CHILD SOLDIERS, VIETNAMESE YOUTH AND THE POLITICS OF STORYTELLING

By Dr Kim Huynh, Australian National University
Chaired by: Associate Professor Emilian Kavalski

Date & Time
Thursday 7 Aug 2014
12:00pm-2:00pm

Venue: Room 18AB, Level 18, Tenison Woods House
8-20 Napier Street, North Sydney

Abstract: This seminar incorporates a discussion of two interrelated research projects. The first on child soldiers considers how to analyse and judge a) the global problem of child soldiers and b) particular societies that encourage and celebrate child soldiers. With respect to a), I contrast caretaker (liberal humanitarian) and free-ranger (critical childhood studies) perspectives and propose an indirect approach to solving the global child soldier problem that concentrates not so much on demobilising individuals and demilitarising societies, but rather on improving the socioeconomic and security conditions that are conducive to the use of child soldiers. With respect to b) I examine the stories of Vietnamese child soldiers – from ancient myths to modern heroes to my father’s experiences as a twelve-year-old revolutionary – in order to better understand a society that was and arguably remains pro child soldier.

The second project entitled Vietnam as if... Tales of Youth, Love and Destiny reflects recent efforts to present my scholarship as political action and fiction. This collection of novellas traces the journeys of five young people who have moved from the country to the city. Each story engages with a major social issue (gender, minorities, indifference, ideology and faith). The collection embodies my research and experiences from 2011 to 2012 when I lived in Vietnam and sold sticky rice, became a tennis player and ball boy, consulted for big business, marched in the streets against foreign aggression, translated and edited literature for the government and returned to the classroom.

Dr Kim Huynh researches and teaches refugee politics, international relations and political philosophy at the Australian National University. His political biography Where the Sea Takes Us: A Vietnamese-Australian Story (HarperCollins 2008) has attracted academic and popular acclaim. Kim co-edited (with Jim George) The Culture Wars: Australian and American Politics in the 21st Century (Palgrave 2009) and is the co-author (with Katrina Lee-Koo and Bina D’Costa) of the soon to be published Children and Global Conflict (Cambridge University Press). He has published articles on political theory, women’s studies and forced migration along with contributing to Australian newspapers and a series of essays on Asian-Western relations for the BBC Vietnamese. His forthcoming publications include a collection of political stories about youth in contemporary Vietnam and an article reviewing Australian asylum politics since the end of the Cold War. He is also working on a chapter on Vietnam’s response to China’s rise (with Do Thanh Hai) and a project that examines the politics of Super-Rich Asians. He has received the ANU Vice Chancellor’s award for teaching excellence and is currently under consideration for the 2014 national award for outstanding contribution to learning. He is the 2013 winner of the Society for Humanistic Anthropology’s Ethnographic Fiction Award was a 2012 Asialink Arts Resident.
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