

AUTHORITARIAN NOSTALGIA IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A Proposed Panel for the EUROSEAS Conference 2017
16-18 August 2017, University of Oxford

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Abstract: Are we witnessing the rise of authoritarian nostalgia in Southeast Asia? This panel aims to problematize the perceived mobilization of “authoritarian memories” of Southeast Asian leaders to legitimize their “populist”, if not “authoritarian”, governments. A previous study on the Asian Barometer Surveys (Chang, Zhu and Pak 2007) has revealed interesting findings on public opinion on the legitimacy of democracy and desire for authoritarian alternatives. In this panel, we take stock of recent developments to compare it with this previous study. More importantly, here we explore a different aspect of the perceived authoritarian nostalgia: the mobilization of “authoritarian memories.”

Publics in the region’s two widely considered democracies, Philippines and Indonesia, are still struggling over the memories of their past dictators. In both countries, the memorialization of these dictators as “national heroes” was the subject of intense debates in the most recent elections. The Philippine government is inclined to host a state burial for ex-dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the national pantheon of heroes. On the other hand, Indonesia’s second largest party Golkar has recently announced its plan to name ex-dictator Suharto as national hero. We dissect how the practice of remembering (or forgetting) this authoritarian past has shaped the politics of the present.

Lastly, this panel will focus on the political mobilization of “authoritarian memories” and how the control of its interpretation (the past) impacts the reading of the present and the possibilities of gaining power over the future.

Participants: TBC