

Shifting Plantations in the Borderlands

A Challenge of Chinese Agribusiness in Southeast Asia

Thursday, 22 June 13:30-15:00

1st Floor, Research Commons, East Building, CSEAS

This presentation examines the Chinese agribusiness under the impact of China's economic regionalism as borderlands become sites for intensified resource extraction. It argues that Chinese agribusiness and the penetration of overland Chinese entrepreneurs has turned farmland along the Mekong River on Thai-Laos borders into banana production factories and export processing zones. Chinese banana industry and its practice of 'shifting plantations' have turned the borderland into spaces of agricultural frontiers that allow for specific and intensive regimes of resource extraction.

Over the past decade, increasing demands for bananas coupled with challenges facing domestic production have led many Chinese banana investors to seek out more places to promote banana industry. Southeast Asia, especially Laos, has been identified as an ideal place for land acquisitions by Chinese banana producing investors. In all banana plantations, vast quantities of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides are required to maintain monoculture production. This process poses a serious health risk to workers and the surrounding environment. After 6 to 10 years of producing fruit on cleared farmland the company usually abandon it for another plot once factors such as soil depletion and pest infestation begin to lower yields. Since 2016, the government of Laos has issued a ban on new banana plantations. The shifting plantation practices, however, have spread to Thailand, Myanmar and Cambodia, wreaking health and environmental havoc along its path. The case of Chinese banana plantations in Laos is a striking example of some of the challenges posed by Beijing's economic influence in Southeast Asia.

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**No
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