

**“Imagined Communities and an Imagined Southeast Asian
Communitas: The Case of Vietnam and Southeast Asia”**

Thursday 2nd November 2017 at 2:30 p.m.

IAS Meeting Room 2.27, Level 2, FASS Building

Abstract

As a Southeast Asianist, I am always fascinated with “the idea” of Southeast Asia and with the efforts of people, from scholars to politicians, to mobilize that idea for various purposes. In the 1960s-1980s in “the West,” there was a scholarly effort to define Southeast Asia as a region and to highlight the historical agency of the peoples of Southeast Asia’s newly independent nations. Meanwhile, today the idea of Southeast Asia is very important for the governments of ASEAN countries as they seek to create a sense of community in the region to enhance political security and prosperity and to respond to new challenges. These current efforts to create an idea of a Southeast Asian “*communitas*,” or a sense of community based on shared experiences, however, face a persistent challenge in the form of nationalist desires to highlight the uniqueness of individual nations.

In this presentation I will highlight some of the ways that Vietnamese currently “imagine” their national “community” so as to draw attention to the difficulty of imagining a Southeast Asian “*communitas*.” I will then reflect on the role that scholars, particularly social scientists and humanists working together, can play in helping to “re-imagine” Southeast Asia in ways that can both bring increased sophistication to scholarly output and resonate with the interests and needs of the people who live in the Southeast Asian region today.

Speaker’s Profile



Liam Kelley is an Associate Professor of Southeast Asian History at the University of Hawaii at Manoa where he teaches a wide range of courses on Southeast Asian history for undergraduate and post-graduate students. His main area of research to date has been Vietnamese history where through a monograph and numerous articles he has challenged two of the main pillars of Vietnamese historiography: the idea that Vietnam has always had an antagonistic relationship with China and the idea that the origins of the Vietnamese nation date back to antiquity. Beyond teaching and research, Professor Kelley is also a co-organizer of the Engaging With Vietnam conference series (www.engagingwithvietnam.net), the only annual conference on Vietnam-related research in the world, and serves as the co-editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, the leading journal in the world on Vietnam-related research.

For more information on Professor Kelley’s research, please consult his Academia.edu page: <https://manoa-hawaii.academia.edu/LeMinhKhai>