

Call for Papers

Muslim Minorities and Questions of Secularity in China and Beyond

International Workshop at Leipzig University, 9-10 June 2023

Conveners:

- Yee Lak Elliot Lee, Institute for the Study of Religions, Leipzig University
- Markus Dressler, Institute for the Study of Religions/Modern Turkish Studies, Leipzig University
- Hubert Seiwert, Centre for Advanced Studies “Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities”, Leipzig University
- James D. Frankel, Cultural and Religious Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong,

This interdisciplinary workshop investigates the role of secularity – that is, conceptual distinctions and institutional differentiations between “religion” and its others – in the formation and normalization of Muslim minorities, with a focus on China. Recent developments in China give a strong impression of Muslim minorities being subjugated under a state-led secularist regime. Therein, Muslims are discursively disciplined by means of semantically overlapping binaries, such as religion/secular, legal/illicit, good/bad, local/foreign, and modern/traditional. While this scenario puts emphasis on the agency of the state, our workshop aims at exploring the roles of various actors (including but not limited to Muslims and state authorities) in resisting, appropriating, altering, and reproducing such binaries to sustain or upset established religious and secular fields. Whereas the Chinese state justifies its approach to regulating Islam by mimicking practices of other countries from which it seeks endorsement, Muslims respond to the secularist regime by drawing on symbolic and material resources from their transregional networks. These actors’ manoeuvres point to continuities with and breakaways from longer historical dynamics, as Muslims settled and displaced in and out of China in past exchanges and conquests along the overland and maritime “silk roads”, through post-Cold War dynamics of globalization and reterritorialization.

Against this background, we are seeking papers based on empirical work that address the following themes:

- Transregional dynamics in responses, by Muslims as well as non-Muslims, to religious differences in China – valuing the analytical insights of entangled history that goes beyond the Chinese context.
- The roles of Muslim minorities in developing distinctions and differentiations and their recodification in religion-secular terms. How do they respond to (proto-)secularist political programs in historical and contemporary China and/or beyond?
- Specific issues or reference problems that various actors address in the formation and/or contestation of Chinese Muslim practices in relation to hegemonic notions of religion and secularity.
- Responses by Muslim minorities and other segments of society to particular secular(ist) arrangements (e.g., Han nationalists’ or Christians’ rejection of ethnic minority *halal* economy). How are modern conceptualizations of religion and its demarcation toward various others (or their historical precedents) experienced amongst Muslims (e.g., habituation via religious/secular education; spatial demarcation of Islamic and non-Islamic space; mediascapes)?

- How should we compare and correlate secularities (or the lack thereof) developed in China in relation to the presence of Muslim minorities and those found beyond China's border? What would be their theoretical implications on the scholarly debates of secularity, secularization, and the secular?

Costs for travel and accommodation will be covered for all invited participants from outside of Leipzig without institutional funding of their own. Round-trip traveling costs to Leipzig will be reimbursed with a capped amount. In case of travel restrictions due to the pandemic, the workshop will be held in a hybrid format, allowing virtual participation. The workshop language will be English.

The workshop is organized and funded by the DFG Research Project "Negotiating Modern Sino-Muslim (Hui) Subjectivities, 1900-1960: Reforming Islam in China" at the Institute for the Study of Religions and the Centre for Advanced Studies "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities" at Leipzig University, and in collaboration with the Centre for the Study of Islamic Culture at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

We intend to publish selected papers in a special journal issue or an edited volume and are therefore interested in original contributions.

Please send your applications and direct all inquiries to Yee Lak Elliot Lee:
yee_lak_elliot.lee@uni-leipzig.de.

Timeline

- 16 January 2023: Deadline for abstract (300–400 words) and short biography
- Early February 2023: Notification of acceptance
- 28 April 2023: Deadline for full paper drafts
- 9-10 June 2023: Workshop