

ISA INTERNATIONAL GUEST LECTURE

MELDING SCRIPT INTO VOICE: THE SOCIAL LIVES OF DREAMS, MOUNTAINS, AND NEW ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES IN SOUTHWEST CHINA

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How does the melding of script and voice bring to life the dreams of religious specialists, ordinary people, and spirits? Scriptural voicings among the Nuosu, a Tibeto-Burman group of Southwest China, often unfold as riffs on the religious texts of their animistic priests, which may be ritually used to make dreams and wishes a reality. One common dream-fulfilling ritual across the Liangshan mountains is the sacrifice to the local mountain spirit, which many Nuosu beseech to grant them health, prosperity, fertility, growing numbers of livestock, strength in every endeavour, wealth, success in business, feasts with neighbours, a lack of disputes, and to have their speech and actions protected. Going further, many Nuosu ask their mountain spirit to stay, rather than leave the area, even when they dig up or plough into its territory. Disturbing the mountain spirit may cause it to retaliate against people, their grains, and livestock—or to simply withdraw its protection by ‘moving house’. Yet keeping mountain spirits in place has become increasingly challenging as new energy technologies such as wind turbines and solar panels are installed deep into the earth to manage climate change. In this lecture, I show how several ordinary Nuosu men gave scriptural voice to a priestly text during a sacrifice to their local mountain spirit, which supported their own dreams of being protected by it well into the future.



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