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**CITYSCAPES &
NEW RELIGIOSITIES
IN ASIA**

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JOINTLY ORGANISED BY

**DORISEA
DYNAMICS OF RELIGION IN
SOUTHEAST ASIA**

**CETREN
TRANSREGIONAL RESEARCH
NETWORK**



**GEORG-AUGUST-UNIVERSITÄT
GÖTTINGEN**

Abstracts for the DORISA-CETREN Summer School “Cityscapes and New Religiosities in Asia”

Keynote Speech:

Lily Kong

Death and its rituals in urban Asia

In many Asian cities, particularly those that confront increasing land scarcity, the conversion from burial to cremation has been encouraged by state agencies in the last several decades. From Hong Kong to Taipei to Singapore, planning agencies have sought to reduce the use of space for the dead, in order to release land for the use of the living. The more secular guiding principles regarding efficient land use in these cities had originally come up against the symbolic values invested in burial spaces, resulting in conflicts between different value systems. In more recent years, however, the shift to cremation and columbaria has been marked, and even voluntary, for example, in Hong Kong, where private providers offer creative and expressive options in new columbaria. In still more recent years, even columbaria have become overcrowded, and sea burials (the scattering of ashes in the seas) are being encouraged, as are woodland burials (the scattering of ashes in woodlands or around trees) in places like Hong Kong and Taipei. Indeed, the latter has been promoted as the “new eco-friendly burial method”. As burial methods change, so too do commemorative rituals, and the annual Qing Ming Festival (tomb sweeping) has seen the rise of new online and mobile phone rituals in China. This paper traces the ways in which physical spaces for the dead in several Asian cities have diminished and changed over time, the growth of virtual space for them, the accompanying discourses that influence these dynamics, and the new rituals that emerge concomitantly with the contraction of land space.

Theme I: Transformations of Religious Sites

Michael Dickhardt

Religious Places in Urban Spatialities – Transformative Spatial Articulations of Religion, Place and Modernity in Contemporary Cities

The lecture will focus on two theoretical shifts that have been of major importance for the social sciences and the humanities over the last three decades: the reconceptualization of religion and modernity and their mutual relationship on the one hand, and the reconceptualization of the spatial dimension of socio-cultural praxis on the other hand. The first of these shifts has opened new perspectives on religion and modernity in their historical and contemporary entanglements and articulations, compelling us to see religion as a genuine part of modernity and modernity as deeply formed by religion. The second shift provides us with a new understanding of the role of space and place in those entanglements and articulations of religion and modernity. Against this background, the lecture will explore some of the fundamental concepts of these two theoretical shifts such as space, place, modernity, secularization, rationalization and dis-/re-enchantment and relate them to the topics of transformations of religious sites in contemporary urban spatialities and the processes bringing those transformations about within various dimensions (e.g., production of space, globalization, heritagization).

Readings:

- Beyer, Peter. 2012. Observing Religion in a Globalized World: Late Twentieth Century Transformations. In: Volkhard Krech and Marion Steinicke. Eds. *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe. Encounters, Notions, and Comparative Perspectives*. Leiden and Boston: Brill. 413-433.
- Burchardt, Marian and Irene Becci. 2013. Introduction: Religion Takes Place: Producing Urban Locality. In: Irene Becci, Marian Burchardt and José Casanova. Eds. *Topographies of Faith. Religion in Urban Spaces*. 1-21.
- Hancock, Mary and Smriti Srinivas. Spaces of Modernity: Religion and the Urban in Asia and Africa. In: *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32:3. 617-630.
- Knott, Kim. 2010. Religion, Space, and Place. The Spatial Turn in Research on Religion. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 1. 29-43.

Andrew Alan Johnson

Social Transformation and Popular Religious Practice: A Case Study of Changing Spirit Shrines in Thailand

Many scholars of Southeast Asia point to a newly-emerging religious landscape, one marked by an increase in popular religious practice (Taylor 2004, Pattana 2012, Chong 2013). In order to explain this, many have pointed to the radical transformations within Southeast Asian societies: neoliberal economics, rapid urbanization, increased global interconnection, etc. Thai religious practice, always straddling the line between an outer image of Theravada Buddhist homogeneity and a dazzling diversity, provides a fertile case study to query theory relating to social and urban change and the transformation of religious sites. Here, I provide three ethnographic case studies from my own work, stripped of theoretical analysis, and then seek to explore what various theoretical approaches of these sites might contribute to an understanding of the rise of popular urban religious practice.

Readings:

- Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 1999. Occult Economies and the Violence of Abstraction: Notes from the South African Postcolony. *American Ethnologist* 26:2. 279-303.
- Keyes, Charles. 2002. National Heroine or Local Spirit: The Struggle over Memory in the Case of Thao Suranari of Nakhon Ratchasima. In: Tanabe Shigeharu and Charles F. Keyes. Eds. *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*. New York: Routledge. 113-136.
- Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2012. Mediums, Monks, and Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today. Seattle: University of Washington Press. Chapter 2: Beyond Syncretism (pages 11-34).

Theme II: Religious Communities

David A. Palmer

Spirituality, individuation and the religious productions of Asian modernity

This lecture will explore the potentials and pitfalls of "spirituality" as an analytical category in research on urban Asian contexts. The concept of "spirituality" has become increasingly prevalent in mainstream Western cultural discourses and identifications of growing numbers of people who eschew confessional identification with a single religious institution but are willing to engage with the symbols, practices, texts and teachings of religious traditions without regard to confessional boundaries, while remaining grounded in individual experience and agency. In the Western context, this phenomenon has been described as a modern or even postmodern trend, expressing the weakening influence of institutional religious authority and the growing role of market relations in structuring religious activity. Until now there has been little critical reflection on the category of

"spirituality" in Asian contexts. This lecture will aim to open such a reflection by first proposing a basic conceptual framework and definitions for an anthropology or sociology of spirituality, and then raise a number of issues relevant to considering the transformations of "spirituality" in a modern Asian context, including individuation, secularization, the state, the market and global circulations.

Readings:

- Palmer, David A. 2011. Gift and market in the Chinese religious economy. *Religion* 41:4. 569-594.
- Van der Veer, Peter. 2009. Spirituality in Modern Society. *Social Research* 76:4. 1097-1120.

Julius Bautista

The Pious Performance of the Passion in a Philippine City

In this paper I describe Holy Week Passion rituals in the Philippines, where scores of Roman Catholic penitents commemorate Christ's crucifixion through self-flagellation or by having themselves publicly nailed to a cross during a street play in the city of San Fernando, Pampanga. What are some of the motivations for these rituals? What kinds of religious and cultural subjectivities do they channel? Filipino Catholics are often taken as exemplars of the vitality and frenetic growth of Christian populations in the 'Global South' amidst the staggering decline of the faith in its traditional Western bastions. I draw from over three years of ethnographic fieldwork in Pampanga in discussing how self-mortification in the Philippines offers new ways of thinking about piety and ritual practice in a urbanized community.

Readings:

- Bautista, Julius. 2011. The Bearable Lightness of Pain: Crucifying Oneself in Pampanga. In: Andrzej Dańczak and Nicola Lazenby. Eds. *Pain: Management, Expression and Interpretation*. Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press. 151-159.
- Bräunlein, Peter J. 2009. Negotiating Charisma: The Social Dimension of Philippine Crucifixion Rituals. *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37. 892-917.

Theme III: Religion and Media

Sanjay Srivastava

Moral Consumption and Post-Nationalism: Religiosity, New Urbanism and Consumer Cultures in India

This lecture explores the connections between contemporary practices of religiosity and two of the most sociologically significant processes of contemporary non-western life, viz., consumerism and the contemporary re-shaping of urban life. I broach the topic through specific ethnographic vignettes relating to attempts by a (Hindu) religious university to combine religious teaching with 'modern personality development' and 'scientific spirituality', gated communities and middle-class religiosity, and a religious theme park in Delhi. These vignettes allow me to both link the worlds of religiosity, consumerism and new forms of urbanism, as well as position the relationship within wider contexts where meanings of terms such as 'the state', 'citizens', 'tradition' and 'modernity' are undergoing change. They also allow for an exploration of two key concepts – 'post-nationalism' and 'moral consumption' – around which the discussion is anchored. These concepts seek to outline frameworks for meaning making in rapidly changing urban environments.

Readings:

- Johnson, Andrew Alan. 2012. Naming chaos: Accident, precariousness, and the spirits of wildness in urban Thai spirit cults. *American Ethnologist* 39:4. 766-778.
- Khek Gee, Francis Lim. 2011. The Eternal Mother and the State: Circumventing Religious Management in Singapore. *Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series* 161.

- Srinivas, Tulasi. 2010. Building Faith: Religious Pluralism, Pedagogical Urbanism, and Governance in the Sathya Sai Sacred City. *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13:3. 301-336.
- Yang, Fenggang. 2005. Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44:4. 423-441.

Dan Smyer Yü

Mediating Religiosities of Tibet in urban China: Sensing Buddhist landscapes/mindscales in Web, Cinema, and Literature

The architecture of digital media in the twenty-first century is not merely built to meet the ever growing demand for high-speed information sharing but is also becoming a global sphere of human sensing, visualizing, and communalizing information transferred. As it makes contact with our thumbs, index fingers, eyes, and eventually thoughts and imagination, the information and its medium are often fused together to trigger the tactility of our eyes and the hapticity of our minds. In this regard, human psychic terrains coincide with the terrains of what is mediated. As a mediated subject, the modes of being religious often rely upon the connectivity of agentive, active perceptions and imaginations generated and modified through the mediascape as it makes its way into human psychic terrain rather than being only premised upon a set of canonic teachings. In turn, the given religion encounters new forms of practices and social entanglements.

This lecture presents a case study of how Tibet is perceived, imagined, and represented in urban China as the site of a global Buddhist spirituality. It is parsed into three segments. First, by discussing the triadic relationship between Chinese Buddhist netizens, the cyber representation of Tibetan lamas, and the forces of the market, it lays out how China's market economy inadvertently engenders an alternative social space for both Tibetan Dharma teachers and Chinese Buddhists, and, in the meantime, turns Tibetan Buddhism into an object of consumption. Second, it discusses how the Tibetan landscape has become an object of topophilia in Chinese popular culture. This portion of the lecture responds to the current body of scholarly literature critiquing what is known as "the imagined Tibet" by proposing a post-Orientalist understanding of Tibet as a unique high place, which possesses its own antecedence in triggering what scholars characterize as "imagination," "fantasy," or "hallucination." Lastly, the lecture discusses how Tibetan independent filmmakers based in urban China develop their own cinematic verisimilitude and believability when they emphasize the inextricability of Tibetan Buddhism from Tibetan cultural and place-based identity and depict the destabilizing forces of globalization and modernization toward Tibetan Buddhist values.

Readings:

- Cowan, Douglas E. 2005. Online U-Topia: Cyberspace and the Mythology of Placelessness. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44:3. 257-263.
- Geoffroy, Martin. 2004. Theorizing Religion in the Global Age: A Typological Analysis. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 18:1-2. 33-46.
- Helland, Christopher. 2005. Online Religion as Lived Religion: Methodological Issues in the Study of Religious Participation on the Internet. *Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet* 1:1.
- Liu, Kang. 2004. *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. Chapter 5: The Internet in China: Emergent Cultural Formations and Contradictions (pages 127-161).
- Pieterse, Jan Nederveen. 2010. Global multicultural: Cultures, transnational culture, deep culture. In: Claudio Baraldi, Andrea Borsari and Augusto Carli. Eds. *Hybrids, Differences, Visions: On the Study of Culture*. Aurora, CO: Davies Group.
- Smyer Yu, Dan. 2011. *The Spread of Tibetan Buddhism in China: Charisma, Money, Enlightenment*. London: Routledge. Introduction: mise-en-scene of Tibetan Buddhism in China: the Polygon of Tibetan Buddhist Revivals in the Twenty-first Century (pages 1-27).