

## Abstract

James Scott has defined a large region of today's southern China and Southeast Asia "Zomonia" – seeing in it a specific area in which millennia of expansion by the agricultural empires produced a multiplicity of ethnicities scattered over infertile mountainous ranges (*The Art of Not Being Governed*, 2009). Seen from the perspective of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, the emergence of these ethnicities, both majorities and minorities as well as the states in which they dwelled, belongs to a much more recent history. Indeed, it was the entangled process of British, French, and Chinese colonial expansion, together with the state-building efforts of Siam that formed much of the region and redefined its borders in the late nineteenth century. Then, these new regional formulations were upturned by the collapse of the colonial systems, communist revolutions, and American political, military, and economic expansion. The "Zomonia" then is not a given, but a process in constant and often violent remaking that involves not just a lowland peasant and a highland tribesman, but that is played among many global forces and multiple agencies.

The main purpose of my research project is to analyze the most recent and the most global of these reformulations of the aforementioned region – a one that occurred between the late 1940s and early 1950s. Contrary to most of the historiographies of China and Southeast Asia, which follow nation-centered narratives, I intend to globalize the query and link internal developments of the young People's Republic of China to the decolonization and state formation in the neighboring countries within Southeast Asia. I want to challenge two predominant discourses of the early Cold War Asia: first, that the communist Chinese invasion was pending and only the stern American, British, French, and Thai policy blocked its advancement. And the second that Chinese communist revolution was a self-limiting liberation movement meant to close solely within the "natural" social and geographical boundaries of China. Both discourses at various times were politically useful tools used by the actors involved. Nevertheless, overwhelming evidence demonstrate their falsehood – in fact, such discourses appear as useable half-truths or simply disinformation produced for the internal and external publics to justify political processes that underlay the violent struggles in the Asian Cold War (or rather Asian Hot Peace).

One of the unique characteristics of the Southeast Asia on the cusp of the 1940s and 50s was the fact that its formation was anything but not global. Indeed, the establishment of states, their social and political systems, the ethnic categorizations used for defining their social bodies were a part of a global historical process and came as results of the actions by global players who followed ideologies and (pseudo)scientific premises most often not rooted in this region. As the creation of narratives of the national pasts obliterated much of the global interaction that formed this region, the events and the number of actors involved in the process deny these histories veracity. Indeed, the fading away of the global colonial order (in Asia, as it appeared, mortally damaged by Japanese occupation) opened a new slate for multiple actors to shape the region's future. Most recently Christopher Gosha (*The Road to Dien Bien Phu*, 2022) had demonstrated this process in force for what became the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, however, other parts of the Southeast Asia, and notably, the so-called southwestern China are still chined to the national narratives. Taking a global approach, in my project, I will ask the following questions: what powers (political, social, economic) and processes shaped the region after the WWII? What factors determined Chinese communists' ability to expand their political authority in Southeast Asia? Why Tibet was the last conquest of the PRC? Why Western powers (USA, UK, France) and Thai military authorities believed the PRC wanted to military expand in Southeast Asia? How did the political conflicts of this period affect ethnic policy, definition of ethnicity and creation of Southeast Asian nations? How did the conflicts of this period shaped Chinese communities, their organization, and their forms of memory and commemoration?