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BUDDHISM, ECONOMY, AND GENDER AMONG THE TAI LUE OF SIPSONG PANNA (P.R. CHINA)

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Sipsong Panna (Chin.: Xishuangbanna), a rapidly transforming, multi-ethnic region in southwest China, is host to the largest community of Theravada Buddhists in the country, the Tai Lue. After suffering repression during the Maoist Revolution, in the last decades monasticism has recovered its importance as a socializing discipline for young Tai Lue males. At the same time, and pushed by sustained double-digit economic growth in China, Sipsong Panna has integrated into national and regional economic webs and has become a key trade hub in the Economic Quadrangle along with Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar. In an economic context dominated by Han Chinese businessmen and their relational networks, Tai Lue monks and former monks play a fundamental role as the group's resilient cultural elites, promoting locals' engagement with market economy and even becoming successful entrepreneurs themselves. The current prominence of these men, however, obscures the fundamental role local women continued to play in the rural economies of Sipsong Panna. This, in turn, is a reflection of their relatively privileged position in traditional kinship and gender regimes. In this Research Forum, Roger Casas first will summarize his past work among village and urban communities in Sipsong Panna, focusing on the connections between religious and secular sources of meaning and authority, and especially between Buddhist monasticism and masculinity among Tai Lue. Then, he will offer a glimpse into his new research project which explores the contemporary interplay between religion, economic action, and gender imaginings and practices in this thriving frontier where China meets Southeast Asia.



Roger Casas (PhD, Australian National University) is currently a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute for Social Anthropology at the Austrian Academy of Sciences. He has lived and worked in Sipsong Panna and other areas of China for extended periods since 2001. His recent published articles include: "The Buddhist Basketball Association: Sport Practice and the Cultivation of the Body among Tai Lue Monastics" (*Asia Pacific Journal of Sport and Social Science* 6, 2017), and "The 'Khanan Dream': Engagements of Former Buddhist Monks with the Market Economy in Sipsong Panna, P. R. China" (*The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 16, 2016).

