



Wrestling beetles and ecological wisdom: Exploring a political natural history in Northern Thailand

Beetle fighting is a game that builds upon an uncanny cooperation between human beings and Rhinoceros beetles (*xylotrupes Gideon*). It has developed to a high level of refinement and institutionalization in Northern Thailand, for years if not centuries. Beetle fighting is even being widely presented as a regional pride, a marker of the local Lanna identity, a portrayal of local ecological wisdom. It will be shown that the harmonious connection built by human populations with their natural environment is less about the coleoptera (beetle) than what happens in the intimate relationship between human beings and insects. This lecture will follow the way players build on an alterity or "otherness" between them and the insect, and how the technical and conceptual handling of the beetles resonate with the local cosmology in an original way. We will shed the light on a genuine and pragmatic aspect of Thai natural history, and what occurs when one not only project human traits on coleoptera but is also attentive to the sensible world and the vibrating communication methods of insects. As such, we shall assess how beetles force humans to reflect on their engagement in the world to the point that brings this game on to the stage of political ecology.

Dr. Stéphane Rennesson

A cultural and social anthropologist, Stéphane Rennesson is currently working at the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia in Bangkok (IRASEC). After a PhD at the University of Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense and a postdoctoral position at the Musée du quai Branly, he joined the French National Center for Scientific Research (CNRS). He used to teach anthropology at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) from 2009 to 2012 and at the Paris Institute of Political Studies from 2010 to 2014. As a specialist of Thai culture he has carried studies both on Muay Thai and on the relations Thai people nurture with animals, notably when they play with them (Beetle and fish fighting, bird singing contests). Lately, he has been working on Naga worshipping in Northeast Thailand.

Date: 30 May 2019

Time: 10.00 am

Venue: Auditorium, National Museum Bangkok

Cost: 100B members/ 200B Non-Members

