Religious Diversity Colloquium

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“Islam in modern China: the case of Hui community and secularism”

Religion in Modern China has not existed in the public space; however, Islam is the exception to this official policy of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and traditional Chinese characteristics. In this context, Islam has always been seen by the state as the other one which should be controlled; therefore, the religious affairs directory of the state—similar to the Turkish directory of religious affairs—was established by the state. However, the state has not intervened in the Islamic way of life among the Hui community, which is ethnic Chinese Muslims. The Hui community in China has not been studied as extensively as other Muslim communities around the world. Although the Hui community converted to Islam in the early eighth century, making it older than Chechens, Bosnians, Albanians, and many others, they have always been viewed as the other by the Muslim community across the globe. However, this shadow image of Hui began to change in the early 2000s. China’s open-door policy has transformed the Hui community from more local, introverted, and traditional to more global and connected to the larger Muslim network. As a result, the Hui community is changing very rapidly and moving towards a part of Muslim global ummah, which was not the case before 2000. The Hui community is becoming more religious, and we witness the revitalization of Islam among the community, populated all over China. On the other hand, Huis are also becoming more secular, which is linked to the commodification of religion and modernity and is a product of the capitalist mode of production. In this article, I examine the transformation of the Hui community from a part of a godless society to revitalization of religion and moving toward secularism. I argue that the Hui community has been secularized as a result of the market conditions of capitalism with Chinese characteristics.