



Special Lecture in Collaboration with the Department of Religious Studies

In God We are Ethnic: The Global Manifestations of Caodaism in the Vietnamese Diaspora

- Monday, 20 August 2012, 1:30pm
- Seminar room OAW
- Language: English
- Moderation: Lukas Pokorny (University of Aberdeen)



Ninh Thien-Huong is a doctoral candidate in Sociology at the University of Southern California. Her research compares two Vietnamese transnational religious communities - Catholicism and Cao Dai - in the U.S., Cambodia, and Vietnam. Her latest articles include “God needs a Passport: The Struggle of Vietnamese Caodaists in Cambodia for Religious and Ethnic Recognition Across National Borders” and “The Transmission of Religion Across Generations: How Ethnicity Matters”.

Caodaism is a Vietnamese syncretistic indigenous religion that is now being practiced in many countries, with the largest groups in Vietnam (3.9 million), the U.S. (20,000), and Cambodia (3,000). Its globalization is against a historical backdrop of migration to a new country, transplantation in the new society, and institutional re-connection across national borders. This paper investigates the overseas manifestations and transnational exchanges among Cao Dai followers of the Tay Ninh branch, which is structurally and theologically centralized around the Holy See in Tay Ninh and constitutes nearly 60% of all Cao Dai followers around the world. The research focuses on Vietnamese Caodaists in Cambodia and the U.S., the largest communities outside of Vietnam. The cross-country comparison analyzes national and international politics of migration and ethnicity. It traces how these conditions have shaped divergent pathways of religious localization and global orientation among Vietnamese Caodaists in Cambodia and the U.S. The paper aims to draw implications about the trajectory of cross-border ethnic identity collectivity among Vietnamese Cao Dai immigrants and their overseas-born descendants, particularly with regards to their relations with host societies and the homeland.