

Panel 17: Remedies of Modernity: Malaysian Halal, Vietnamese Medicine and the Making of National Identities

Panel Description:

In Vietnam, the production, trade and consumption of traditional herbal medicine has experienced a revival since the mid-20th century. Following a series of economic reforms in the 1980s, the cultivation and production of herbal medicine came to be nationalized, modernized and commercialized in novel ways in the Vietnamese context. In the same period, the understanding and practice of halal (literally 'lawful' or 'permitted') in Malaysia was resignified along similar lines. In this paper, we show how the emergence and institutionalization of herbal medicine and halal commodities in a comparative perspective reflect a number of broader tendencies. A central argument is that the emergence, consolidation and expansion of herbal medicine and halal in Vietnam and Malaysia respectively are most fruitfully explored at the interfaces between forms of bio-politics, 'state bodies', nationalism and globalization in developing Southeast Asia. Vietnamese herbal medicine and Malaysian halal products have been mobilized not only in the name of health and nutrition but equally importantly also as elements of nation building in a time of increasing globalization.

Panel Organiser: Dr. Ayo Wahlberg, Research Fellow, BIOS Centre, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK (a.j.wahlberg@lse.ac.uk)

Participants and abstracts

17. 01 Vietnamese immigrants, medical pluralism and recourse to “traditional medicines” in Canada: Culture, health and the challenges of globalisation

By Laurence Monnais

The main objective of this paper is to help redefine the concepts of “traditional medicine” and “alternative medicine” in the context of globalisation through the case study of the Vietnamese immigrant population and their healthcare practices –including their recourse to Vietnamese Traditional Medicine (VTM). Based on a qualitative research (n = 16 participants, methodology: in-depth interviews) dealing with the recourse to medicines and pharmaceuticals among Vietnamese immigrants in Montreal, Canada, my analysis confirms the existence of practices of therapeutic pluralism within the community. It also reveals the complexity and the variability of the forms this therapeutic pluralism might take especially in terms of categories of medicines consumed (including biomedicines, Chinese and Vietnamese remedies and pharmaceuticals but also Western natural health products). By reconstructing representative therapeutic itineraries, I will explore the role played by cultural factors –especially beliefs about health, disease, medicines, or the body- in this population’s therapeutic choices. Finally, I will discuss what these practices say about the immigration process experienced by Vietnamese people and what this tells us in terms of integration to the Canadian system of healthcare, considered by the World Health Organization as among the most integrative in the West.

17.02 Dr. Johan Fischer, title tba

17.03 Dr. Ayo Wahlberg, title tba