

# FEELING LIKE A FOREST

## Ethnopoetics of an Upland Landscape

No  
Reservation  
required

27 (Thu)

2025  
March 13:30-15:00

Mid-sized Meeting Room (No.332)

3rd Floor, Inamori Center, CSEAS, Kyoto University



Format: Hybrid

For Zoom participants, please join from the following link  
<https://kyoto-u-edu.zoom.us/j/97176252672?pwd=9Dqo5na8e802uFsvH3BzV8UwTB1E6C.1>

Does a tree falling in the forest make a sound if no one is there to witness it? How much does Language limit our ability to imagine a reality other than our own? In northern Laos, many people living on the edge of forested spaces speak languages that have elaborate systems of poetic speech that help construct their experience of landscapes. The approximately 2,600 people that speak the Bit language use expressive words, rhyming patterns and parallel language to animate the natural world and all its inhabitants – human, animal, plant, spirit and even landforms. Ecological poetics map time, space and emotion in ways not possible with “normal” prosaic language. In Bit, fallen trees after a big storm in the forest “sound” like *soploop-saplaap*. I will introduce Bit ethnopoetics that speak beyond the human into the forest, suggesting an intimate grammar of animacy based in the affective power of sound rather than the effective logic of meaning.



Discussant

**Nishaant Choksi**

Associate Professor,  
Indian Institute of Technology Gandhinagar



**Nathan Badenoch**

Associate Professor, Villanova University  
CSEAS Visiting Research Scholar/  
Affiliated Associate Professor

Nathan Badenoch has worked as an environmental policy analyst, bilateral development researcher, cultural ethnographer and field linguist. His main interest currently is in the cultural and linguistic dynamics of upland Southeast Asia and how these are intertwined with life in transforming landscapes. He is currently working on a book entitled *Poetic Ecologies: The Aesthetics of Animacy in Northern Laos* as well as a dictionary of the Bit language. He is also working on a volume of transcribed, translated and annotated orature in Bit, Sida, Ksingmul, Khmu and Phong languages. He is an Associate Professor in Villanova University's Department of Global Interdisciplinary Studies, where he directs the Asian Studies Program.