

Humanitarian Confessions

23^(Thu)
January

13:30-15:00

Research Commons,
1st Floor, East Building, CSEAS

No
Reservation
required

Format: Hybrid

<https://kyoto-u-edu.zoom.us/j/91993075571?pwd=cAkN8laM5QC9aMjizXkCFRw8GbzaQ4.1>



Humanitarian autobiographies provide compelling windows for analysing the religious encounters of aid workers. Free from the genre constraints of development scholarship or fundraising appeals, religion and spirituality are frequently given considerable space in these narrations, in a variety of different ways. Some authors are fascinated by the exotic religions they encounter, others face an existential crisis that leaves them feeling shattered, while others undergo a spiritual transformation as they arrive at new understandings of themselves. This talk explores humanitarian autobiographies as 'confessions' in that the authors seek to reveal something about their hidden or interior lives through their self-descriptions. I draw on a range of books, including: *The Selfish Altruist*, *Three Cups of Tea*, *Emergency Sex*, *Zen Under Fire*, and *Tsunami and the Single Girl*. This talk focuses especially on those texts that engage with Asia. I argue that the critical study of humanitarian autobiographies is an important site for thinking through the contested and dynamic cultural politics of aid work.

Philip Fountain

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Philip Fountain is a Senior Lecturer in Study of Religion at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He was previously a Senior Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore. He has published extensively on religion, development and humanitarianism. His books include: *The Service of Faith: An Ethnography of Mennonites and Development* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2024); *Political Theologies and Development in Asia: Transcendence, Sacrifice and Aspiration*, edited with Giuseppe Bolotta and R. Michael Feener (Manchester University Press, 2020); *The Mission of Development: Religion and Techno-Politics in Asia*, edited with Catherine Scheer and R. Michael Feener (Brill, 2018); and *Religion and the Politics of Development*, edited with Robin Bush and R. Michael Feener (Palgrave, 2015). Philip is currently a visiting research scholar at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University.