



Coming of Age and Learning to Live (With Ghosts) in Borneo's Rainforest

Thursday, May 6, 2021, 6 - 8 pm

The lecture will take place via Microsoft Teams

Lecture by Prof. Dr. Alison M. Groppe (Modern Chinese Literature, University of Oregon)

What does it take to "come of age": what kinds of experiences or revelations bring about maturation? How is coming of age shaped by identity and historical milieu? As seen in his award-winning, semi-fictionalized memoir "End of the River" (2008-2010), for Borneo-born, Sinophone Taiwan author Li Yongping (1947-2017), coming of age involves discovering the horrors of his homeland's history, rooted in Borneo's history of European colonialism and Japanese imperialism, and realizing how these destructive patterns loiter in the present. During a month spent in West Kalimantan with a family friend in 1962, the novel's adolescent protagonist, Yong, joins an international expedition up the Kapuas River into the heart of Borneo's rainforest. The visit transpires during Ghost Month, as spirits roam among the living. Through spectral encounters with Borneo's ghosts, and the historical and psychic darkness they

evoke, Yong witnesses the oppression and violence from Borneo's colonial past that haunts the transition from colony to independent nation. In this lecture, I will analyze how the novel deploys a rhetoric of haunting to criticize the oppression of Borneo by European colonizers and Japanese imperialists while simultaneously interrogating Li's own masculinity and relationship with Borneo—as a son both of Borneo and Chinese immigrants, who grew up in but then abandoned Borneo to live and write in Taiwan.

Alison Groppe teaches modern Chinese literature, film and popular culture at the University of Oregon. She specializes in literary and cinematic representations of identity, Sinophone and Chinese literature and film, and world literature.