Religious Diversity Colloquium

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“Exporting Chinese Christianity to Europe: the transnational sacralization of urban space”

As China is being increasingly integrated into global capitalist political economy, more and more Chinese are expected to live transnational lives and conduct business on a global scale. The mass participation of Chinese merchants and traders in migrant churches in Europe is one good example. Drawing on multisited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Wenzhou, Rome and Paris, the paper analyzes this migrant Christianity in terms of its transnational production of evangelical networks and sacred space. For many rural-originated Chinese migrants who embrace a global hierarchy of places, the radical separation between the mundane and the transcendent spheres in evangelical Christianity finds expression in their perceived opposition between the peripheral local and the modern global center in the global market economy. This moral-spatial imagination serves to justify their transnational movement and offers a meaningful way of constructing life in diaspora. As China’s official restrictions on religion increasingly motivate the Chinese house church to channel its resources to a “reverse mission” overseas, a group of transnational Chinese Christians have actively engaged in producing religious activities and events that link China and Europe and in resacralizing secular real estate and attaching evangelistic meanings to Europe’s urban space. This paper probes the transnational geography of an indigenous Chinese Christianity.

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