

Informal Northern Thai Group Bulletin

10 July, 2016

- 1. MINUTES OF THE 405TH INTG MEETING: Tuesday, 14 June, 2016. “Women Studies to Die or to Grow: Women and Gender Studies at Chiang Mai University”. A Talk by Ariya Svetamra.**
- 2. NEXT MEETING (406TH): Tuesday, 12 July, 2016, 7:30pm. “Statue-mania in the North! Sculpting and Casting Historical Memory in Northern Thailand”. A Talk by Taylor Easum.**
- 3. AUGUST MEETING (407TH): Tuesday, 30 August, 2016, 7:30pm. “Thailand’s Magical Stamps and the Mainstreaming of 21st Century Supernaturalism”. A Talk by Peter Anthony Jackson.**
- 4. List of Future meetings**
- 5. INTG CONTACTS: CONVENOR - SECRETARY - WEBSITE**

1. MINUTES OF THE 405TH INTG MEETING: Tuesday, 14 June, 2016, 7:30 pm
“Women Studies to Die or to Grow:
Women and Gender Studies at Chiang Mai University”
A Talk by Ariya Svetamra

1.1. PRESENT : Bonnie Brereton, John Cadet, Pauline Erera, Louis Gabaude, Christine Gent, Verity Groitein, Michel Lorrillard, Monica Meyer, Walter Meyer, Patrick Morel, Suriya Smutkupt, Gary Suwannarat, Sangkhom Suwannarat, Susan B. Walker, Richard Weatherly, Alvin Y. Yoshinaga. 16 signed out of 18 attendants.

1.2. THE TALK : “Women Studies to Die or to Grow: Women and Gender Studies at Chiang Mai University”

In Thailand, Women’s Studies programs at Chiang Mai University and other universities have been in a crisis situation from lack of official support. They are targeted as a ‘problematic unit’ for being a financial burden and not as lucrative as other ‘trendy subjects that cater to demands from the business/industrial sector’. Therefore, the question of sustainability of Thai Women’s Studies is raised up widely for discussion. This paper questions the problems that have brought about this crisis, from the shifting of global issues that has resulted in the lack of funding support to the weakening of theoretical development of Women’s Studies. It will also encourage brainstorming in order to seek ways in which resolutions and alternatives for Thai Women’s Studies’ sustainability may evolve. For example, Women’s Studies should find more working alliances, have dialogues across disciplines and find more sharp and contemporary issues.

The Women's Studies Center (WSC), Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University was established in 1986. WSC was foremost a women's studies program with the main task of rural leadership and paralegal training. Since 2000, WSC has become an arena for dissemination of feminist theories and methods from western perspectives through the Women's Studies Master's Program. A new body of knowledge in the discipline of Thai and regional women's studies has been constructed in various forms and topics, i.e. thesis, research, collecting of books/texts and publications. One method used to disseminate such new knowledge, has been the yearly publication of STANCE: Thai Feminist Review, the first women's studies academic journal in Thailand. WSC also coordinates and organizes workshops, trainings, conferences, and lectures for local, national, and international groups. WSC has already organized paralegal training for women from 17 Northern provinces: to date there are now 250 trainees. WSC coordinates with women's groups and movements at national, regional and international levels when campaigning and advocating on women's issues. For instance, some outcomes of the WSC joining the women's movement included the recognition of gender equality in the 2007 Thai Constitution and issuance of various legislations on protection of women's human rights.

On February 28, 2009, the Women's Studies Center was ratified under Chiang Mai University announcement on departmentalization as the Department of Women's Studies. The department purpose is to be an academic and research center in the field of women's studies. It provides BA. courses, and both an M.A. and Ph.D. program in Women's and Gender Studies. It is the resource for publishing, accumulating, researching and disseminating all data related to women's problems as an academic service for society. It is an important strategy that an institute such as the university should support the issue of Women's Studies in order to develop knowledge system/body of knowledge and provide services to the public. However, to date the university/institute still does not give precedence to Women's Studies.

What is the importance and how is the contribution of "Women's Studies" theories/concepts made in Thai society and the region?

On the occasion of the 27th Anniversary of the Thai Women's Studies Center at Chiang Mai University, the seminar on "Women's Studies Is to Die or to Grow?" was held on 26 July 2013 at the Women's Studies Building, Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University. Its main objectives were to brainstorm ideas and experiences concerning the problems of and crisis in Thai Women's Studies; to search for guidelines and suggestions on strategies and methodologies for the sustainability of Thai Women's Studies; to encourage capacity building among women at various levels; and to increase organizational capacity and sustainability of the Thai Women's Studies' movement. There were 90 participants in this workshop, including academics, educational personnel, students, women activists, and the paralegals for women from 17 northern provinces of Thailand, NGO members and concerned individuals.

Associate Professor Suwanna Sata-anan from Chulalongkorn University addressed in the seminar three issues essential to the question of whether women's studies is to die or to grow. Firstly, are Women's Studies going to die? Secondly, are Women's Studies going to grow? Thirdly, are Women's Studies going to die and grow? This issue leads to the next issue that it will die from something in order to grow into another thing. There are three things that will not die as long as there are human beings in the world. The first is religion and spirit, because humans ask for meaning beyond their own short lives. The second is sex, gender and sexuality, because sex is the starting point of birth and reproduction is a connecting point of one life to another life or one generation to another generation. Women's Studies give us a way of looking at sexual relations as power relations and all schools of Women's Studies promote the same issue: that society has to go for sexual and gender equality. The third is war and violence, because human beings always have conflict as long as they live together. Therefore, Women's Studies as a methodology of sexuality and gender studies are not to die; owing to issues of sex and gender and sexuality. Women's Studies is not to die.

Shifting of the Global Issue

The interesting question today is that, although Women's Studies is not to die, why is Women's Studies seen as being weakened. Firstly, the world is changing. Women's Studies were developed around the world in the 1960s, along with the process of civil rights movement in America. It is now running over 50

years. Currently, the world is shifting more and more from issues of social justice to economic issues. The main concerns are terrorism, security and natural disasters. It is less political than it was in the past. For example, China is facing social justice problems due to having a big economic gap.

Secondly, the funds supporting to Women's Studies around the world have decreased. Because the world issues change, funding also changes.

Thirdly, theoretical development of Women's Studies is weakening. The world is no longer debating on the big issues at an ideological level after the Berlin wall collapsed, because capitalism wins in most areas. In this situation, theoretical debate that does not explain mainstream issues is declining. It is not only Women's Studies, but also other philosophical studies that have had no prominent work during the past 5-10 years.

Many scholars notice that Women's Studies is weakening. In Women's Studies, we talk about Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism and other Feminisms that explain experiences of humans in the past. However, these are no ardent authorities to talk about people's life in the present time.

Sign of Life

Despite this, among the changes that seem to obstruct the Women's Studies, there is a sign of life for Women's Studies. For example, looking at the index of successful work of women, we have had Thai and other female Prime Ministers around the world. However, there is a complexity in this victory, because sexual inequality still remains in the politics. Therefore, we can see that Women's Studies has only partly changed some sub-cultures.

Within the change and signs of life, Women's Studies should find more alliances to work together. It is difficult to work alone like we had done between the 1960s and 1990s. A good case is the Ewha Woman's University in South Korea that integrates the leadership issue with the women's movement. Women's Studies might be integrated with local development or Women's Studies might be linked to health issues or human security and etc.... Many countries are becoming an aging society. The issue of gender and aging should be addressed with an exploration of how sexuality changes. Combinations between Women's Studies and other important issues now may help Women's Studies become alive and live a beautiful life. Women's Studies may find more relevance in the sharpening of contemporary issues. For example, sexuality issues in the beauty of body, leadership, aging of population, consumerism, etc.... Women's Studies must connect to these issues and make them sharper.

Associate Prof. Dr. Niramom Sudhamkij, chairperson of the Women and Youth Studies Program at Thammasat University, expressed an appreciation of the vast collection of materials and publications produced by the Chiang Mai University Women's Studies Center. The problem of Woman's Studies Program at Thammasat University is different from Women's Studies at Chiang Mai University. However, it has faced a lack of new staff. The Program has attempted to survive by integrating women's studies into other disciplines, such as leadership, issues relating to ASEAN, economics, law and social welfare, etc.... At the graduate level, gender and sexuality are also added into the curriculum. However, now it is not the mainstream discipline, so there are only a few students in this field. On the other hand, instructors are in a small number.

Associate Professor Virada Somswasdi from Chiang Mai University addressed the fact that Women's Studies are a body of knowledge that will change the world, because societies have problems due to social inequality as well as gender inequality. Therefore, there are two components of Women's Studies that include theories and practice that challenge existing power relations. Women and gendered groups being subordinated thus attempt to define the new meanings with diverse feminist theories. Because of this, explanations become scattered and are not unified due to their relationship to diverse women's experiences and different social groups, e.g. aging, education, economic and social status, ethnic, religion, etc. Women's Studies should have dialogues across disciplines but how much of this has Women's Studies programs done?

Assistant Prof. Dr. Pinkaew Laungaramsri from Chiang Mai University said that, first of all, the feminist movement has an ideological legacy and a powerful social practice. "Women" is not a minority issue or marginal issue. This is because issues of women's struggle have been moved into the central power of the state, such as law reform and discrimination issues. In terms of women's development in the past three to four

decades, Women's Studies as a movement are responsive and strong. However, as a discipline, it is not attractive. Actually, Women's Studies are an expression of the politics of the 60s and 70s. In order to be a contemporary discipline, it is important to talk about women as a new politics. First, Women's Studies should not be confined with heterosexuality. Second, Women's Studies should not be confined with the issue of gender. Third, we should improve the situation so that we can publicly say what is not allowed or cannot say, particularly relating to sexual issues that cannot be discussed in Thai society.

A woman paralegal mentioned in the seminar that, "the issue of Women's Studies Is to Die or to Grow? astonishes me. As I see, it is urgent that we altogether have to help Women's Studies Center to continue its existence in Chiang Mai University so as to work continually with us and the women of 17 provinces in the North. Actually, we work as women paralegals for our people, not only in Thailand, but also in the world, without any monthly salary, award and rank."

A woman activist said, "I think that Women's Studies is an important and essential issue for Thai society. Its way of thought helps human beings (of all sexes, not just women) concerning the problems that are happening in relation to unequal power relations. If we are concerned and understand it, social violations will not occur."

Conclusion

During this weakening of Women's Studies in the region, how can we make small piles of fire become bigger? The weak point of Women's Studies is that we did not continually connect women issues between organizations. The women's movement in Thailand emphasis on the issue of gender justice has to promote an expanding alliance, communicating with both old and new generations in society. Likewise, one of the duties of Women's Studies is constructing the tools for communication with public. To be an interesting discipline, Women's Studies has to become linked to the contemporary situations or contemporary issues interesting to the young generation. It is necessary to think about new questions and new debates. Women's Studies in universities should not focus only on academic work. They should be linked to the women's and gender equality movement for social change and the encouragement of sexual equity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amara Pongsapich. 2006. "Women's movements in the globalizing world : the case of Thailand" in Jane S. Jaquette and Gale Summerfield (eds) *Women and gender equity in development theory and practice: institutions, resources and mobilization*. London: Duke University Press, p. 219-239.
- Darunee Tantiwiranond and Shashi Ranjan Pandey. 2008. *Does Advocacy Matter? Women's Advocacy Campaign in Thailand*. Bangkok: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
- Suwanna Satha-anand 2004. *Women's studies in Thailand : power, knowledge and justice*. Seoul: Ewha Womans University Press.
- Virada Somswasdi. 2003. "The Women's Movement and Legal Reform in Thailand." Cornell Law School Berger International Speaker Papers. Paper 1. (Online: http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/biss_papers/1)
- Virada Somswasdi. 2006. *With hindsight, heading forward : integrative Thai feminist standpoint*. Chiang Mai: Women's Studies Center, Chiang Mai University.

COMPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

In the following and attached document, you will find a list of complementary resources on the topic of this talk which includes more than 2000 references :

Feminism, Gender, Woman... - A List of Articles, Books, Chapters in western languages available at the École Française d'Extrême-Orient Library in Chiang Mai—131 Charoen Prathet Road Opposite The Alliance Française—or at Louis Gabaude's home in Sansai.

2. NEXT MEETING (406TH) - Tuesday, 12 July, 2016, 7:30pm

“STATUE-MANIA IN THE NORTH!

SCULPTING AND CASTING HISTORICAL MEMORY IN NORTHERN THAILAND”

A Talk by Taylor Easum

The Talk: Memory has been a boom industry recently. Both in terms of academic work in the field, and in terms of more popular acts of memorialization, monument-building, commemoration, heritage preservation, and nostalgia, much ink has been spilled over the contested memories of the past. In Thailand, the late 20th century saw a burst of memorialization in the form of statuary monuments, a boom described by Grant Evans as “Statuemia.” This near obsession with building statuary monuments reached northern Thailand as well, and produced a number of monuments in Chiang Mai alone, including statues of Kawila, Khruba Sriwichai, and the famous Three Kings in the city center. By examining both the histories told by these monuments, and the histories behind their creation, I hope to offer a glimpse into the erasure of memories and histories of resistance and local identity in the (internally-)colonial frontier of Northern Thailand.

The Speaker: Taylor Easum is Assistant Professor of History and International Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where he teaches classes on global history, colonialism and empire, and Southeast Asian history. This summer, he is leading a study abroad program in Chiang Mai focusing on global empire throughout Southeast Asia. His research focuses on the urban history of northern Thailand and neighboring regions, as well as comparative colonialism and regional identity in Southeast Asia.

3. NEXT MEETING (407TH) - Tuesday, 30 August, 2016, 7:30pm

“THAILAND’S MAGICAL STAMPS

AND THE MAINSTREAMING OF 21ST CENTURY SUPERNATURALISM”

A Talk by Peter Anthony Jackson

The Talk: Since the 1980s, many new supernatural movements have become highly visible additions to Thailand’s spiritual landscape and religious marketplaces. Seeking supernatural intervention to achieve success, wealth and prosperity in Thailand’s expanding economy, these movements are often only tangentially related to orthodox Theravada Buddhist teachings and practice. They emerged in the context of Thailand’s economic boom in the 1980s and 1990s, and have continued to grow in popularity through the economic setbacks of the 1997 Asian economic crisis and the political divisions that have beset Thai society over the past decade. In this presentation I consider the further development of highly commodified wealth-oriented forms of supernatural practice in early 21st century Thailand. The large number of colourful special issues of Thai postage stamps devoted to supernatural cults of prosperity released since 2004 reflects the relocation of these movements from the margins to the centre of national religious practice. These postage stamp special issues also reflect a major shift in the regime of power over the public imaging of participation in new forms of supernatural ritual. No longer hidden or private, participation in supernatural ritual is becoming an increasingly visible and sociologically significant dimension of religious practice in early 21st century Thailand.

Peter Jackson will give a complementary talk at Chiang Mai University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Centre for ASEAN Studies (CAS) on "(Post)Modernity Makes Magic in 21st Century Southeast Asia". The exact date, time, and room will be announced in the next INTG Bulletin.

The Speaker: Dr. Peter Anthony Jackson is Emeritus Professor at the College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, Canberra. He has been a pioneer before becoming an expert in the study of homosexuality and queer studies in Thailand and Southeast Asia. Among his main books: *Dear Uncle Go: Male homosexuality in Thailand*; *Genders and sexualities in modern Thailand* (with Nerida M. Cook); *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent Boys : Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand* (With Gerard Sullivan); *Male homosexuality in Thailand*; *Queer Bangkok* (Includes a comprehensive bibliography).

4. List of FUTURE INTG MEETINGS

Tuesday, 12 July, 2016, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai : “Statue-mania in the North! Sculpting and Casting Historical Memory in Northern Thailand”. A Talk by **Taylor Easum**.

Tuesday, 30 August, 2016, 7:30 pm at the Alliance Française, Chiang Mai : “**Thailand’s Magical Stamps and the Mainstreaming of 21st Century Supernaturalism**”. A Talk by **Peter Anthony Jackson**.

6. INTG CONTACTS : Convenor - Secretary - Website

1) **Convenor : Rebecca Weldon** : e-mail : <rebecca.weldon@gmail.com>. Mobile : **087 193 67 67**.

2) **Secretary : Louis Gabaude** : e-mail : <gabaudel@yahoo.com>. Mobile : **087 188 50 99**.

3) **INTG Website : Clarence Shettlesworth**: <http://www.intgcm.thehostserver.com>

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
31 years of Talks!

**SCULPTING
AND CASTING
HISTORICAL
MEMORY IN
NORTHERN THAILAND**

A Talk by **Taylor EASUM**

Tuesday, 12 July 2016, 7:30 pm

At **The Alliance Française** - Chiang Mai
138, Charoen Prathet Road, (Opposite EFEO)

Informal Northern Thai Group (INTG)
31 years of Talks!

Thailand's
Magical Stamps
and
21st Century
Supernaturalism

A Talk by **Peter Jackson**

Tuesday, 30 August 2016, 7:30 pm

At **The Alliance Française** - Chiang Mai
138, Charoen Prathet Road - Opposite EFEO