

Christian Circulations: Missionary Helps Postcards and the Evangelization of Asia, 1907-1924

Speaker: Professor Emeritus Jean DeBernardi (University of Alberta)

Date/Time: 29 Feb 2024 (Thu), 3:00 - 4:30 pm

Location: Wan Boo Sow Research Centre (AS8-05-49)

Host: Professor Kenneth Dean (Department of Chinese Studies)

Abstract

In *Christian Circulations: Global Christianity and the Local Church in Penang, and Singapore, 1819-2000* (2020), I explore the globalization of the nondenominational evangelical Christian movement known as the Brethren Movement. In 1819, the London Missionary Society founded the first British Protestant missions in Penang, Singapore, Malacca, and Java. The LMS missionaries viewed their work in Southeast Asia as preparation for work in China, and as soon as it was possible to do so, they moved to mainland China. Independent missionaries took over running the schools they had founded, and eventually the Open Brethren missionary support group Echoes of Service took on the responsibility to raise funds for the missions in Penang, Malacca, and Singapore.

Between 1907 and 1924, an organization in Liverpool called Missionary Helps also supported Brethren missionary efforts by selling sets of educational postcards. The postcards and a related publication, *Links of Help with Other Lands*, reveal that millennial expectations fueled missionary efforts in the early 20th century, in particular as new technologies of travel and communications conquered time and space. China continued to be a focus of their fundraising efforts, and the Christians interpreted world events there and elsewhere to raise hopes that Christian missionary efforts were succeeding. I conclude that individual creators like the inventor of the Missionary Helps postcards and the editors of the Open Brethren magazines are responsible for proposing the visual and textual synthesis that inform our understandings of what religions are.

About the Speaker

Jean DeBernardi is Professor Emerita of Anthropology at the University of Alberta. She received her training as a cultural anthropologist at Stanford University, Oxford University, and the University of Chicago and has been teaching in Canada since 1991. She has done extensive ethnographic and archival research focusing on Singapore, Penang, and two UNESCO World Heritage sites in China, Wudang Mountain, a popular pilgrimage site for Southeast Asian Daoists, and Wuyi Mountain, a famous tea-growing area in Northern Fujian.

