

THINKING RIGHTS, WRITING JUSTICE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA Spring 2022 Lecture Series presents ...

"'When I Was Tortured...' A narrative of state injustice in Thailand"

Dr. Nick Cheesman, Australian National University

Tuesday, 12 April: 6 pm PST, 9 pm EST

Wednesday, 13 April: 8 am ICT, 10 am JST, 12 pm AEDT

Register for lecture: <https://bit.ly/3quygHp>

Abstract: Published in 2021, *When I Was Tortured... An Ensuing Search for Justice* (เมื่อผมถูกทรมาน... จึงมาตามหาความยุติธรรม, Bangkok: CrCF) recounts a decade-long struggle to hold policemen in Prachinburi accountable for the 2009 torture of an unassuming young man, Ritthirong “Chopper” Chuanjit, whom they had accused of theft. It illustrates how law and administration in Thailand counter appeals for justice when state officers are accused of wrongdoing while undertaking routine work. How does it do this? And how does it hold out the possibility that from its narrative of state injustice an alternative narrative of justice might emerge? In this lecture I use these questions to prompt a reading of *When I Was Tortured* that, following Paul Ricoeur, tacks back and forth between reading as the restoration of meaning and as an exercise of suspicion, or rather, demystification. Adopting the former stance, I absorb and communicate what the book’s protagonists tell about the practice of torture in Thailand, and the obstacles that have stood in the way of people like them wanting to hold torturers accountable there. Adopting the latter, I read for what remains unsaid or unsayable about a kind of state violence that is inherently difficult to communicate and dangerous to describe. The goal of this dual reading is not to criticize the book’s authors, or query Chopper’s claims, which are by now beyond doubt. On the contrary, it is to learn, through this reading, how to write other narratives of torture in Thailand, and Myanmar. And it is to be able to ask better questions about state injustice and torture: questions not about what or why but how; questions that motivate me to explore injustice—which in practice always precedes justice—not as a problem of ontology or causality, but ultimately as one of method.

Bio: Nick Cheesman is Associate Professor in the Department of Political & Social Change, Australian National University whose ongoing research interest is on torture and political order in Thailand and Myanmar. His “Torture in Thailand at the limits of law” is forthcoming in *Law and Social Inquiry*.

The THINKING RIGHTS, WRITING JUSTICE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA online lecture series is a project of the Justice in Southeast Asia Lab (JSEALab). The JSEALab is part of a five-year initiative on Social Justice housed in the Center for Southeast Asian Studies and the Human Rights Program at UW-Madison. Idea exchange and public-facing events aim to foster collaboration in and beyond the university. Follow the JSEALab on Twitter/Facebook or check the website [<https://seasia.wisc.edu/sjsea-project/jsealab>] for the full schedule and links to register.



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