

Friday Seminar



Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
香港中文大學人類學系

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Crossing the Border, Pursuing Citizenship: Young Yunnanese Migrants from Northern Burma in the Thai-Burmese Borderland

Date:

19 March 2021

Time:

1:00 - 2:30 pm

Speaker:

Sam Lai Siu Hei

Department of Anthropology, CUHK

Zoom Meeting Link:

<https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/99518759320>

Meeting ID:

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Passcode:

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Yunnanese has long been a prominent migrant group in the highland Southeast Asian borderland in both history and contemporary times. In this seminar, I will talk about the stories of some young Burmese born Yunnanese migrants—their trajectories of crossing the border between Northern Burma and Northern Thailand—and their aspirations to obtain a Thai citizenship. I will discuss how these young Yunnanese migrants transgressed the state apparatuses they encountered when crossing the border. Owing to the absence of valid Thai identity documents, their mobilities and other pursuits in life in Thailand were subject to various obstacles and inconveniences. In this respect, pursuing a Thai identity paper or even a citizenship is somewhat they were urged and aspired to. I argue their attempts on obtaining identity paper as the process of hope. While the possibility of citizenship motivated these young Yunnanese from Burma to effort on making the desirable outcomes happened, frustrations and disappointments emanated from the prolonged awaiting were indispensable in the process of obtaining identity paper. Situating in the context of the Thai-Burmese borderland, this seminar explores the aspirations and effortful practices of the Yunnanese youth in connection with migrations and their navigations in the realm of citizenship.

About the speaker:

Siu-hei Lai is a PhD candidate at Department of Anthropology in the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Based on a thirteen-month fieldwork in an uphill Yunnanese village in Chiang Rai, Thailand, his dissertation examines the aspirations of Yunnanese teenagers in the Thai-Burmese borderland. It picks up on the issues of education, employment, ethnic relations, political citizenship, and border crossing, against the backdrop of sociopolitical and economic transformations in the Mekong region conditioned by the flock of Chinese capitals. His research interests include anthropology of youth, aspirations, migration, ethnicity and citizenship, focusing regionally on Southeast Asia and the Thai-Burmese borderland.



ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME!