



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND  
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**COLLOQUIUM SERIES OF THE INSTITUTE OF ANTHROPOLOGY**  
**Public Lectures**

# **From 'Fun' Adventures to 'Ordinary' Convenience: Local Temporalities of Cross-border Infrastructure and Mobility in Northern Laos**

At the crossroads of the 'Kunming-Bangkok Highway' and Lao-China Railway, the northern Lao border province of Luang Namtha is designed to be a regional infrastructural hub linking China with Southeast Asia, as part of Laos' national vision of transforming from a land-locked to a land-linked country, recently taken up by China's ambition to develop Laos as a central node of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

This paper explores how local actors engage with the rhetorical entanglement of China's and Laos' developmental ideologies and programmes of belts, roads, railways, and economic corridors for their daily livelihoods in discourse and practice. Importantly, I embed this ethnography of the present in the historical context of infrastructural connectivity and transportation in Laos and the wider region. Zooming in on small-scale cross-border traders in Luang Namtha, I examine how they relate rapidly increased, mostly China-backed, cross-border connectivity to memories and experiences of past and present forms of mobility, as well as infrastructure projects by other regional and external actors, both in contexts of military war operations and post-war development aid. Older traders, for example, contrast the time-consuming, adventurous, and risky, yet 'fun' and profitable, cross-border journeys in the past with the speedy and convenient, yet 'ordinary' and 'common', border-crossings of today, which 'now everyone can undertake'. Nuanced attention to local temporalities and meanings of cross-border mobility contributes to serious efforts to historicize, and therefore better understand, China's (and others') recent infrastructural advances into Laos and beyond.

**TUESDAY,  
DECEMBER 12**  
**17:00 c.t. – 19:00**

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**LOCATION: South Asia Institute,  
Lecture Hall (010.01.05),  
1st Floor**