

ISA International Guest Lectures

The politics of land in the making of Indonesia's "Geothermal Island"

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University of Colorado, Boulder



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With 40% of the world's known geothermal reserves and second in installed capacity, Indonesia plans to become a "geothermal superpower." Geothermal is particularly important as a baseload power source as the country struggles to meet its decarbonization goals. In this context, Flores was designated as a "Geothermal Island" in 2017, but development of geothermal has been very slow due to resistance from indigenous communities. This resistance has been largely dismissed and misunderstood by policymakers, development personnel, and government staff, who paint Flores residents as uneducated or manipulated by outside interests. In this presentation I will discuss the political economy of geothermal development in Indonesia, and present four case studies in Flores where geothermal development is either planned or has been implemented. In doing so I will highlight issues of struggles between ontologies of land as an abstract, empty, and alienable commodity, and land as a set of relations that binds the living, the dead, and future generations.



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Emily T. Yeh is a professor of Geography and College Professor of Distinction at the University of Colorado Boulder. She has conducted research on development and nature-society relations, mostly in Tibetan parts of the PRC. This has included projects on the political ecology of pastoralism, vulnerability to climate change, the politics of nature conservation, emergent environmentalisms, the cultural politics of entrepreneurship, the infrastructuralization of nature, and climate justice.

Her book *Taming Tibet: Landscape Transformation and the Gift of Chinese*

Development explored the intersection of the political economy and cultural politics of development as a project of state territorialization. She also edited *Mapping Shangrila: Contested Landscapes in the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands* and is currently an editor of *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*. Her more recent research focus has been on global weather modification and on the politics of geothermal development in Flores, Indonesia.

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