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**Opium at the Interface. Global and Local Interactions in the  
Golden Triangle**

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**Abstract**

Opium links global and local levels in several respects. Firstly, opium is probably the crop with the longest history of international trade (dating back several thousand years), which was not only a natural product but closely intertwined with the rise of colonialism and the modern world economy. Secondly, opium is the object of several international treaties and of international agencies. Thirdly, through development projects aiming at crop substitution and drug control, the local level at which opium is produced is connected to national and global development organisation which requires the creation of “interfaces” as NORMAN LONG (2002) points out.

The focus of the presentation is on the local level of the Golden triangle, still the major Opium producing region, and how the local dynamics (separatist movements, war-lordism, role of the hilltribes in the respective states etc.) are intertwined with global processes (war in Vietnam, war on drugs, containment of China, illegal world economy etc.). In particular, the interface is analysed between the meaning of Opium in global discourse as a dangerous drug and cash crop, and the local reality, where Opium plays a multidimensional role as means of exchange, strategic resource, medication, status indicator etc. The development projects aiming at the reduction of opium production are integrated into the global dynamics in terms of project aims, organisation and techniques, which do not always relate to the local meaning (and understanding) of opium. The conclusion is that technically oriented crop substitution projects fail, as they are not compatible with the local context. In contrast, projects facilitating local self-organisation are presented as a promising alternative.