DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY
national university of singapore

DEPARTMENTAL SEMINAR

Women Warriors and Wartime Spies of China

Professor Louise Edwards
University of New South Wales, Australia

CHAIR
A/P Yang Bin

Wednesday, 5 November 2014, 3 pm
History/Political Science Lounge, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences,
Block AS1, #04–01, 11 Arts Link, Singapore 117570

Abstract
This presentation explores the ways that women and men, femininity and masculinity have been used to advocate for war, to promote militarised violence and to perpetuate the seeming logic of the inevitability of war through the public commemoration of woman warriors and wartime spies. The militarisation of society requires rituals, memorials, movies and school texts to give war legitimacy—despite its evident and well-documented horror and futility. Narratives of women warriors and wartime spies play significant roles in this process of militarisation in China. Women war fighters become powerful icons to proclaim the urgency of war, of its demands that all patriots make some sort of sacrifice. They help hide its dirty, calculated nastiness beneath a deceit of eroticised glamour, or the promise of an ‘opportunity’ to break free of ordinary-life restrictions. The continued promotion of women warriors and wartime spies in all forms of media reveals their centrality to the militarisation of peacetime societies as well as their utility during war itself. I explore key themes in gender and war cultures through the most prominent female warriors and spies of 20th century China including Xie Bingying, Liu Hulan, Qiu Jin, Aisin Gioro Xianyu, Zheng Pingru and Zhao Yiman.

About the Speaker
Louise Edwards is Professor of Modern Chinese History in the School of Humanities and Languages at UNSW Australia Sydney. She is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, and Hong Kong Academy of the Humanities. She is currently working on a range of projects related to gendered cultures of war in China. Her recent sole-authored books are Men and Women in Qing China (Brill 1994, Hawaii University Press, 2001) and Gender, Politics and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage in China (Stanford University Press, 2008), which were translated into Chinese and published in 2014 with Peking University Press and Overseas Chinese Studies Series of Jiangsu Renmin chubanshe respectively.

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