Seminar

"Development, Inequality and the Welfare State"

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3:30 p.m. in BRNG B212

The majority of the world’s poorest of the poor today live in middle income countries. In other words, raising the floor in developing world countries requires more than just aggregate economic growth. It is fundamentally a political economic problem of redistribution. It should come as no surprise, therefore that policy debates in the global south center around the welfare state, and state capacity more generally. The challenge, however, is adapting a welfare state model informed by a certain mode of industrial production at a certain moment in time, which does not resemble the political and economic realities of the developing world. This talk examines the tension between the formal mechanisms of welfare state governance (extraction and redistribution) and the informal realities that the world’s poorest of the poor experience in the developing world. Indeed, the main challenge for welfare states today is to “reach” those who are most difficult to reach – the very poor, marginalized, and invisible – thus demanding a re-think of the welfare state model, in theory and in practice.

Joseph Wong is the Ralph and Roz Halbert Professor of Innovation at the Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto, Professor of Political Science and Canada Research Chair in Democratization, Health and Development. Wong was the Director of the Asian Institute at the Munk School from 2005 to 2014. In addition to many academic articles and book chapters, Professor Wong has published four books: Healthy Democracies: Welfare Politics in Taiwan and South Korea (2004) and Betting on Biotech: Innovation and the Limits of Asia’s Developmental State (2011), both published by Cornell University Press, as well as Political Transitions in Dominant Party Systems: Learning to Lose, co-edited with Edward Friedman (2008), and Innovating for the Global South: Towards a New Innovation Agenda, co-edited with Dilip Soman and Janice Stein (2014). Wong is currently co-authoring a book with Dan Slater (University of Chicago) on democracy and development for Princeton University Press. Professor Wong is also working on a long-term research project on the political economy of reach and redistribution in developing world settings, summarized in a recent article (2015) in the Bulletin of the World Health Organization. Wong has been a visiting scholar at leading universities in Asia, the US and the UK. He has advised international organizations such as the United Nations, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the World Health Organization, as well as for governments in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Wong was appointed Senior Fellow of the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada in 2011 and was honored with the Faculty of Arts and Science Outstanding Teaching Award in 2013. Professor Wong earned his Hons. B.A from McGill (1995) and Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2001).

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