



Guest Lecture

Floating Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors in North China Plain: Boat-dwelling Fisherpeople's Mobile Pantheon and Ancestral Hall

Ching-chih Lin

Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University

This talk focuses on how environmental change transformed the religious culture by examining the floating community of boat-dwelling fisherpeople in North China. These mobile, isolated boat people adapted to a boat-dwelling lifestyle, organized aquatic social groups, and created innovative religious practices and beliefs in order to maintain their relationships with spirits and ancestors, as well as dispersed lineage members, given that they had no fixed base on land to build temples, ancestral shrines or tombs. These boat dwellers were displaced from their land-based estates and became environmental refugees during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The isolation of the boat people protected their unique religious activities from the anti-religious campaigns of the twentieth century. Some significant elements and structures of religious belief and practice of boat people, namely their ancestral worship and central rituals for deities, remained unchanged, transcending differences in occupation, social status, and environment for centuries. With the assistance of ritualists within the floating community, these boat people endeavored to continue their genealogies and maintain ancestor worship, practices that were equally important to farmers. These shared components can help us rethink core elements and structures of Chinese popular culture, previously based on farmers' experiences, and discern which features are the most significant in Chinese popular religion and how and why they play such vital roles. More importantly, core cultural elements have been resilient and resistant to environmental change.

Friday July 8, 2016 • 2 pm (c.t.) • KWZ 0.610