

Seminar

Forgery and Formalism in Early Capitalist Bangkok

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Date: **7 September 2015 (Monday)**

Time: **4 pm – 5:30 pm**

Venue: **G5-317, AC1, City University of Hong Kong**

Abstract

This paper examines the role of photography in shaping the nature and function of the bureaucracy in Siam (Thailand after 1939) during the early twentieth century. It does so through a study of the counterfeit crisis that plagued the Siamese government after the introduction of paper money in 1902. Through an analysis of documents from the Ministry of Finance, historical newspaper reports, and vernacular fiction, the paper shows how the Thai state adopted a strategy to protect its nascent capitalist economy that relied heavily on new technologies of representation, particularly photography, to make the design of money increasingly complex and thus theoretically more difficult to forge. In the process, economic value became tied to appearances, determining the authenticity of which became a key task of successive governments. The result has been the emergence of a technologically enabled formalism in administration, a feature common in different degrees to most modern bureaucratic and capitalist societies.

Short Bio

Samson Lim is an Assistant Professor in History at the Singapore University of Technology and Design. He received his Ph.D. in History at Cornell University. His research examines the connections between technology, capitalism, and culture. His first book, *Siam's New Detectives: Visualizing Crime and Conspiracy in Modern Thailand* (University of Hawaii Press, forthcoming), is a history of the visual culture of policing in Thailand during the early 20th century. He is currently working on a new project, which will be a cultural history of capitalism and the money economy in early twentieth century Bangkok. He is also the principle lead of the Opportunity Lab at SUTD, a centre that seeks to understand and enhance the role that design and designers play in social change.

All are welcome.

Language: English

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