, National University of Singapore

ABSTRACT

Modernity did not so much privatize religion and secularize the city as it altered the nature of religious expression. There are some parallels in terms of mentalité between rapidly urbanizing industrial Europe in the 19th and early 20th century, and rapidly urbanizing Southeast Asian ones a century later. In both the newly urban lower middle classes appeared to seek both individual salvation and respectability in puritanical and patriarchal forms. This type of moralistic public piety lost its hold in Europe in the First World War, and was definitely over in the 1960s, but only hit its stride in Southeast Asian cities at about that time. This lecture will review the encounter in the late 19th and early 20th centuries between pre-modern Southeast Asia’s unusually balanced gender pattern and an exceptionally male, puritan, and alien model of modernity in government, business and religion. Although irresistible for western-educated Southeast Asian men, this offered a very poor fit for women accustomed to dominant roles in business. Southeast Asians were therefore judged to have failed the test of modernizing economically in the colonial era. Only the rapid urbanization after 1950 brought a similar dynamic to Southeast Asia as that which had accompanied Europe’s industrial transition a century earlier. We should not be surprised that patriarchy and puritanism then also became marks of piety and respectability in Southeast Asia. The fascinating question would be whether Southeast Asia could nevertheless retain its relatively balanced gender pattern in face of these pressures.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

Anthony Reid is a New Zealand-born historian of Southeast Asia. His doctoral work at Cambridge University examined the contest for power in northern Sumatra, Indonesia in the late 19th century, and he extended this study into a book The Blood of the People on the national and social revolutions in that region 1945-49. He is most famous for his two volume book, The Age of Commerce, developed during his time at the Australian National University in Canberra. His later work includes a return to Sumatra where he strongly advocated a historical basis for the separate identity of Aceh. Professor Reid was Professor of Southeast Asia history at University of Malaya (1965–1970) and Australian National University (1970–1999). He became the founding director of the Southeast Asia Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1999–2002, and then the founding director of Asia Research Institute (ARI) at the National University of Singapore (NUS), 2002-2007. He was Professor of Southeast Asian History and Research Leader at NUS from 2007-2009. Currently, Professor Reid is Professor (Emeritus) at The Australian National University.

Jane M. Jacobs is Professor of Urban Studies at Yale-NUS College of the Liberal Arts, Singapore. She trained as a Human Geographer and researcher, publishes and teaches in the fields of urban studies, postcolonial studies, and qualitative urban methods. Professor Jacobs did her undergraduate and Masters training at the University of Adelaide, Australia. While at University of Adelaide she also worked on a national survey of tourist impact on Aboriginal rock art sites. She was awarded her PhD from University College London, where she examined heritage and community based opposition to large-scale urban redevelopment in a rapidly transforming City of London. Professor Jacobs has taught at UCL, The University of Melbourne and The University of Edinburgh. While in Melbourne she was a founding member of the Institute of Postcolonial Studies and served a term as its Director. Professor Jacobs’ early research was on indigenous rights, and specifically land rights and cultural property activism and identity politics in settler Australia. She published widely in this area, including the co-authored book Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation (1998). On occasions she still publishes on indigenous-settler relations and indigenous activism. The main focus of her current research is urban studies. She has published on the postcolonial politics of cities, including her monograph Edge of Empire: Postcolonialism and the City (1996) and her co-edited book Cities of Difference (1998). Most recently her work has focussed on trans/nationalism and high-rise housing knowledges and infrastructures (http://www.ace.ed.ac.uk/highrise/); comparative urbanism and the relationship between architecture and society. This has resulted in various published papers as well as the co-authored book Architecture Must (MIT Press, Spring 2014) and Architecture and Geography (Routledge, 2014). She shares her name with a very famous, but now dead, urban scholar (the Jane Jacobs who authored, among other things, Death and Life of Great American Cities) and so has become an expert in professional disambiguation.

REGISTRATION

Admission is free, however, registration is required. Kindly register early as seats are available on a first come, first served basis. We would greatly appreciate if you write to Sharon via email arios@nus.edu.sg your name, email, organisation/affiliation and contact number.