

[CFP | Malay World Manuscripts: Medium and Method in Decentring Dominant Narratives](#)

Announcement published by Sharon Ong on Wednesday, December 1, 2021

Type:

Call for Papers

Date:

January 31, 2022

Location:

Singapore

Subject Fields:

Humanities, Southeast Asian History / Studies, Colonial and Post-Colonial History / Studies, Contemporary History

This workshop is jointly organised with the Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore; funded by the Ministry of Education (MOE) Academic Research Fund Tier 1 Grant.

This proposed workshop will convene physically in Singapore (subject to travel conditions at the time of the workshop period). Research related to this workshop is funded by the MOE Academic Research Fund Tier 1 grant. It aims to explore different methods, approaches, and perspectives to the study of an important medium – Malay World manuscripts. The workshop attempts to advance the study of Malay manuscripts as a new epistemic source for the redefinition of social, ecological and cosmological life within the fields of historiography and the sociology of knowledge, as well as to reinvigorate the relevance of Area Studies in contemporary times, where state-centrism and nation-state borders are being contested.

Manuscripts are generally defined as handwritten and hand decorated. They may be works of original compositions, translated from other languages, copied from other sources, recopied, and added by an author or many authors through time. However, with the advent of new technologies, these handwritten manuscripts were lithographed, printed, and are now being digitised. What significance do these developments have for the study of manuscripts? How do we define “manuscript” and what are the novel approaches to studying, collecting and using manuscripts? Indeed, this must be problematised.

Manuscripts written in Malay prior to the colonial period, even with later additions, constitute a significant corpus of local knowledge production and representation. However, rather than viewing the manuscript as the repository of authentic ‘indigeneity’, we propose to interrogate the manuscript as a medium and method for ‘decentring dominant narratives’. This can be interpreted as a project for the decentring of epistemic narratives which have centred the epochal sway of imperialism, colonialism and nationalism (primarily European-driven) as the ‘singular dominant’ point in the historicisation of ‘Asia’ versus the rest, or of the Malay world, in comparison to others. Will the examination of these Malay manuscript texts uncover alternative paradigms that provide the longue durée perspective of social processes? Could this result in coloniality and its effects to be nudged from their dominant and centred position to a more multi-layered, interconnected, and circulatory

Citation: Sharon Ong. *CFP | Malay World Manuscripts: Medium and Method in Decentring Dominant Narratives*. H-Announce. 05-27-2022.

<https://networks.h-net.org/node/73374/announcements/9184204/cfp-malay-world-manuscripts-medium-and-method-decentring>
Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.

time frame where 'other' plural paradigms with new meaningful categories, new imaginaries and new methodologies will be discovered? The method of inter-referencing and multiplying frames of reference without placing Europe and coloniality at the centre allows for many other agents to be recognized as the significant and interconnecting points of reference. The Malay world before colonialism was not parochial or 'local' but one that was already connected to the other power centres such as in China, India, Middle East and Eurasia before the rise of Europe.

Malay Manuscripts have long been and considerably studied before this, within the fields of literature, history, linguistics, philology, and cultural studies. This workshop proposes to investigate novel and innovative approaches to studying these manuscripts where they will straddle both medium and method and as a multiple site of meaning-making. Textualism as a tool for reading and re-reading the manuscripts, intertextuality, or the process of deconstructive reading, in which the text and its textuality can be read as the intersection of numerous social processes, and relationships within the Malay Archipelago and beyond.

Texts and contexts or "new historicism" is another method for establishing the historicity of texts and the textuality of history by triangulating or corroborating manuscripts with other contemporary sources to reconstruct societies from which manuscripts were deemed to have been produced. Manuscripts could also be considered as a 'social thing' with a biographical narrative of mobility and circulation. Old manuscripts are material artifacts, with a history of 'travelling' and of 'utility' and 'function'. The method for tracing this will combine both historical and ethnographic study of how manuscripts and their meanings have been used within contemporary political and cultural discourse. This workshop invites such studies in the hope of establishing a forum to explore novel approaches to facilitate more inter-disciplinary collaborations and initiate new dialogues between experts from diverse fields and geographical areas of study.

Thematic readings will assist workshop participants to focus on specific genres of manuscripts such as the *kitab-sejarah* (historical-religious), the *hikayat* (stories), *syair* (narrative poems), *silsilah* (genealogies) court chronicles and letters. The following themes may be examined: 1) State Formation 2) Gender Relations 3) Conceptions of Power and Inequality 4) Diplomacy and Intercultural Engagements 5) Enchantment and Magic 6) Origin and Founding stories and 7) Political Economy.

The outcome of the workshop will be the identification of new global relationships and cross-cultural borrowings where circulation, connectivity, interactivity and interdependency of knowledge production is key. Understanding the past through decolonising genealogies will enable a more complete understanding of how future trajectories on issues of power, inequality and conflicts may be projected.

The workshop welcomes empirically grounded papers that explore new approaches, perspectives on the various themes and areas found in Malay manuscripts through theoretical and/or methodological innovation.

Useful General References

1. Capan, Zeynep Gulshah, "Beyond Visible Entanglements: Connected Histories of the International", *International Studies Review* (2020) 22, 289-306

2. Douki, Caroline and Minard Philippe, "Global History, Connected Histories: A Shift of Historiographical Scale?" *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* Volume 54-4, Issue 5, 2007, 7-21
3. Duara, Prasenjit, "Asia Redux: Conceptualizing a Region for Our Times", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, November 2010, Vol. 69, No. 4 (2010), pp. 963-983
4. Shih, Shu-Mei, "World Studies and Relational Comparison", *PMLA*, 130.2 (2015):430-438
5. Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia", *Modern Asian Studies*, Jul., 1997, Vol. 31, No. 3, Special Issue: The Eurasian Context of the Early Modern History of Mainland South East Asia, 1400-1800 (Jul., 1997), pp. 735-762

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Paper proposals should include a title, an abstract (250 words maximum) and a brief personal biography of 150 words for submission. Please use the [paper proposal form](#) and send it in doc/docx format to Sharon at arios@nus.edu.sg by **31st January 2022**.

Successful applicants will have their travel and accommodation costs covered to enable them to present their papers at this workshop. Please also include a statement confirming that your paper has not been published previously, it is not committed elsewhere, and that you are willing to revise your paper for potential inclusion in a special issue submission (in collaboration with the workshop organisers and other participants).

Successful applicants will be notified by **end of February 2022**. Panel presenters will be required to submit drafts of papers (5,000-8,000) words by **end August 2022**. These drafts will be circulated to fellow panellists and organisers in advance. Drafts will be subject to revision since we expect that presenters will be open to feedback from fellow participants.

WORKSHOP CONVENORS

[Assoc Prof Maznah Mohamad](#)

Co-Convenor, Malaysia Study Group, Asia Research Institute, and
Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore
E| mlsmm@nus.edu.sg

[Assoc Prof Sher Banu A. L. Khan](#)

Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore
E| mlssbalk@nus.edu.sg

Contact Info:

Sharon Ong (she/her)

Contact Email:

arios@nus.edu.sg

URL:

<https://ari.nus.edu.sg/events/mwm/>