



FRONTIERS OF HUMANITY AND BEYOND

TOWARDS NEW CRITICAL
UNDERSTANDINGS OF BORDERS

P01 - DECENTERING ASIAN SLAVERY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPEAN COLONIAL EMPIRES: DEBATES, DEFINITIONS AND CHALLENGES (16TH TO 19TH CENTURY)

ORGANISERS

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ABSTRACT

Since the early 2000s, a number of scholars have been writing and publishing works analyzing the presence of South, Southeast, and East Asians enslaved by Europeans in the early modern Americas and Europe, as well as in the waters between the Indian and the Pacific oceans under the rule of a variety of different powers: Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, Mughal, Persian, Chinese, Japanese, Moluccan, and others. The panel wishes to invite contributions from scholars interested in the enslavement of Asians by Europeans in the early modern age. Some of the possibilities include the following: How were local forms of human bondage used by European historical actors? How did local and imported notions of labor, dependence, subalternity, and coercion interact in the encounters of Europeans with Asians? What social and legal categories were created and transformed in societies under and beyond the jurisdiction of colonial and ecclesiastical powers in order to respond to the demand for labor in Goa, Kochi, Ormuz, Batavia, Pegu, Malacca, Manila, Macau, Canton or Nagasaki? How can local scholarship contribute to the understanding of the enslavement of Asians by Europeans? Is the violence suffered by enslaved Black Africans in North and South American plantations comparable to the violence endured in households dominated by Europeans in Asia? Were Asians submitted to processes similar to the “social death”? Did European merchants participate in Asian slave trading networks? How did early modern scholars see Asian slavery in comparison to the enslavement of Native Americans or Black Africans? The panel aims at deepening our understanding of specific and general frameworks related to these questions and gathering scholars interested in future projects in this vein.

Romulo da Silva Ehalt is an historian interested in the intellectual and social history of early modern slavery and moral theology in the Portuguese Empire in Asia. He was a MEXT scholarship recipient (2006-2009), when he studied at the University of Tokyo and the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies; and a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science DC-1 Research Fellow between 2011 and 2013. In 2018, he received his Ph.D. in global studies from the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies with the dissertation “Jesuits and the Problem of Slavery in Early Modern Japan”. Currently, he is a JSPS International Research Fellow (2019-2020) at Sophia University, in Tokyo.

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