

Affective Work

Religion, Economy and Gender among the Tai Lue of Contemporary Sipsong Panna (P.R. China)

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Fri

16:00-17:30

Tonantei (Room 201),
Inamori Center, CSEAS, Kyoto University

No
Reservation
required



Abstract

A small, formerly semi-autonomous principality located in the interstices between the Chinese, Siamese and Burmese empires, Sipsong Panna (Ch.: Xishuangbanna), in the south of Yunnan province, became throughout the twentieth century gradually integrated into the administrative and economic structures of the People's Republic of China. Since the end of the Maoist period and the embrace by this country of a "socialism with Chinese characteristics", the previously peripheral Sipsong Panna has become not only an important tourist destination in Yunnan, but also a key hub of the southern corridor in the China-promoted Belt and Road Initiative. These developments have set into motion rapid and profound cultural transformations among the different ethnic groups in the region.

Building on extensive fieldwork in Sipsong Panna, in this presentation Roger Casas will explore these ongoing changes, putting the focus on one such group, the Tai Lue, the population historically dominant in the area, and especially on the connections between shifting religious, economic and gender regimes among the group. Appropriating the state notion of "ideological work" (Ch.: *sixiang gongzuo*), Dr. Casas depicts cultural change in contemporary Sipsong Panna as driven by an all-encompassing *affective work* targeting locals' desires and affects, implemented by a variety of agencies from the local to the global level, and whose goal is the transformation of local subjectivities into compliant participants in the Chinese developmental project. It will be argued that, within this paradigm and in this particular context, the cultivation of desire(s) is inextricably linked to the simultaneous mobilization of negative affects associated with resilient stereotypes about the civilizational defectiveness or inferiority of minority groups (Ch.: *shaoshu minzu*) in relation to the Han majority.

SPEAKER

CSEAS Visiting Research Scholar

Roger CASAS

DISCUSSANT

Bunkyo University

HASEGAWA Kiyoshi

MC

CSEAS

KOBAYASHI Satoru

Roger Casas

has lived and conducted research among the Tai Lue of Sipsong Panna since 2004. He obtained his PhD from the Australian National University in 2015, with a thesis on the connections between Buddhist monasticism and masculinity among the Lue. Since then, he has continue working on the Tai Lue, expanding his research to domains such as the economic anthropology and the anthropology of gender. His latest publications are the book chapters "Death of the Last King: Contemporary Ethnic Identity and Belonging among the Tai Lü of Sipsong Panna", in *Regional Identities in Southeast Asia: Contemporary Challenges, Historical Fractures*, and "Intangible Enclosures and Virtual Scripts: The Cultural Politics of the Tham Script in Sipsong Panna", in *Manuscript Cultures and Epigraphy of the Tai World*, both volumes published by Silkworm Books (Chiang Mai, Thailand). A revised version of his PhD thesis will be published by the University of Hawai'i Press in 2025.

