

Global China Seminar

The Bronze Drum culture of the Li and Lao and ethnic relations in early South China (200-750 CE)



In the middle centuries of the first millennium CE in the lands approximately halfway between the present-day cities of Hanoi and Guangzhou, peoples known variously as Li and Lao produced the largest collection of bronze kettledrums known in the world. These drums were symbols of political authority and legitimacy for the Li and Lao chieftains, and the abundance of drums cast in the area centuries after the Chinese Empires had conquered the surrounding districts indicates the continued growth of the chieftains' wealth and power.

In this talk, the speaker attempts to explain the political and economic factors behind the rise and persistence of these chiefdoms and their

subsequent disappearance in the mid eighth century. She challenges many widely held assumptions about the history of ethnic relations in what is now south China, critiquing the ideas of cultural absorption and irreversible Sinicization (assimilation to Chinese linguistic, cultural and political norms) of indigenous southerners. Placing the Li and Lao at the centre of the historical narrative, she argues that over four centuries interactions with the Chinese empires had actually strengthened the power of their native chieftains.

About the speaker

Dr Catherine Churchman is a Lecturer in the Asian Studies Programme in the School of Languages and Cultures. She studied Chinese and Dutch Studies as an undergraduate in New Zealand and Taiwan before receiving her doctorate in Asian History from the Australian National University in 2012. Her research interests include the history of the Lingnan region of southern China and Mainland Southeast Asia in the first millennium CE, Chinese contact creole languages of Southeast Asia (in particular Malaysian Hokkien), Southern Chinese local identities both within China and amongst the Chinese diaspora, Vietnamese and Tai literature written in Nôm (Chinese-based demotic script), Sino-Vietnamese literature, and the role of the Republic of China (Taiwan) in the Korean War.

Date: Wednesday, 18 October

Time: 5 - 6pm

Venue: AM 106, Alan MacDiarmid Building, Kelburn Campus, Victoria University
([map](#))

If you are interested to attend this seminar, please email Lai Ching at laiching.tan@vuw.ac.nz or call 04 463 9549 to register.