

REGIONAL ECONOMIC STUDIES PROGRAMME WEBINAR

Webinar Series 2020-2021: Financial Transformation, Credit Markets and Household Debt in Southeast Asia

The Production of Financial Landscapes in Cambodia

Date : Monday, 3 May 2021

Time : 4.00 pm – 5.15 pm (Singapore time)

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About the Webinar

In the 1990s, scholars of development proposed the concept of financial landscapes to make sense of how rural finance is made up of both formal and informal markets. They showed that formal financial markets are actually sustained by informal practices like family borrowing and local moneylending. To understand the uneven dynamics of rural finance, it is thus necessary to examine the power-laden connections between a variety of institutions of lending, borrowing, and saving. However, this approach to financial landscapes has inadequately conceptualized how rural finance is produced by the material practices of labouring on and off the land. Indeed, human geographers have long shown that the production of physical landscapes is a constitutive element in socio-economic relations. In this presentation, I apply insights from human geography to ethnographic data about Cambodia's rural financial landscape. I illustrate that different forms of household farm labour both sustain, and are sustained by, various financial markets, from informal moneylending for cattle trading to formal microfinance for agricultural intensification. This approach advances our understanding of financial landscapes in two ways: 1) it focuses analysis on the relationship between agricultural transformation and financial markets; and 2) it explains how rural finance is connected to geographically dispersed labour markets as farming households increasingly rely upon out-migration for income. Policy should therefore regulate financial markets with an eye towards the diversity, and precarity, of livelihood practices pursued by rural households today.

About the Speaker



W. Nathan Green has been assistant professor of geography at the National University of Singapore since January 2020. Prior to arriving in Singapore, he received his MA in Southeast Asian Studies in 2014 and his PhD in geography in 2019 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research critically examines economic development, agrarian change, and rural livelihoods in Southeast Asia. He is currently leading a project that will investigate the creation of Cambodia's national financial market as part of a larger trend of financialization in Southeast Asia, and how these new markets are transforming agrarian landscapes. His work has been published in highly-ranked geography journals like *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* and *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*. He is also the recipient of multiple awards from the Association of Asian Studies and American Association of Geographers in the US.