

### 1. Title:

Historical Anthropology in the Highlands: Contexts, Methods, Actors, and Ethics

### 2. Conveners:

Pierre PETIT (Université libre de Bruxelles) and Jean MICHAUD (Université Laval)

### 3. Brief description:

After decades of inconspicuousness, ethnohistory and historical anthropology have (re)surfaced as a field of research in Highland Southeast Asia, as attested notably by the special issues published in the *Journal of Global History* (Michaud 2010) and *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* (Tappe 2015). This renewed interest antedates Scott's *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) but was certainly also fuelled by it.

Ethnohistory and historical anthropology are often used interchangeably, although the latter usually refers to historical research in reportedly "marginal" contexts, whereas the former has often been outlined as "folk history", or "the view a society has of its past", to quote Carmack's seminal article (1972). A common thread of the emerging scholarship is to pay attention to both oral and written sources, and to keep on the ridgeline between memory studies – which often lack an interest for the objective aspects of the past – and more classical history – which often lacks an interest for the present stakes for the past. If the increasing concern for such research in mountainous Asia is salient, the stakes of its methodology and epistemology, and those of the diffusion and reception of its results have been to a large extent addressed in implicit rather than explicit ways. These are the specific issues this workshop intends to unravel. We welcome contributions that, although empirically grounded, go clearly beyond local interests to discuss the following questions:

*Contexts.* How has ethnohistory been developed and practiced during the colonial period in South-East Asia – considered at large, including the eastern fringes of India and the southern provinces of China? For which purposes, and in which environment? How was it related (or not) to the development of this subfield in other continents? How has it changed since the political turmoil of the 20<sup>th</sup> century? How about its connections with the global urge for "cultural conservation", phrased in UNESCO and/or nationalist terms?

*Methods.* What are the different ways to conduct such research? Apart from oral narratives and written documents, what are the other sources that can be used in the process, like archaeology, landscape, or rituals? How to cope with the locally acknowledged "key informants" and gatekeepers when dealing with sensitive topics in local history? How to handle the often-reported male authority on historical information? How to capture history-in-the-making, through performances rather than interviews?

*Actors and ethics.* Who speaks for whom, and in what languages? How about the ethics of anonymity, censorship and self-censorship? How about collaborative works, between international, national and local scholars from different and sometimes antagonistic political background, and across disciplines? And more globally, what are the specificities of historical anthropology, ethnohistory, and other ways to speak about the past?

4. Format:

Double session (2 x 90 min.)

5. Discussant :

None