

The 12th 'Japan-ASEAN' seminar **Socialized Lands and Contestations of Dispossession in Laos**



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Over the past two decades, the government of Laos has pursued an ambitious policy of economic development referred to as “Turning Land into Capital”. Mirroring trends of “global land grabbing”, the policy includes various forms of land commodification but is epitomized by the granting of long-term, large-scale land concessions to foreign enterprises for resource extraction and infrastructure projects. The transfer of lands away from peasants to multinational investors has been presented as a relatively straightforward process of accumulation by dispossession. This talk shows, however, that land cannot be easily extracted as a privatized commodity due to the ways in which it is entangled in a web of social and ecological relations. Instead, land is an inescapably socialized phenomenon,

in that it is 1) comprised of multi-scalar social relations and 2) has been historically constructed in socialist Laos as a public, national good. Employing ethnographic research conducted in Southern Laos between 2013 and 2015, this presentation will highlight the contested nature of dispossession in upland areas of the Annamite Cordillera that have been targeted by Chinese and Vietnamese tree plantation companies. Despite moves towards privatization, land there is bound up with a socialized sphere dominated by the state. Investors and peasants work through complex social relations of the state to respectively acquire or protect access to land. This talk is based upon the central ideas of a book manuscript under development.

✂ Language: English



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