

Farish and Tamara- Call for collaboration/comparison

Call for collaboration/contacts:

Southeast Asian Women in the economy during the Colonial Era 1800-1950

That Southeast Asian women have been active in business and trade is a well-documented fact by now, and numerous scholars have written about the visibility of women in the economic sphere in Southeast Asia today.

What interests us is the question of how Southeast Asian women conducted their business affairs during the late colonial era – from 1800 to 1950 – and what forms of economic activity took place then.

In the broader framework of Southeast Asian history and present-day scholarship on the realities of Southeast Asian life under colonial rule, we are looking for fellow scholars and researchers (including lay scholar-researchers, retired scholars and those who conduct research while not being affiliated to educational institutions) who are likewise working on the topic of Southeast Asian women in the economic/business sector during the colonial era.

We are keen to meet with and work with those who have been studying this topic, and in particular those who have been researching the history of Southeast Asian female merchants who worked during the 19th century.

Among the questions that we seek to address are:

- How did women gain access to capital and what were the modalities of trade and commerce then? Were Southeast Asian women merchants more focused on the trade of particular commodities such as gold, cloth, spices, or did they trade in all commodities that were then available in the market?
- What were the legal, social, cultural limitations and obstacles that Southeast Asian women traders face during the colonial period? Did colonial laws restrict and hinder, or help and facilitate, trade in and across Southeast Asia for local men and women alike?
- Are there any archives or records that can help us quantify the volume of trade then, conducted by female merchants in the region?
- Did Southeast Asian merchants – male and female alike – see commerce and trade as a means of retaining their native identity vis-à-vis colonial hegemony and power? Was trade a form of passive resistance to Empire?

Note that our timeframe is at present fixed from 1800 to 1950. Note also that by ‘Southeast Asia’ we are referring to the region that presently encompasses the ASEAN group of nation-states, as well as Timor Leste and Papua New Guinea, though we are keen to discover the extent to which Southeast Asian women traded beyond the region, with their counterparts in India, China, the Arab lands, Africa and Europe as well.

Please note though that this is not a call for papers. Rather we would like to know what you are doing, your geographic area/timeframe of interest and the stage of your research (starting out/in the midst of/ ready to publish). It is our hope to start a collaboration of like-minded people for the study of the economic agency of women in this time period and to bring together scholars, researchers, students, and anyone else who share our interest.

We are, of course, not ruling out the possibilities of future workshops or conferences and certainly a collection of published materials in this field of study.