The Catholic Church and Its People in Cambodia

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This presentation will trace the history of the Catholic Church in Cambodia and examines its efforts of rebuilding since its return to the country in the 1990s. A special focus is on the Cambodian Catholic Church's relations and attitudes toward Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese. How has the Church shifted its policies toward Khmer-Vietnamese relations since its return to Cambodia? Why has the Church pursued these changes? The presentation will also discuss how Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese are relating to each other under the eyes of the Catholic Church. I will share data recently collected at the 2008-built popular pilgrimage center devoted to Our Lady of the Mekong River in Phnom Penh. This is where Khmer and ethnic Vietnamese regularly meet and pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Today, the center has become so popular that it has attracted visitors from around the world.

Thien-Huong T. Ninh is currently a Bolin Fellow (2012-2014) at Williams College and a former CKS Senior Fellow (2010-2011). In May 2013, Ms. Ninh successfully defended her dissertation, Religion of a Different Color: Vietnamese Catholic and Caodai U.S.-Cambodia Ties, at the University of Southern California. Her dissertation investigates two Vietnamese transnational religious communities - Catholic and Caodai - based in the U.S. and Cambodia. The project engages with discussions about immigration, diaspora, and racialized religion. Her research interests include Ethnicity, Race, Diaspora, Comparative Religion, and International Migration and Transnationalism.