

## Volume 11: Chinese Religions Going Global

# Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion

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*Edited by*

Nanlai Cao, Giuseppe Giordan and Fenggang Yang



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# Preface

*Nanlai Cao, Giuseppe Giordan, Fenggang Yang*

Four decades of economic reform and opening up in China has brought about dramatic social and cultural changes associated with globalization. As China is being increasingly integrated into global economy, more and more Chinese live transnational lives and practice religion globally. So far the scholarship of the interrelationship between religion and globalization in the Chinese religious field has primarily been set in the historical context of the encounter between Western Christian missionaries and local Chinese agents, and little is known about a global Chinese religious field that is in the making. By now the relationship has become substantially diversified, with an increasing number of Chinese people going abroad for various religious as well as non-religious reasons, including planting new temples and churches to reach local people as well as serving the Chinese diaspora. A reverse trend in the globalization of Chinese religions has also occurred as more and more diasporic Chinese religious groups seek to build or rebuild their ties to the motherland for religious, economic or cultural reasons.

At the present stage of China's globalization, there is an intellectual urgency of going beyond the China/West dichotomy in the common narrative of globalization that assumes western concepts and forces transform the lives of local Chinese people. This volume seeks to challenge the dichotomous ordering of the western global and the Chinese local, and to add a new perspective for understanding religious modernity globally. Our contributors come from diverse social science disciplines and from four different continents. Together we aim at applying a social scientific approach to systematically researching the globalization of Chinese religions.

A distinctive feature of this volume is its geographic focus on Europe with 8 of the 14 chapters examining various cases of Chinese religion and Chinese religious communities in Italy, France, Britain, Germany and Austria. Much of the literature on immigrant Chinese religions have tended to be based on research conducted in North American, which contributes to a dominant paradigm for the sociological study of religion worldwide. As Europe is becoming the new centre of global migration from other countries, it provides a new and different social context for conceptualizing religion and globalization with reference to these new migrants who lack long histories of settlement overseas.

While we have sought to diversify our cases based on religion, half of the 14 chapters focus on Christian religion, especially Protestantism. This

overrepresentation, we believe, may well speak to the mobility and transcendent nature of congregational Christianity, giving Chinese Christians a unique institutional advantage in setting up diasporic communities globally. In contrast, chapters focusing on indigenous Chinese religions like Yiguandao and Chinese Qigong mainly invoke the story of the westernization of Chinese religious traditions as an alternative form of spirituality in a shifting global field.

Ting Deng's opening chapter provides an in-depth ethnographic picture of a group of Chinese Christians who operate Italian coffee bars in Bologna, a major hub of Wenzhou Christian coffee bar business. This study shows vividly how religion, business and the family interact in the life of Chinese immigrant Christians in Italy, especially how traditional family values help to solve the moral dilemmas faced by these migrant entrepreneurs when they find their conservative Christian morality in conflict with secular entrepreneurial values. The picture of Chinese Christian bar owners with a dual identity navigating morally ambiguous daily life provides a timely counterpoint against the view of Chinese migrants in Europe as purely economic agents. This seems to be a common ground reached by both Deng's chapter and other chapters on Chinese religion in Europe in this volume.

In Chapter 2 Nanlai Cao explores the rise of Protestant Christianity in the Chinese diaspora in Italy and France as both a case of the sinicization of Christianity and a product of China's reform-era globalization. This ethnographic account shows that in the current context of China's aggressive business outreach and mass emigration Christianity has become a vital social force and moral resource in binding Chinese merchants and traders in diaspora. Drawing on multisited fieldwork, the analysis captures the rise of a sinicized Christianity in secular Europe with an emphasis on ethnic congregational dynamics, migrant lay leadership and a self-envisioned Chinese-led global mission movement.

In Chapter 3 Berti Pedone documents the development and social functions of a major Buddhist temple in Prato, the largest Chinese migrant business center in Italy. The picture of Puhuasi Temple and wealthy Chinese lay Buddhists publicly engage with Italian society by making donations nationwide seems to contrast sharply with their Christian counterparts who tend to form large exclusive ethnic congregations. It is a minority religion positive about outreach, interaction with and assimilation to the host society, reflecting complex intertwined dynamics between religion and ethnicity.

In Chapter 4 Marco Guglielmi provides a timely case study of Chinese Catholics in the West. In contrast to the significant and growing literature on Chinese Protestantism in North America and Europe, we have little in-depth knowledge about their Catholic counterparts. This study examines both the



historical development and the current situation of the Chinese Catholic community in Italy, a far smaller minority compared to the Chinese Protestant counterpart. The self-enclosed nature of the Chinese Catholic community and its parallel ritual life separate from that of the Italian parishes echoes the situation of Chinese Protestant congregations in Europe, and the Chinese Catholics seem to be less transnational than the Protestant group.

Chapter 5 by Xinan Li, Line Nyhagen, and Thoralf Klein documents the recent Chinese Christian presence in Britain. While Christianity is supposedly the dominant religion among British Chinese, a large number of Chinese Christians in Britain are new converts. This differs from their counterparts in other European nations, especially those Wenzhou Christians who have brought with them their indigenous faith tradition from China. The uniqueness of this British Chinese Christian group lies in its members being mostly students and professionals recently coming from the PRC. This current wave of Chinese migrants are considered having stronger personal and political connections to the motherland than the previous ones, thus reshaping the socio-religious dynamics of Chinese Christian communities in contemporary Britain.

Chapter 6 by Jie Kang captures the dynamic rise and active operation of a Germany-centred transnational and independent Chinese Christian network sustained by ethnic Chinese ministries from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and North America. Interestingly, backed by this transnational church network, Chinese Christian fellowships in Germany mainly target Chinese students from the mainland as potential converts, and do not interact with German churches or church organizations. There are much internal cultural, linguistic, political diversity within the Chinese congregants, and they need to constantly negotiate different identities, religious and otherwise and carve out a transnational Chinese Christian space not directly linked to the PRC.

In Chapter 7 Chris White and Jifeng Liu explore transnational Chinese Christian networks linking south Fujian and southeast Asia with a focus on the role of overseas Chinese Christians in southeast Asia. Previous literature has focused on the role of popular religion in connecting south China with Southeast Asia, this study shows how the overlooked Christian networks operate between China and southeast Asia, mainly by funding church building projects in the city of Xiamen and making investment in theological training for Chinese Christians from both the Xiamen region and other parts of China.

In Chapter 8 Jonathon Tam draws on a case study on Chinese Canadian evangelicals' short-term missions (STM) to China to point out serious contradictions and ironies in the STM experience and explores the meaning making process associated with STM. Ethnographic interviews with some Chinese Canadian evangelical youths before and after STM trips provide rich data on how

they negotiate their ethnic, national and religious identities. There has been little research on STM from the ethnic Chinese in the West. This study might fill a gap in our knowledge.

In the following two chapters both Hung-Jen Yang and Nikolas Broy focus on the global spread and engagement of Yiguandao, an indigenous syncretic Chinese religion. They both draw on multisited ethnographic fieldwork and contribute to our understanding of perhaps the most transnational indigenous Chinese religion today that claims 30 million members worldwide.

In Chapter 9 Hung-Jen Yang explores the globalization of Yiguandao with special reference to Yiguandao missionaries and followers in Britain. It highlights two distinctive approaches or strategies of adaptation taken by the Yiguandao missionaries to spread the Chinese religion in the West. Using the diasporic Chinese community (the Vietnamese Chinese enclave) and the Yiguandao branch temple attended by mainly westerners in London and Manchester as two contrasting cases, Yang shows a vivid and convincing picture of how an indigenous Chinese religion has been able to adapt to the condition of global modernity.

In Chapter 10 Broy provides an overview of the origin, evolution and innovation of the movement and a solid specific case study of a Yiguandao branch in Vienna, suggesting the connection between Taiwanese business migration and Yiguandao proselytization. Unlike most transnational Chinese religious movements that operate mainly among ethnic Chinese, this study shows the missionary outreach efforts of Yiguandao as a unique form of Asian spirituality appealing to non-Chinese practitioners.

In Chapter 11 Utiraruto Otehode and Benjamin Penny detail the rise of transnational qigong networks, a new phenomenon emerged since the ban of Falungong and other qigong groups in the PRC in the late 1990s. By emphasizing the role of state regulations, it adds to the growing literature on transnational Chinese religious networks that has conventionally focused on the mobility of immigrant religion. The main contribution of this study thus lies in its analysis of the connection between the Chinese state management of qigong and the flourishing of several qigong groups overseas such as Falungong, Putigong and Tian Gong that have reacted differently to state categorization and pressures.

In Chapter 12 Anna Sun examines transnational Confucianism as a religious identity in the twenty-first century by mainly using the case of a small community of ethnically Chinese Indonesians who identify themselves as Confucians. While lack of clear religious identification has traditionally characterized the presence of Confucianism in East Asia and parts of Southeast Asia, contemporary Confucianism offers a case of the increasing transformation of implicit

religious identity into explicit religious identity in the development of transnational and global religious life.

The last two chapters examine the faith and life of Chinese migrants with a geographic focus on Dubai, UAE. Yuting Wang gives a careful portrait of several Chinese religious groups in Dubai with an emphasis on diverse individual experiences of soul-searching among overseas Chinese. The chapter by Jacqueline Armijo and Shaojin Chai draws on historical analysis of China's Islamic education and recent fieldwork conducted in Dubai. It explores the role of religious and language training in the formation and expansion of the Chinese Muslim diasporic community of Dubai, which has become both a centre of international trade and an Islamic education hub for Chinese Muslims.

The 14 case studies collected in this volume all deal with an increasingly globalized and mutable Chinese religious field, a phenomenon that is still unfolding and to a large extent has been shaped by the unique cultural and linguistic experience of the mobile religious subjects in response to the secular and religious culture of the host society. They demonstrate that Chinese religions will continue to adapt to the condition of global modernity, in which process multiple forms of global interconnectedness lead to multiple sinicizations. What would be the effects of economic and geopolitical power shifts, new immigration regime, changing state-religion relations, the coming of age of the second generation and the world's growing anxieties about China's powerful rise on Chinese religions on a global stage? While providing locally grounded explorations and explanations to the mechanisms and modes of cross-border religious and cultural exchanges, our contributors have raised important and meaningful issues that help identify new trends and theoretically fruitful areas for future exploration.