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GASTVORTRAG

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IKSA, NIG, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Wien, 4. Stock

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Post-1998 Changes in Rural Java: The Rapid Expansion of the Middle Class

This talk is based on a remarkable change to have taken place in rural Java since the mid-2000s. For the first time, the rural middle-class population has grown faster than the urban population, albeit in relative terms. Most studies link the middle-class phenomenon with sound economic growth, or the large-scale development programs. However, the assumption that sound macroeconomic conditions are the sole factor affecting the size of the middle-class population can be misleading. If this was the case, rapid expansion should have occurred in Indonesia from the New Order period, when the economy grew at an unprecedented rate. I argue that the small size of the rural middle class during the New Order regime must have something to do with Suharto's patrimonialism which created a pervasive state patronage in rural areas.

It therefore was not astonishing that the size of the rural middle class was perpetually tiny, confined to a small cohort of dominant rural groups centred on the village apparatus. Such a condition inevitably undermined the people's creativity. The fall of Suharto encouraged the new government to adopt a model of "good governance" which gradually dismantled most elements of state patronage in rural areas. In tandem with the structural-economic changes characterized by a shift from the formal to the informal sector, this new setting paved the way for the aspiring lower class, which had historically been marginalized by the system, to climb up the socioeconomic ladder.



Diese Veranstaltung findet in Kooperation mit der Austrian-Indonesian Society statt.

Agung Wicaksono is a lecturer at the Department of Anthropology, Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia. He obtained a doctoral degree at Kyoto University in 2019. His study focused on the rapid expansion of the rural Indonesian middle-class particularly after the Asian financial crisis in 1998. In general, Wicaksono's interests revolve around agrarian changes, political economy, and social transformations taking place at the rural areas either in Java or other regions. He currently is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Zurich. In this program, he attempts to understand the process of strengthening patriarchy through commodity crops in Southeast Asian communities. His case study is located in Java.