



**Inter-Asian Connections II: Singapore
CALL FOR WORKSHOP PAPERS
DEADLINE – MAY 31, 2010**

**Workshop Title:
Inter-Asian temple and trust networks within and out of Southeast Asia**

Workshop Director:
Kenneth Dean
East Asian Studies, McGill University
kenneth.dean@mcgill.ca

Although considerable empirical research has been done on Southeast Asian trading networks, so far less attention has focused on the role of Chinese and Indian temples and Islamic institutions in fostering, facilitating, and shaping the flow of people, capital, and cultural resources within these trust networks. With some notable exceptions, so far there has been little examination of the historical role of these temples and community networks in the spread of the Chinese, Indian, and Islamic communities into Southeast Asia. Nor has their current role in reviving connections between Overseas Chinese, Indian, and Islamic communities, and their ancestral temples, communities, and holy sites in China, India, and the Middle East been explored.

The study of these intricate, overlapping networks is one way to prevent local history from falling into the trap of endless recuperation by national history. In that model, local history can be nothing more than an endless series of minor variations on a theme, with the underlying issue being the process of cultural unification of the locale with the state. A focus on trans-national, and even global networks, works against the prevalent model of hierarchical encompassment and state control of local society by introducing multiple planes of reference, alternative and transversal sources of cultural invention and investment, and the possibility of local cultural self-definition drawing creatively from multiple sources.

Study of the historical development and recent renewal of these networks –whether through ritual or other socio-cultural processes--should reveal essential aspects of the process of globalization and its impact on specific locales. This workshop will raise important questions about the ability of local cultures to negotiate the forces of capitalism, ethnic identity and cultural nationalism sweeping through Asia today. For instance, ritual practices among Chinese networks show extraordinary versatility and flexibility in creatively engaging with these forces without losing relevance to their participants. This in turn raises broader questions about the impact of modernity on contemporary Asia and the value of theories of alternative modernity for the study of these developments.

This workshop will examine and compare a number of specific temple networks or parallel trust networks that operate within and out of Southeast Asia. Papers will trace the spread of specific cults of regional deities and particular ritual practices (local Daoist traditions, collective spirit medium training and group trance dance) out of China, across Southeast Asia into Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, and into a wider inter-Asian region, where they often evolved new ritual forms. We will also explore the return flow of ritual knowledge and economic support within these networks during the massive revival of popular religion in Southeast China over the past 30 years. Papers will be presented on Islamic trust networks and networks of Indian temples and their links to trade and other cultural networks. The workshop can also showcase new technologies for the mapping and analysis of religious networks (GIS and spatial network analysis). Case studies of specific sites (Malacca, Penang, Singapore, Semarang, Kuching, etc.) will examine the complex interactions between different temple communities, and their interactions with other ethnic and religious communities.

For additional details and application guidelines, please visit the Conference website - <http://www.ssrc.org/pages/conference-on-inter-asian-connections-ii-singapore-december-8-10-2010/>.