Vietism: Human Rights and the New Vietnamese

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In the 1970s, Vietnamese refugees in Japan, Australia, Canada, the United States, and continental Europe indicted the communist government for human rights abuse. Then as now, the slipstream of human rights activism pulled along their cause, helping to mount international pressure on the government to reform. While some refugees appealed to the United Nations, others drew up a unique philosophy to contest the socialist conception of human rights. Vietism, as this doctrine came to be known, looked chiefly to Jungian psychology to rethink Vietnamese humanism—what it was and what it ought to be. In due time, Vietnamese intellectuals would present this doctrine as a means for their kin, as well as the third world, to achieve global peace. This talk will explore the philosophical and literary foundations of Vietism, bringing into view “the new Vietnamese” as an avatar of the higher-man.

Trinh M. Luu is a doctoral candidate in Comparative Literature at the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation examines twentieth century Vietnamese literature and legal culture. Currently, Trinh is a UC Dissertation Fellow, and Managing Editor of the Journal of Vietnamese Studies.

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Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue