

China Research Seminar Series (Michaelmas 2020)

Protestant Christian Names, Naming and Religious Legitimacy in Contemporary China



Dr Mark McLeister

(University of Edinburgh)

5pm, 25 Nov, 2020 (Wednesday) via Zoom (pre-registration required)

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/tJUuf-irrij0jHNUSQ6G-dwRX2rAGrOAikNQX>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email
containing information about joining the seminar.

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Abstract

Despite the social and political significance of personal names in Chinese societies, not much research has been published on names and naming in contemporary Chinese religious contexts. This paper will explore names (both 'milk' names and formal-legal names) and the naming process in a Protestant community in the People's Republic of China, and will analyse the roles which names play in the building of Protestant identity. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, this paper will offer some preliminary analysis of different categories of Protestant names. It will further explain the motivations of Protestant Christian parents who choose to name their children with religious names and discuss the role of church leaders who are often sought out by parents to name children. I will argue that as name-givers, church leaders are legitimised in the broader church community. The paper will further analyse the multiplicity of roles which these Protestant names play in church communities: how names serve as a 'reminder' of the Christian identity of the parents, the name-bearer and the wider church community; how Protestant names serve as a 'protector' of the child until they have a 'proper' understanding of their religious faith; and of how such names are seen as helping to shape the bearer's religious identity. Although further fieldwork is needed to explore this topic, it is hoped that this paper will help expand our understanding of how the religious identities of Christians are formed in contemporary China.

Speaker

Mark McLeister is Lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Edinburgh where he teaches on various aspects of Chinese societies and research skills and methods. Mark's primary research interest is 'popular Christianity' in the People's Republic of China and he has recently published ethnographies of grassroots Pentecostal-style practices in urban China (*Asian Ethnology*) and a Deaf Christian congregation (*Studies in World Christianity*). He is currently working on two projects: one on church festivals (namely Christmas and Easter), where he is exploring ritual exchange and the culture of hosting, and another project on 'Christian' personal names, which he'll be presenting on in this seminar.