“Little Hanois” and “Little Saigons”: Cold War Polarities in Diasporic Vietnamese Temples

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Vietnam’s long civil war between rival capitals in Hanoi and Saigon has meant that overseas communities in the United States, Australia, and Canada are overwhelmingly made up of refugees from southern Vietnam, while overseas communities in eastern Europe (Prague, Berlin, Warsaw and Moscow) are made up mainly of students and contract workers who came from northern Vietnam. Building on previous research in California’s “Little Saigons”, I reflect on new fieldwork on the ritual life of the “Little Hanois”, where a resurgence of popular religious practices has accompanied post-socialist development. Regional differences have traveled to new destinations and interacted with the cosmopolitan challenges of practicing Vietnamese religion in secular European countries. Generational differences, ritual uses of the flags of Saigon and Hanoi, the worship and/or commemoration of the spirit of Ho Chi Minh, the Hung kings, and of nature-based mother goddesses are explored in these new settings, for a comparative analysis of how cold war polarities continue to cast a shadow in contemporary Vietnamese communities.


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Room 203, Luce Hall, 34 Hillhouse Avenue