



Friday Seminar

History Written in Advance: The Temporal Politics of Learning Mandarin for Jehovah's Witnesses in Zambia



Date: 30 Oct 2020

Time: 1-2:30 pm

Speaker:

Justin Lee Haruyama
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Zoom Meeting Link: <https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/98247596761>

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Over the last decade, there have been a proliferating number of Mandarin-language Jehovah's Witnesses congregations in Zambia. These congregations are almost exclusively composed of local Zambians who have learned Mandarin as a second language, and count few to no ethnic Chinese congregants among their number. Nevertheless, these congregations conduct their meetings exclusively in Mandarin, and their Zambian congregants have attained a very high degree of fluency in Mandarin. Though ostensibly formed for the purpose of evangelizing to Zambia's rapidly growing Chinese migrant community, members of the congregation emphasize that the apparent lack of Chinese converts is no failure at all. Regardless of the outcome of their efforts, what is important is that their intense evangelizing is part of an ongoing fulfillment of their obligations to Jehovah God. Thus, the relations between these Witnesses and the Chinese they proselytize to are not dialogic but triangular. Their evangelizing efforts represent a challenge to secular time: while secular portrayals of Chinese expatriates "buying up" Zambia rest upon teleological assumptions of economic and political development, these congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses act upon a temporal horizon in which Biblical truths must be quickly spread before the rapidly approaching dissolution of the current system of things.



Biography:

Justin L. Haruyama is a Ph.D. candidate in cultural anthropology at UC Davis. His dissertation examines the controversial presence of Chinese migrants and investors in Zambia today. Haruyama explores the diverse forms of relationality enabled by these encounters, ranging from intimacy and fellowship, to exclusion, to mutual dependence and obligation. Taking issue with simplistic narratives that have too frequently painted Chinese companies and individuals in Africa as either neocolonial exploiters or South-South, "win-win" development partners, Haruyama brings these domains together to demonstrate that concrete encounters between Chinese and Zambians are far more ambivalent and open-ended than is often portrayed by contemporary rhetoric about "China in Africa."

ALL INTERESTED ARE WELCOME!