

IHSS 6008 Advanced Ethnography and Field Research Methods

Syllabus, Semester 2, 2020-2021 (Jan.-June 2021)

Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Hong Kong

Instructors:

David A. Palmer (Professor, HKIHSS)

Joseba Estevez (PhD student, University of Münster and SRA, HKIHSS)

Schedule: TBA

Prerequisite: interested students should contact the instructor at palmer19@hku.hk for permission before enrolling.

The Ethnography of Ritual Manuscripts, Performance and Cosmology

This seminar will consist of six intensive day-long workshops to consider the integration of textual and anthropological field research methods through the case of ongoing research on the ritual traditions of the Lanten Yao ethnic minority of Laos, using primary materials collected in the field, notably (1) digitised ritual manuscripts, (2) video-recorded rituals, and (3) ethnographic data from participant observation. We will consider the methodological issues specific to the collection and usage of each of these types of data, and interpretive issues arising from the juxtaposition and integration of the three types of materials.

Each workshop will include the following components:

1. Ethnographic reading on an aspect of the cosmology and ritual of the Lanten Yao
2. Study and analysis of selected manuscripts digitised in the field
3. Video analysis of the rituals in which the selected manuscripts are used or performed
4. Discussion of relevant anthropological writings.

For the study of manuscripts, for each text we will (a) discuss the methods and issues of manuscript selection and transcription, (b) analyse the textual structure and content, (c) discuss the social implications that can be inferred from the text.

Seminar plan:

1. Charting the Lanten socio-cosmos: The cosmological landscape and its celestial inhabitants
2. The Lanten concept of the person
3. Modes of exchange in Lanten rituals
4. The Lanten ritual as a Chinese Imperial Audience
5. Communal rituals (1): Planting the Rice Festival – Rituals of socio-cosmic renewal and the founding of Lanten villages in the highlands of Laos.
6. communal rituals (2): The Lanten New Year – Rituals at the household and village-level on the commemoration of the founding of the households and the village.

List of manuscripts:

Opening the Mountains 開山科

Ordination through the Lights 受戒川光科

Ordination by the Celestial Masters 天師戒度科

Madam Huang 黃氏女

Pacifying the Dragon-Guardians/Chanting the Spirits 安龍科/喃靈科

Attack on Hell 破獄科

Selected Bibliography:

ESTEVEZ, Joseba. *Conquering Demons, Taming the Forest: Priests and Masters of the Lanten Yao*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Münster.

LEMOINE, Jacques and GIBSON, Donald, 1982: Yao ceremonial paintings. Bangkok: White Lotus Company

PLATENKAMP, Josephus: 'Becoming a Lao Person: Rituals of Birth and Socialisation in Luang Prabang, Laos', in: P. Berger et al. (eds.), *The Anthropology of Values. Essays in Honour of Georg Pfeffer*. Delhi: Pearson.

BLOCH, Maurice and PARRY, Jonathan, 2010. *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. Cambridge University Press

SCHIPPER, Kristopher, 1986: 'Progressive and Regressive Time Cycles in Taoist Ritual', in Fraser, Lawrence, Haber (eds) *Time, Science, and Society in China and the West*. University of Massachusetts Press.

SANGREN, Paul Steven, 1987. *History and Magical Power in a Chinese Community*. Stanford University Press.

JOHNSON David, 2020. *Spectacle and Sacrifice; The Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China*. Brill.