

Cluster Manager:

Christian Oesterheld, email: christian.oes@mahidol.ac.th

Christian Oesterheld is a lecturer in the Social Science Division of MUIC. He studied Austronesian Languages and Cultures at the Asia Africa Institute (AAI), University of Hamburg, and obtained an MSc in “Conflict, Violence and Development” from the School of Asian and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. He is currently doing a PhD in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Frankfurt.

An anthropologist by training, Christian is interested in the study of temporal and spatial dynamics of frontier zones in Southeast Asia, particularly in the border regions of central Borneo. He has known the area since 2000 and has previously been engaged in research on ethnic conflicts and identity politics. Recently, his focus has developed towards the analysis of historical legacies, memoryscapes and cultural heritage in the heart of Borneo

Further Information:

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Cluster Members:**1. Barbara Maria Ekamp, Humanities and Language Division, MUIC**

Barbara Maria Ekamp is a lecturer and a Humanities Program Director in HLD (Humanities and Language Division). She got her M.A. in Literature, Philosophy and Political Science from University of Muenster and University of Cologne and her M.A. in Sinology from “Freie Universitaet Berlin”. Prior to joining MUIC, she worked as DAO-Counsellor (Intercultural Communication Management for Europa – China), as a journalist in the “Berliner Zeitung” and in 2013 started as a full-time teacher at Thammasat University in Bangkok.

Her research centers on cognitive neuroscience, neuro-anthropology, neuro-ethics and on political behavior and phenomena.

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2. Dr. Hardina Ohlendorf, Social Science Division, MUIC

Hardina Ohlendorf is a lecturer in the Social Science Division of Mahidol University International College (MUIC). She got her PhD in Politics and International Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. Prior to joining MUIC, she worked as a full-time teaching fellow at SOAS and as a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Sociology of Academia Sinica in Taiwan with the Taiwan Fellowship. In 2018, she was a Residency Fellow at the Asia Culture Center in South Korea.

In her research, she is interested in the discursive construction of Taiwan identity, the role of public space and public memory in post-authoritarian societies, political and cultural dimensions of tourism, and strategic Chinese identities in frontier zones. She has carried out fieldwork in China, Taiwan, South Korea and Northern Thailand.

Further information:

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3. Dr.Jesper Ole Döpping

Jesper Döpping is a lecturer at the Business Administration Division at MUIC. He acquired his Ph.D. from University of Copenhagen in 1998. He was employed at Copenhagen Business School before he in 2000 pursued a Career in the Pharmaceutical companies Ferring A/S and Lundbeck A/S as Director for Human Resources. He has worked in Asia with News Corp. Outdoor South East Asia, and the British Club in Bangkok prior to joining MUIC in 2014.

Research interests are focused on process theories of cultural entrepreneurship, innovation processes, New digital business organizations, and organizational identity/identification. A special focus is on the organization of space and time for organizations that are located on the frontier between the global business network, and what has been called the “waste land”, fly over land, and that or that in between.

4. Dr. Bernard Sellato, Center of Southeast Asian Studies of the National Center for Scientific Research(CNRS) and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS), Paris/France

Bernard Sellato is a senior scholar (emeritus) with the Center of Southeast Asian Studies of CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) and EHESS (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) in Paris, France. He has been carrying out research in the central mountainous region of Borneo since the early 1970s, especially in the upper Mahakam regency, traveling on foot across water divides to the south (Central Kalimantan), west (West Kalimantan), and north (Sarawak, Malaysia). His work has focused on reconstructing over some three centuries the history of the isolated minor ethnic groups of this central region in relation to the various powerful and warlike peoples living downriver all around them. Prominent in his research are the role of nomadic hunting-gathering groups and the violent contest for commercial forest resources, which governed the steady, conflict-ridden thrust by state-prompted tribal collectors into remote hinterland areas and the dynamics of shifting, ethnically based economic frontiers, later leading to the setting of internationally sanctioned border lines.

Further Information:

<http://case.ehess.fr/index.php?408>

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Sub-project I:

The Upper Mahakam Region in Central Borneo: Culture, Society and Development in a Frontier Region

Christian Oesterheld / Bernard Sellato / Jesper Döpping

Being one of the latest regions to obtain the status of 'regency' (kabupaten) within Indonesia's decentralization process, the upper Mahakam (Mahakam Ulu) is situated in the north-western corner of East Kalimantan province, right at the heart of Borneo – a dynamic frontier space with borders to the Malaysian territory of Sarawak and to the provinces of North, Central and West Kalimantan. The area was amongst the last to be added to the Dutch colonial possessions in the East Indies and had remained terra incognita until the late 19th century, allowing for the development of a distinct regional identity in an ethnically diverse setting.

This cross-disciplinary research project investigates processes of socio-cultural and socio-economic change in connection to the "transformation of marginal space into frontier zone" (Cons and Eilenberg 2019), focusing on the "assemblage" character of such spatial and temporal zones of convergence. As such the project connects historical and contemporary perspectives when engaging with the process of the area's (re)frontierization dynamics. We address the question of how frontiers are made at specific moments in history and discuss the lifecycle of such frontierization – as well as the frontier's "afterlife": the occasional reemergence of a geographic area as a frontier. We are also interested in vestiges of "frontier heritage" that emerge when frontiers disappear: public memory, social adjustments, economic adaptation or legacies of political suzerainty.

The project has initiated a loose cooperation with the government of Mahakam Ulu Regency, which is currently in the process of formalization. Our international team of researchers also cooperates with local scholars in East Kalimantan to foster a collaborative network of exchange and mutual inspiration.

Recent Project Publications:

Christian Oesterheld

[A Past for the Future: Frontier Heritage on the Upper Mahakam \(East Kalimantan, Indonesia\)](#)

This article reviews historical processes of frontier-making (and re-making) in a region of central Borneo that was and still is on the margins of state control. Contributing to discussions about the 'assemblage' character of frontiers as zones of the 'not yet', this case study demonstrates how complex and eclectic historical legacies have gone on to produce a palimpsest of experiences and public memories that are currently being reinscribed in the context of 'frontierisation in the second degree'. This 'afterlife' of the

Sub-project II:

Frontier Communities: The Kuomintang Villages in Northern Thailand

Hardina Ohlendorf/Barbara Ekamp

This project seeks to examine the so-called Kuomintang (KMT) villages in Northern Thailand through the theoretical lens of 'frontier community'. Frontier in this case is understood in several dimensions: 1. As a political frontier, where different claims of statehood and national belonging intersect and overlap, namely those of Thailand, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of China, and Taiwan. 2. As a socio-economic frontier where expanding forces of crop cultivation, forest preservation and global tourism interact. 3. As a spatial frontier, where investment, infrastructures and personal networks from China and Taiwan intersperse and occasionally fragment Thai national territory. 4. As a cultural frontier, where contesting memories, diverse languages and religious faiths meet. Employing Appadurai's (2001) concept of process geography, this project conceives of the KMT villages not as areas with well-defined limits and lines, but rather as places with a social life, as localities that are constantly produced and re-configured through the flows of people, goods and ideas. Relying on semiotics, interviews and archival research, this project seeks to shed light on identity constructions of the KMT villages in the current period by examining perceptions of the Chinese, Taiwanese, and the Thai state by KMT villagers, generational dynamics in self-identification and senses of belonging, the impact of tourism on identity constructions in KMT villages as well as discourses on the KMT villagers in contemporary China and Taiwan. This project aims to advance our understanding of overseas Chinese networks in Southeast Asia, and, in a wider sense, seeks to contribute to discussions of the role of 'place' for identity formations in frontier zones and spaces. The research is expected to shed some light on how not just issues of "national belonging", but also intercultural and interethnic interactions shape cultural identities and senses of citizenship. It thus aims at contributing to a better understanding of processes of migration and

Sub-project III:

Organizing Cultural Entrepreneurship on Frontiers and in Pockets of No Man's Land in the Global Business World

Jesper Döpping,

This project seeks to develop process theories and models for the creation of innovative entrepreneurial assemblages and possibilities in the interstices between existing fields of evolving practices. Schumpeter (1942) pointed out that entrepreneurship primarily is based on imagined futures and the creation of new frontiers and opportunities in trade and business. The majority of research has focused on finding and exploiting arbitrage opportunities through exploitation and production at frontiers rather than creating new assemblages for value creation. The cultural entrepreneurship approach inside business studies focuses on the organizing of innovative entrepreneurial processes and the possible creation of opportunities in an uncertain future and novel space. Lounsbury & Glynn (2019) argue that innovative cultural entrepreneuring is a specific focus point:

"Possibilities for entrepreneurial action exist at the interstices of distinct identity positions in around institutional fields where novel entrepreneurial identities and practices may be constructed"

The project in particular seeks to conceptualize how the cultural innovative entrepreneuring create frontiers from the periphery of the global centers. In this project 'frontiers' are conceptualized as "edge[s] of space and time: a zone of not yet – not yet mapped, not yet regulated. It is a zone of unmapping: even in its planning, a frontier is imagined as unplanned.... Their wildness is made of visions and vines and violence: it is both material and imaginative" (Tsing 2003: 5100). The empirical data will be focused on a comparative study of an AI/drone company in Bangkok the production