

EUROSEAS panel proposal with the title: Upland Pioneers – Future Aspirations, Moral Imaginaries and Emerging Religiosities in Southeast Asia

Convenors: Rosalie Stolz (University of Cologne) and Oliver Tappe (University of Cologne)

Ten years after the publication of James Scott's (2009) widely received "The Art of Not Being Governed", the image of the "state evading" anarchic uplander, though subject to much debate, continues to shape our imaginations of the socio-political dynamics in upland Southeast Asia. In order to open up new conceptual terrains we propose to substitute this image by the trope of the "upland pioneer" that encapsulates the idea that the people of upland SEA maintain a "pioneering ethos" (Pierre Petit) and a future-orientation shaped by both hope and uncertainty. Instead of discussing responses, resistance, and other 're'-active positions towards external forces – from the developmental nation-state to global capitalism – we shift our focus more consequently to proactive attitudes and practices that shape the relationship between upland communities and the external forces. We wish to illuminate the manifold practices of imagining worthwhile futures, initiating and shaping socio-economic change, and gauging its cosmological and moral dimensions that are currently taking place in the uplands of mainland Southeast Asia.

We aim to explore two intersecting layers of future-making: Aspirations of economic development and emerging religiosities. The corresponding dialectic between sociocultural change and an assumed moral order is of particular concern here: How do pioneers fathom and re-configure economic and religious frontiers – and handle the moral ambiguities of breaking new ground? The materiality of moral ambiguity and the transformation of spiritual landscapes provide hitherto under-researched fields of empirical investigation. This change of perspective, inspired by anthropological approaches to hope and the good, renders visible the diversity of forms of engagements with "development" and "the state", conflicting and plural value-regimes, religious and cosmological transformations.

We aim to gather ethnographically-based contributions that engage with processes and conundrums of future-making in upland Southeast Asia. In particular, we encourage fresh perspectives on exploring uplanders' aspirations and imaginations as well as local narratives and practices that underlie (economic and religious) future-making strategies.

Double session (2 x 90 min.), 6 presenters

Discussant: Guido Sprenger (University of Heidelberg)

Confirmed speakers (in alphabetical order):

Vanina Bouté (EHESS; Université de Picardie); Tam Ngo (Max Planck Institute Göttingen); Seb Rumsby (University of Warwick); Hans Steinmüller (SOAS, London)