27 January, 2016 (Wednesday), 5pm, Rooms 8 & 9, FAMES (tea served at 4:45pm)

The Identities of the Chinese in Réunion, France

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This presentation raises the question of the identity of the Chinese descendants born, educated and socialized in Reunion Island, a Creole society ruled under French Overseas Department. To be Chinese in Reunion is to belong to two, or even three, cultural worlds — Chinese, French, and Creole. We call these people “Sino-reunionese or Sinwa in Creole language. Why do Sino-reunionese claim to “return to their roots”? What make them different being as Chinese? and not as Reunionese or French? The identity construction of the Sinwa has something to do with French policies and the situation of Reunion. They may find themselves identifying as Chinese only some of the time and not all of the time. They find that their consciousness of being Chinese is formed and transformed in relation to other Reunionese; that is, they feel more or less Chinese depending on whom they are with. They may find themselves assuming different identities at different times, identities which are not always unified around a fixed consistent “self.” In a multiethnic and multicultural Creole society, an individual identifies with several groups, considering him or herself a member of them but at the same time he or she feels different from the other members of these groups, when he calls himself or herself a Chinese, Tamil, African, or whatever. The development of Chinese identities follows this process, progressively moulding and modifying itself, and adopting different forms throughout its existence in response to the events and disruptions in the social, political, cultural, or economic life of the Reunion. In short, the Sinwa cultural identity develops in accordance with the transformations affecting the whole of Reunionese society for some thirty years.

Dr. LIVE Yu-Sion is Associate Professor in Sociology, teaching in the Department of Anthropology, Faculty of Letters and Social Sciences, Université de La Réunion. He was born and grew up in Madagascar, a former French colony. LIVE Yu-Sion is the Francised Cantonese romanisation of his Chinese name 廖遇常. He received his sociological training in Paris at Université René Descartes, Sorbonne (Licence 1978, Maîtrise 1979, DEA 1980) and at Écoles des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (PhD dissertation 1991 La diaspora chinoise en France). He currently divides his time between Paris and Réunion island, conducting researches on the question of identity and image of the Chinese in France and in the multicultural societies of the South West Indian Ocean Islands (Reunion, Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius). Recently, he has joined a team of scholars doing research on the Chinese religious beliefs and practices in France, and is working on a documentary film on this topic. He has authored a number of books, articles and documentary films. For his works, please see : http://dire.univ-reunion.fr/lequipe/yu-sion-live/. Since 1999, he is the co-editor of KABARO, an International Review devoted to the Societies of the South-West Indian Ocean Countries. His
research interests include: sociology of migration, minority, identity, race and ethnic relation, Creole societies, multiple belonging, religious pluralism, Chinese diasporas.