

Title: Spirited Politics: Spirit Discourses and National Trauma in Thailand

Convener: Dr. Megan Sinnott

Participants:

Chair: Megan Sinnott

Presenters:

Dr. Megan Sinnott, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia USA

Dr. Kanya Wattanagun, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

Dr. Bo Kyeong Seo, Yonsei University, Seoul, South Korea

Discussant: Dr. Peter Jackson, Australian National University

Panel Abstract

Ghosts and spirits are ever-present in the Thai landscape, evident in the ubiquitous spirit shrines and offerings that dot the countryside and cities. Spirits are part of everyday life; they are propitiated, worshipped, loved, feared, and dreaded. Spirits are so central to the everyday experiences of many people that any account of religion and culture in Thailand is not complete without an accounting of how the spirit world informs both personal experience and ideological structures. This panel explores multiple ways in which spirit beliefs and practices in Thailand evolve and transform in response to changing social contexts. Spirits are evoked by the state to bolster hegemony, such the practice of state actors sponsoring particular shrines (to royal historical figures, mythical figures, Indic deities, and local spirits). Spirits are also evoked by the general public in response to social crises, regional identities, and traumatic events. This panel will explore a range of spirit beliefs in Thailand and examine their connections to local social and political events and discourses. Topics will include the state's efforts to monopolize local spirit festivals and rituals, the Thai public's reliance on spirit discourses to address national traumas and crises, and the production of new practices and beliefs in response to changing social conditions.

Single session

Megan Sinnott
Associate Professor
Director of Graduate Studies
Institute for Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Georgia State University
megansinnott@gsu.edu