

Abstracts Panel 1: Spatial Dynamics of Religion between Modulation and Conversion

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Ritual imagination of rural village origins among migrants in Ho Chi Minh City: the case of cúng xóm ('hamlet worship') during the lunar new year festival

In recent years an interesting phenomenon can be observed in certain parts of Ho Chi Minh City, especially Tan Binh and Tan Phu districts, usually about eight or nine days after Tet, the lunar new year. On street corners and in alleyways in residential areas at this time, marquees and altars are set up for rituals known as cúng xóm, 'hamlet worship', but which in this context means worship by neighbourhood groups who are long-term migrants to the city from the centre of Vietnam, especially Quang Nam and Da Nang provinces.

This paper describes these rituals and outlines their nature and significance, based on research in Ho Chi Minh City's Tan Phu district and in Da Nang, conducted in 2011-12. It shows how importing this ritual into a new urban environment is linked to the process of urban adaptation, while simultaneously providing the participants with a sense of community and identity linked to their original homes. Cúng xóm also has to be understood within the context of the process of religious revival in Vietnam, itself linked to economic modernization since 1986 and the movement of people associated with this.

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Merging Deities, Religious Conversions, and Spatial Movements of Spirits, Objects and People in Angkor, Cambodia

This paper will discuss the dynamics of several religions in Angkor, Cambodia, by demonstrating how the respective religions have reorganized spaces and recreated the sacred order there. Religions such as the indigenous spirit cult, Hinduism and Buddhism have attempted to overpower or maintain their influences over other religions. In the process guardian spirits appropriated certain Hindu figures in Angkor monuments to demonstrate their powers through spirit mediums' healing practices or finding solutions for the people coming from near and far. While Hindu temples converted to Buddhist, guardian spirits reestablished their abodes in Buddhist temple spaces. People following new cults often combine anything considered powerful and gather in Angkor to organize religious ceremonies or practices. Even cultural objects worshipped as representing particular spirits might have been lost, newly created concrete replacement are made sacred through people's recognition of and continued beliefs in the power of the spirits embodied in the objects and particular places. All these dynamic religious expressions and spatial movements of spirits, objects, and people enhance the sacredness of particular places and space of Angkor on the whole.

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From Churches to Malls: Reconfiguring Worship Spaces in the Philippines

This paper reviews the reconfigurations of the 'centers' of evangelization in modern-day Philippines. The investigation is focused on the shifts in understanding new places of worship in contrast to the traditional notions assigned to places of worship in colonial and post-colonial times. The shifts in understanding have gradually introduced newfound practices in the local churches which bear some pastoral and spiritual implications for the local church in the Philippines today. While the religious dispensation in colonial times placed the Church at the center side by side the seat of civil power representing the King of Spain, the new order sees the places of worship side by side the seats of entertainment. Has the demarcation between commerce and worship been eliminated? This paper shall thresh out the lines through a historical and religio-cultural investigation.

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Profane Temple: Transforming Sacred Space to Profane Space in Buddhist Temples, Thailand

My research focuses on the transformation, in a social and political context, of contemporary Buddhist temple spaces in Thailand. Over the past 100 years, these temples have undergone a transformation from sacred spaces to signifiers of profane space. The article argues that there are three factors in this transformation. Firstly, artistic objects in the temples that were representative of Buddhist cosmological beliefs have become signifiers of Thainess and civilization. Secondly, in the mid-20th century, the Thai government changed its funding policies, forcing the transformation of temples into trade and tourist spaces to ensure their survival. Finally, buildings surrounding the temples that originally served to "simulate" and "mimic" the structure of the spiritual world in traditional society have become a showpiece for the individual creativity and identity of architects and artists. Buddhist temples in Thailand have been fundamentally transformed from sacred spaces to works of art.

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Reproduction of mission frontiers: or why Protestantism can climb the hills of Southeast Asia

It has been said that highland groups in Southeast Asia have maintained a high degree of religious autonomy, blocking the influences of the lowland societies. "Civilization can't climb hills," as James Scott has put it. In the past two centuries, however, many upland groups—in both the mainland and maritime regions—have converted to Protestant Christianity. The Kachin people in northern Myanmar (Burma) is one of them; a vast majority of them are Protestants today. Although much attention has been paid to the pioneering foreign (especially American) missions, most of the evangelical campaigns to the Kachin region have been actually conducted by "indigenous" peoples themselves: first Karen and later Kachin. The "Karen home missions," established in the Irrawaddy Delta, carried out long-term and long-distance mission work across and beyond Myanmar in the 19th century. And then such "home missions" were reproduced elsewhere by other groups including the Kachin, who in the 20th century reached even more remote frontiers such as the Naga and Wa areas. The spatial extension of Protestantism to the uplands has been achieved through the indigenous

reproduction of evangelical frontier missions. That is, the “indigenization” has required a series of frontiers to be successively identified. Framing frontier as “space of conversion” or “space-to-be-converted,” I identify and analyze the key developments both in doctrine and practice of Protestant evangelism that have enabled the reproduction of mission frontiers.

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Religious Conversions and Flexible Spaces in Riung (Flores, eastern Indonesia)

The Riung people of Flores (Ngada District) are divided into Moslems and Catholics sharing a common local cultural identity. Peaceful interreligious coexistence between these communities can well be observed in the regular intermarriages that take place across religious borders. This paper will focus on religious conversions occurring mainly in the context of marriage and will show how local notions related to symbolical spaces accompany shifts in religious identity. Religions in Riung are not treated as mutually exclusive categories but as flexible spaces, both symbolical and inscribed in the landscape. Water used by Moslems for ritual and hygienic purpose becomes in this context a critical component in the elaboration of contrastive identity and spaces. Christians are “people of the dry land” while Moslems are “people of the water”. However in Riung the opposing contrast usually found in this part of Indonesia between inland-Christians and coastal-Moslems is upset at some levels. Since the introduction of Islam (in the nineteenth century) and Christianity (in the twenty century) religious affiliation is adapted and manipulated by the Riung and religious conversions are integrated and institutionalized in the local custom rules (adat). This general modularity and pragmatic flexibility is analyzed in the light of a distinctive historical context in which the adoption of world religions, dynamics of migrations and settlement processes are closely linked.