

IHSS 6005: Selected Topics in Religion and Society in Asia:

Ethnicity, Religion and Politics in the Anthropology of the Southeast Asian Borderlands.

Graduate seminar, HKIHSS, Semester 2, 2019-2020

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This seminar will focus on the anthropological study of ethnic minorities in the highlands of Southeast Asia, often known as “Zomia”, with specific attention to the Sino-Lao-Viet borderlands. We will consider key issues in the conceptualization of this region and its ethnic dynamics as a field of research; the generation and application of core anthropological concepts and theories in research on this region; and parallels and comparisons with the anthropology of China. We will read and discuss the works of key classical and contemporary authors such as Leach, Tambiah, Condominas, Michaud and Scott. We will consider materials on the culture, society and religion of the Yao/Mien ethnic group as an ethnographic reference for the conceptual, historical and comparative discussions.

Time slot: Wednesdays, 12-2 pm.

Sessions:

1. 22 Jan 2020: The Sino-Lao-Viet borderlands as a field of anthropological study
2. 12 Feb 2020: History and ethnogenesis
3. 26 Feb 2020: Politics and the ritualization of state-local relations
4. 11 Mar 2020: Gift, exchange, big men and political life
5. 1 Apr 2020: Religion
6. 22 Apr 2020: The case of the Yao

Assessment:

A bibliography of required and recommended readings will be provided for each week.

Attendance and participation: 20%. Students must give a brief presentation of one of the readings in the seminar.

5000-word essay on a topic agreed with the instructor, which may be related to your dissertation research: 80%.