

EuroSEAS conference
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There and back again: When local(ized) knowledges go abroad, and when they return

This panel consists of papers addressing the topic of when local knowledge and/or local science moves from a particular Southeast Asian social, cultural or economic context, and enters the realm of foreign/international institutions and actors. The panel will explore how these knowledges are changed, consumed or contested in the international context, and what this implies for the political and material effects of that knowledge when it reenters the local situation?

Papers:

Jan Ovesen, Uppsala University
Revivals of Cambodian 'traditional' medicine

Rupert Friederichsen, Manchester Metropolitan University
Uneasy bedfellows: Researchers and local authorities in a transnational research project into sustainable rural development in northern uplands Vietnam

Eren Zink, Uppsala University
Scientific homecomings: Vietnamese scientists that train abroad and their re-entry into Vietnamese research environments

Nuria W. Eriksson, Université de Paris 8/Lund University
Anthropology of ICT: When Hackers Deal with Local Culture (Case of Aceh, Indonesia, after the Tsunami 2004)

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Convenors: J. Ovesen and E. Zink

Paper Abstract:

Anthropology of ICT: When Hackers Deal with Local Culture (Case of Aceh, Indonesia, after the Tsunami 2004)

Nuria W. Eriksson, Université de Paris 8/ Lund University

“Technology is ‘out of control’ as long as you only study technology.”
Peter Lamborn Wilson (1995)

The old school of Hacker Ethic has general tenets or principles that include sharing, openness, decentralization, free access to computers, and world improvement (Levy, 1984). When the new school of Hacker Ethic emerges with new ideals, they still have information-sharing as the basis. Linus Torvalds, a Finnish software engineer who initiated the development of Linux kernel, is one of these hackers whose belief in information-sharing is respectably noted by others. In his definition, hackers are a group of people who program enthusiastically and who believe that information-sharing is a powerful positive good, and that it is an ethical duty of hackers to share their expertise by writing free software and facilitating access to information and to computing resources wherever possible (Himanen, 2001).

In Aceh, Indonesian hackers (ICT volunteers) had re-developed ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) by using Free/Libre/Open Source Software (FLOSS). The findings of my fieldwork in this area strengthens the idea that the sharing concepts of Hacker Ethic are localized. The elaboration of these concepts shows that Hacker Ethic has deep cultural dependency, an aspect that plays an important role as critical success factor for implementation of ICT in disaster area.

The paper is part of my on-going PhD dissertation. The study attempts to comprehend the localized concept of desires in Hacker Ethic. Discussion incorporates the influence of cultural and religious phenomena that follows the ICT development in post-tsunami period in Aceh, Indonesia.

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Paper Abstract:

Revivals of Cambodian 'traditional' medicine

Jan Ovesen, Uppsala University

In November last year the Ministry of Health in Cambodia announced the establishment of a national policy on traditional medicine, to be supported by the WHO. The explicit aim is to integrate indigenous medicine into the national health system and thereby cater for poor people in the countryside who cannot afford treatment with biomedical pharmaceuticals. This idea is not new. It was reluctantly brought up by the French in the late colonial period, and it was forcefully adhered to by the Pol Pot regime as well as by the succeeding, Vietnam-backed People's Republic of Kampuchea. Common to all these attempts to cash in on medical 'local knowledge' has been the separation of the ('useful') herbal remedies from the wider system of ('useless') spiritual/magical practices that together form part of the indigenous health cosmology. Whatever faith one may have in an indigenous medical system, such imposed separation is clearly an impoverishment of the system, as well as a recipe to deliver poor medicine to poor people.

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Paper Abstract:

Scientific homecomings: Vietnamese scientists that train abroad and their re-entry into Vietnamese research environments

Eren Zink, Uppsala University

This paper is an introduction to *the science of returning home* as practiced by Vietnamese researchers that have trained in universities abroad, and are now trying to establish themselves and their ideas in Vietnamese universities and research institutions. In a context where the national government explicitly encourages internationalist projects and foreign donors are eager to provide funds and other support, my research finds a mixture of hope and disillusionment among recent returners. To understand this, I ask what challenges are encountered by scientists that return to Vietnam after they complete PhD training at an institution of higher education in an industrialized country. What are the social and cultural sources of these challenges, and what strategies do young scientists employ in response to them? In pursuing these questions, I look for a more nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of the articulation of foreign higher education systems with the local realities of a developing country.

The findings of this paper are based upon qualitative data gleaned from interviews with Vietnamese scientists and participant observation in the working life of Vietnamese research and higher education institutions. This research was carried out in several Vietnamese cities over the course of three visits and eleven months during the period 2007-2009.

The paper finds that as scientists return to their home institutions in Vietnam, they (re)encounter particular social, cultural, economic and political contexts that challenge their ambitions to deploy the ideas, practices and subjectivities that they obtained abroad. More generally, the *science of returning home* suggests that scholars and practitioners should not overestimate the power of internationalization projects in higher education (neither in terms of capacity building nor neo-colonial logics) without first examining the degree to which those internationalist projects articulate with higher education and scientific practice in the local context.

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Paper Abstract:

Uneasy bedfellows: Researchers and local authorities in a transnational research project into sustainable rural development in northern uplands Vietnam

Rupert Friederichsen, Manchester Metropolitan University

'Local knowledge' has become a catch phrase in international agricultural research and development practice over the past decades, and many attempts to integrate scientific and technical knowledges with their 'local' or lay counterparts have followed. The related literature is rich in methods and approaches – most prominent among them are PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) and PTD (Participatory Technology Development) – providing guidance on communicating and acting jointly across professional, cultural and status divides. However, most of the attention has focused on the relations between high status external researchers and experts with low status farmers. This paper will highlight the central and potentially problematic role of local authorities in shaping research and researchers' attempts to communicate results back to the local context.

The paper draws on three years' experience of working within the Uplands Program (UP), an interdisciplinary, collaborative (German, Thai and Vietnamese) research programme into sustainable land use and rural development in uplands Southeast Asia. The paper highlights local authorities' power over knowledge production in the UP as a whole, and analyses in detail selected individual data collection activities and feedback events held by UP researchers with the involvement of local authorities in northern Vietnam's uplands. Analysing such meetings as 'structured encounters' (Pottier, 1997) reveals lines of contestation between local researchers, foreign researchers, and local authorities. A key dividing line found in technical topic areas is between 'high modernist' and 'appropriate' ideologies of technology. A crucial fault line in studying and communicating issues of social organisation lies between the local Vietnamese Communist Party-centred political ethos and that of European (social) scientists. The paper concludes by calling for more explicit discussion of dilemmas arising out of such 'cross-ideological' research as a precondition for developing the sensitivity of individuals involved, as well as project-level strategies for transnational research.

Reference:

Pottier, J. (1997). Towards an Ethnography of Participatory Appraisal and Research. In: R. D. Grillo and R. Stirrat, eds. *Discourses of Development: Anthropological Perspectives*. Oxford, New York, Berg, pp. 203-227.