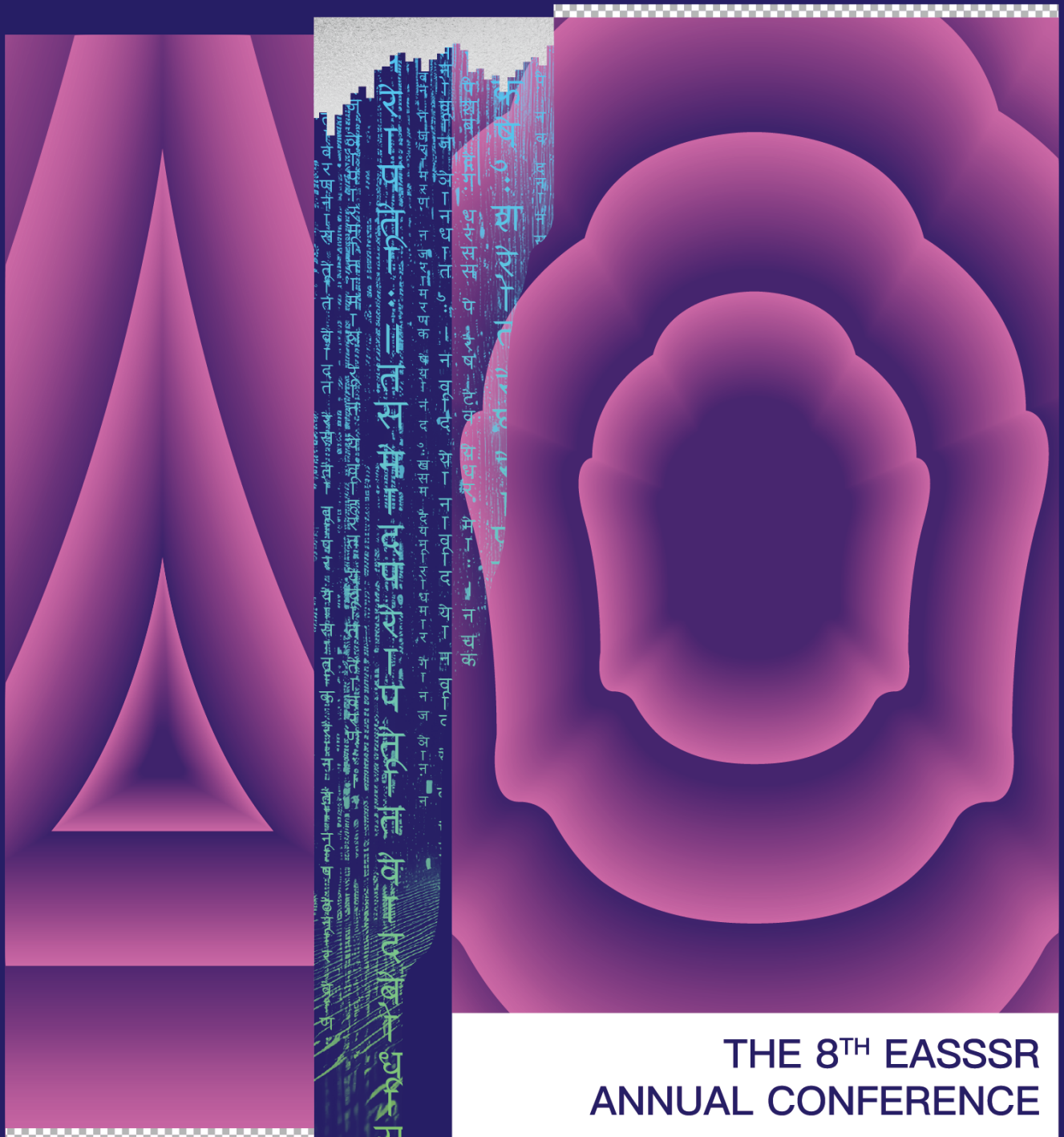


RELIGION AND DIGITAL WORLDS

DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS ADAPTATION,
RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION



THE 8TH EASSSR
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Day 1 (July 1)

TIME			
10:00-10:05	Opening Ceremony Venerable Ru Chang (Director, Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum) Main Conference Hall		
10:05-11:15	Presidential Address <i>"Three Layers of Religion in the Global Religious Field"</i> Palmer, David A. (President, EASSSR) Main Conference Hall		
11:15-11:30	Break		
11:30-12:10	Video Appreciation <i>"AI in Religious Studies"</i> Lancaster, Lewis R. (University of California, Berkeley) Main Conference Hall		
12:10-13:10	Lunch		
13:10-14:40	ROOM A Digitalized Environmental and Peace Movements of SGI Moderator: Fisker-Nielsen, Anne Mette 4 Papers	ROOM B Religion and Social Welfare Moderator: Laliberte, Andre 4 Papers	ROOM C Religious Liberty Issues in East Asia Moderator: Introvigne, Massimo 4 Papers
14:40-15:00	Break		
15:00-16:10	ROOM A Religions in Southeast Asia I Moderator: Shu, Mu-Lung 3 Papers	ROOM B Religion, Social Conflict and War Moderator: Sakurai, Yoshihide 3 Papers	ROOM C Religious Resilience and Innovation in the Digital Age I Moderator: Irons, Edward 3 Papers
16:10-16:15	Break		
16:15-17:15	Overview & Highlights of Fo Guang Shan Main Conference Hall		

Day 2 (July 2)

TIME			
09:15-10:45	ROOM A Spirituality, Science, and Animal in the Digitalized Worlds Moderator: Song, Francis Jae-Ryong 4 Papers	ROOM B Migration, Politics and Religion I Moderator: Ng, Ka Shing 4 Papers	ROOM C Religious Identity in the Digital Age Moderator: Shimizu, Koki 4 Papers
10:45-11:00	Break		
11:00-12:10	ROOM A Religion, Gender and Sexuality Moderator: Wang, Yang 3 Papers	ROOM B Migration, Politics and Religion II Moderator: Chaopreecha, Jakraphan 3 Papers	ROOM C Religion and Social Theory I Moderator: Yang, Xiaozhao 3 Papers
12:10-13:10	Lunch		
13:10-14:40	ROOM A Dao, Crisis, and Adaptation Moderator: Ng, William 4 Papers	ROOM B Civil Religion and Religious Social Engagement Moderator: Chan, Shun Hing 4 Papers	ROOM C Religion in Quantitative Focus Moderator: Su, Kuo-Hsien 4 Papers
14:40-15:00	Break		
15:00-16:10	ROOM A Religion and Gender Moderator: Huang, Weishan 3 Papers	ROOM B Religious Transmission and Informal Islamic Education in South Korea and Taiwan Moderator: Chiou, Syuan Yuan 3 Papers	ROOM C Religions in Southeast Asia II Moderator: Lin, Yu-Sheng 3 Papers
16:10-16:15	Break		
16:15-17:15	TOUR Six Perfections Pagoda One-Stroke Calligraphy & Twin Pavilions Tea Chan Ceremony		

Day 3 (July 3)

TIME			
09:15-10:45	ROOM A Ritual, Festival and Religion Moderator: Wang, Bing 4 Papers	ROOM B Religion in Social Media Moderator: Shmushko, Kai 4 Papers	ROOM C Religion and Social Theory II Moderator: Lim, Francis Khék Gee 4 Papers
10:45-11:00	Break		
11:00-12:10	ROOM A Religion and Arts Moderator: Ho, Wai Chung 3 Papers	ROOM B Religious Resilience and Innovation in the Digital Age II Moderator: Lin, Ching-Chih 3 Papers	ROOM C Migration, Politics and Religion III Moderator: Tajima, Tadaastu 3 Papers
12:10-13:10	Lunch		
13:10-14:20	ROOM A Religion, Economics, and New Religion in the Modern World Moderator: Tovankasame, Nicha 3 Papers	ROOM B Religious Resilience and Innovation in the Digital Age III Moderator: Tischer, Jacob 3 Papers	ROOM C Digital Faith Communities Moderator: Horiuchi, Midori 3 Papers
14:20-14:40	Break		
14:40-16:50	Plenary Meeting Main Conference Hall		
16:50-16:55	Break		
16:55-18:00	TOUR Main Hall Exhibitions & Shrines		
18:15-20:30	Farewell Dinner Diner at Fo Guang Shan		

Day 4 (July 4)

TIME			
09:15-12:00	TOUR Sutra Repository		
12:00-13:30	Experiencing the Formal Meal Offering in the Monastery		
13:30-16:30	TOUR Fo Guang Shan Monastery		
16:30-16:45	Departure		

DAY 1 | 13:10-14:40 | ROOM A

Digitalized Environmental and Peace Movements of SGI Page 14

Living the "Buddhist" Dharma and the Question of the Animal in the Age of the Anthropocene

Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen (Soka University)

Religion as a Buffer against Social Atomization: Soka Gakkai and the Ethics of Rebuilding Social Relations

Youngyun Yeo (Korea University)

The Future We Make: Climate Change Governance for the Common Good of Humankind through Makiguchi Tsunesaburo's Concept of Humanitarian Competition

Jiyeon Jeong (Sookmyung Women's University)

Weaving Faith into Citizenship: Digital Resources and Face-to-Face Community in SGI-Korea's Peace Practice.

Suhyun Lee (IRCC, Kyung Hee University)

DAY 1 | 13:10-14:40 | ROOM B

Religion and Social Welfare Page 18

At the Intersection of Religious Salvation and Public Welfare Foster Care and Children's Freedom of Religion: The Case of Tenrikyo

Shigeru Aoki (Institute of Science Tokyo)

Characteristics of Forest Protection Activities by Religions in Contemporary Japan

Norihito Takahashi (Toyo University)

Grief Care and Activities of Religious Practitioners

Shunichi Miyajima (Hokkaido University)

Religion and Welfare: Why There Is No Confucian Welfare State?

Andre Laliberte (University of Ottawa)

DAY 1 | 13:10-14:40 | ROOM C

Religious Liberty Issues in East Asia Page 22

"Cult" Controversies in Asia: Democratic Neutrality, Delegitimization and the Erosion of Religious Liberty

Massimo Introvigne (CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions))

Marco Respinti (The Journal of CESNUR, Milan, Italy)

Human Rights, Religious Liberty, and the Limits of Legal Reform: Lessons from Contemporary Taiwanese Cases

Rowena Lee (Independent scholar, Taipei, Taiwan)

Religious Freedom and Institutional Path Dependency: Rethinking the Tai Ji Men Tax Controversy in Taiwan

Chih-chung Wu (Independent scholar, Taipei, Taiwan)

Religious Gifts, Transitional Justice, and Incentive Structures: A Three-Dimensional Analysis of Taiwan's Tai Ji Men Case

Shang-Bin Wen (Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy)

DAY 1 | 15:00-16:10 | ROOM A

Religions in Southeast Asia I Page 26

Beyond Guan Yin's Shadow: Zhao Cai Tong Zi (招财童子) and the Dynamics of Folk Buddhist Deity Centralization in Malaysia

Li Ying Sam (Independent Researcher)

Merit, Virtue, and Power: Rethinking Buddhist "Economy of Merit" through Myanmar's Free Funeral Service Movement

Mu-Lung Hsu (National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University)

Chris Maria: Goddess in Cross-Cultural Maritime Belief?

Mingqian Xu (Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies (CAPAS), Research Center for Humanities and Social Studies (RCHSS), Academia Sinica)

DAY 1 | 15:00-16:10 | ROOM B

Religion, Social Conflict and War Page 29

The Unexamined Unification Church in Japan: The Trial of the Suspect in the Assassination of Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

Yoshihide Sakurai (Hokkaido University)

Two Impeachments and the Development of Protestant Fundamentalism in Korea: Mobilizing Infrastructures and Justificatory Frames in the Park and Yoon Cases

Hyung Chull Jang (Induk University)

Why did the Monks Take Part in the Imjin War? A Question of Corrupted Monks or Institutional Necessity

Sung-Eun Thomas Kim (Dongguk University)

DAY 1 | 15:00-16:10 | ROOM C

Religious Resilience and Innovation in the Digital Age I Page 32

A Study of Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism in the Digital Age: A Case Study of the "Buddhist Maritime Silk Road - New Media Art Exhibition " at the Buddha Museum

Miaolin Shi (Administrative Center, Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center)

Mapping Buddhist Knowledge: The Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism as a Dataset for the Scientific Study of Religion

Miao Guang Shih (Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism)

Organizational Design and East Asian Religions in the Era of AI

Edward Irons (Hong Kong Institute For Culture, Commerce And Religion)

DAY 2 | 09:15-10:45 | ROOM A

Spirituality, Science, and Animal in the Digitalized Worlds Page 35

A Study on the Perceptions and Current Status of Companion Animals in Korean Protestantism: From the Perspective of Human-Nonhuman Reciprocity

Andrew Eungi Kim (Division of International Studies, Korea University)

Jongman Kim (Institute for Religion and Civic Culture, Kyung Hee University)

Imposing Spirituality on Non-Human Companions in the Hyper-connected Community

Kwang Suk Yoo (IRCC, Kyung Hee University)

Dong-Uhn Suh (Kyung Hee University)

Posthuman Care Practices among People with Type 1 Diabetes Using DIY Artificial Pancreas Systems:
Implications for the Sociology of Religion

Min Kyung Cha (Kyung Hee University)

Woosung Jang (Kyung Hee University)

Quantum Consciousness Theory and Its Implications for the Sociology of Spirituality/Religion: Focusing on the
Orch-OR Theory

Francis Jae-ryong Song (Kyung Hee University)

Hyun Woo Kim (Chungbuk National University)

DAY 2 | 09:15-10:45 | ROOM B

Migration, Politics and Religion I Page 39

Christianity in Hong Kong Under Political Change: Strategies of Religious Adaptation

Ka Shing Ng (Hokkaido University)

The Contraction of Religion's Interstitial Social Space in China: The Case of a Jiangnan Three-Self Church, 2015-
2026

Megan Rogers (Duke Kunshan University)

Zhenyu Tian (Duke Kunshan University)

Haozhe Lou (Duke Kunshan University)

The Exodus of the Grey and the Black: A Comparative Study of the Survival Strategies of Two Out-migrating
Churches from China

Mingui Gao (Purdue University)

Transnational Religious Networks of Mongolia and the Mongolian Diaspora in the United States

Katsuhiko Takizawa (Osaka University of Economics)

DAY 2 | 09:15-10:45 | ROOM C

Religious Identity in the Digital Age Page 43

Perception of AI Civilization in Daesoon Thought

Soyeon Joo (Daejin University)

Gyungwon Lee (Daejin University)

The Relationship of Youth with Hui Ethnicity and Islam in Modern Chinese City: A Case Study Based in Shenzhen

Tianlin Gao (Hokkaido University)

Threads of Merit: Affect, Affordance, and Ethics in Digital Taiwan

Yu-ting Lin (National Tsing Hua University)

C. Julia Huang (National Tsing Hua University)

What Does It Mean to Answer "Don't Know" to Questions on Religious Belief? Patterns in the ISSP 2018 Japan
Survey

Koki Shimizu (Doshisha University)

A Study on the Experience of LGBTQ+ Members of Soka Gakkai Japan: What Is There to Be Learnt about the Current Status of Gender Equality Advocacy within the Organisation?

Margot Colletti (Graduate School of Social Sciences, Waseda University)

"Middle Women Rising (zhongnü jueqi)": Framing Gendered Empowerment on Chinese Social Media

Jialin Chen (The University of Hong Kong)

Too Religious for Our Group: Digital Gate-keeping, Queer Resilience, and the Threat of Religious Change

Tzu-Chien Yen (Academia Sinica)

DAY 2 | 11:00-12:10 | ROOM B

Migration, Politics and Religion II Page 50

Religion as a Contentious Space of Authoritarian Influence: United Front Networks and the Contestation of Civil Society in Taiwan

Ray Wang (National Chengchi University)

Religious Nationalism: The Reconfiguration of Taoism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Shamanic Cultures in Phuket, Thailand

Jakraphan Chaopreecha (Prince of Songkla University, Phuket)

DAY 2 | 11:00-12:10 | ROOM C

Religion and Social Theory I Page 52

Latent and Syncretic Patterns of Religiosity in Contemporary Urban China

Xiaozhao Yang (Sun Yat-sen University)

On the Social Quantum Hypothesis of Spirituality and Religion

ChinChen Cheng (Institute of Religion, National Chengchi University)

Who is My Neighbor - Moral Community Formation in Urban Chinese House Churches

Cole Carnesecca (Chung Yuan Christian University)

DAY 2 | 13:10-14:40 | ROOM A

Dao, Crisis, and Adaptation Page 55

Interpreting Manifestation and Resonance as Religious Experience: Yiguandao Field Narratives in Indonesia

Yeh-Ying Shen (Singapore University of Social Sciences)

Modern Missionaries: Developing a Power-Sensitive Theory of Transnational Chinese Religious Propagation

Naomi Fastovsky (Harvard University)

Politicized Dao: Propaganda and Antireligious Literacy in the Anti-Yiguandao Campaigns in the Early People's Republic of China, 1949-1953

Nikolas Broy (Rikkyo University)

Dao, Crisis and Security: The Environmental Turn of Vegetarian Discourse in Yiguandao and the Construction of Dual Security

William Ng (Department of History, National Taiwan Normal University)

DAY 2 | 13:10-14:40 | ROOM B

Civil Religion and Religious Social Engagement Page 59

Building the Kingdom: Infrastructuring Religion and the Formation of a Worker-Student Subjectivity in Taitung, Taiwan

Shu-Ling Yeh (National Taitung University)

Sin Wen Lau (University of Otago)

Exploring Faith-Based Active Citizenship: The Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee and Its Role in the Labor Movement

Shun Hing Chan (Hong Kong Baptist University)

Religion and Society: How University Courses Can Connect with Religion in Taiwan

Wei Ting Liu (Tamkang University General Education and Core Curriculum Center)

Syncretism of Buddhism and Daoism in Community Culture: The Religious Life of Kam Tin and Sha Tin Nine Alliances Jiao Festivals

Hau Sze Wong (Saint Francis University)

DAY 2 | 13:10-14:40 | ROOM C

Religion in Quantitative Focus Page 63

How Religion and Religiosity Shape Subjective Well-Being? The Mediating Role of Social Isolation

Myeong Hwan Hwang (Department of Sociology, Yonsei University)

Religious Diversity Around the World

Yunping Tong (Pew research center)

Religious Practice and Negative Life Attitudes: A Comparison Between Taiwan Soka Gakkai Members and Other Buddhists

Gang-Hua Fan (Soochow University)

Transcending the Self or Loving Thy Neighbor? Religious Traditions and Core Discussion Networks in East Asia

Kuo-Hsien Su (National Taiwan University)

DAY 2 | 15:00-16:10 | ROOM A

Religion and Gender Page 67

Between Legitimation and Marginalization: Female Spiritual Practitioners in Contemporary Chinese Mazu Belief

Ming-Chun Ku (Institute of Sociology, National Tsing Hua University)

Open Places, Transnational Networks: Guanyin Citta and the Relational Infrastructures of Urban Buddhism

Weishan Huang (Hong Kong Shue Yan University)

The Guanyin's Power of Healing Recorded in the Buddhist Miracle Tales in the first Two Decades of Post-war Taiwan

Yu-Chen Li (Institute of Religion, National Chengchi University)

DAY 2 | 15:00-16:10 | ROOM B

Religious Transmission and Informal Islamic Education in South Korea and Taiwan Page 70

Negotiating Islamic Education: Migrant Muslim Motherhood, Informal Schooling, and Religious Adaptation in Taiwan

Syuan Yuan Chiou (Department of Sociology, National Chengchi University)

Preserving Faith Abroad: Islamic Education, Islamic School, and Indonesian Muslim Mothers in Educating Children in South Korea

Amelia Burhan (University of Indonesia)

Teacher Involvement and Mental Health Support in Islamic Education in Taiwan

Irna Kartina (National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Sciences)

Syuan-yuan Chiou (National Chengchi University)

DAY 2 | 15:00-16:10 | ROOM C

Religions in Southeast Asia II

Page 73

An Overview of Cross-ethnic Religious Practices in Contemporary Indonesian Buddhism: A Case Study of the Sangha Agung Indonesia

Tzu-Lung Chiu (Nashua University)

Beyond Sinicization: From Datuk Gong to To Worship in Multi-Ethnic Southern Thailand

Yu-sheng Lin (Academia Sinica)

The Deity's Keeper: A Study of the Role of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Sustaining Chinese Folk Religions in Singapore and Malaysia.

Li Ying Sam (Independent Researcher)

DAY 3 | 09:15-10:45 | ROOM A

Ritual, Festival and Religion

Page 76

Buddha's Birthday Celebrations and the Social Impact of Buddhist Organizations in Hong Kong: A Case Study of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association and Fo Guang Vihara Hong Kong

Bing Wang (Hong Kong Chu Hai College)

Emotional Resilience of Filial Piety in the East Asian Society: Dialogue between Science and Humanities

Wenxu Zhang (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

The Belief of Emperor Fuyou 孚佑帝君 in Taiwan's Morality Books Before and After World War II: Centered on the Collection of Books by Venerable Yuanman Dezhi 圓滿德治法師

Weng-Ching Chen (Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University)

The Localization of Humanistic Buddhism in Latin America: The Global Outreach of Fo Guang Shan

Wei-hsian Chi (Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica)

DAY 3 | 09:15-10:45 | ROOM B

Religion in Social Media

Page 80

Bandwagon Pilgrimage: Imitative Rituals on Social Media — A Case Study of the Communication of Black Myth: Wukong

Zhongwang Lyu (Hong Kong Shue Yan University)

Platformed Cross-Reading: Marian-Guanyin Functional Equivalence in Social Media Contexts

Nan Ma (Jinan University (Guangzhou, China))

Rednote (Xiao hong shu 小紅書) as Method: Theorizing Religious Repertoires in Global Chinese Sphere

Kai Shmushko (University of Amsterdam)

Translation Edit Rates (TER) of Current LLMs for the Chinese to English Translation of the Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism: Correlations with Taishō Canon Mapping

Zhi Yue Shih (Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism)

DAY 3 | 09:15-10:45 | ROOM C

Religion and Social Theory II Page 84

- Abiding Nowhere: An Inquiry into the Diamond Sutra in the Perspective of Liquid Modernity
Yining Liu (Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts)
- From Charismatic Technology to Generative Charisma: Understanding Technology and Religion in the Age of A.I.
Francis Khok Gee Lim (Nanyang Technological University)
- Rhizomatic Religion and Cosmovisiones
Daan F. Oostveen (University of Humanistic Studies)
- Unify by Mission: Evangelical Network Growth via Intragroup Tensions
En-Ya Tsai (Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame)

DAY 3 | 11:00-12:10 | ROOM A

Religion and Arts Page 88

- Between Temple and Museum: Religious Publicness and Sacred-Secular Compatibility in the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum
Teng-Hsiang Chen (Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism)
- Song Singing, Love, and Virtue: State Led Confucian Moral and Affective Formation in Chinese Music Education
Wai Chung Ho (Hong Kong Baptist University)
- The Monastic Influencers: Art, Digital Space, and the Tiantai Diaspora
Yasmin Cho (The University of Chicago)

DAY 3 | 11:00-12:10 | ROOM B

Religious Resilience and Innovation in the Digital Age II Page 91

- Artificial Intelligence in Taiwanese Folk Religion: The Dual Dynamics of Protection and Peril at Beigang Wude Temple
Ching-chih Lin (Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University)
- Buddhism's Recent Decline in East Asia
Yunping Tong (Pew research center)
Dalia Fahmy (Pew Research Center)
- Digital Footprints and Spiritual Navigation: An AI-Driven Framework for Religious Resilience and Visual Narratives of Humanistic Buddhism at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan (2005–2025)
Chih-lin Liu (National Cheng Kung University (Republic of China))

DAY 3 | 11:00-12:10 | ROOM C

Migration, Politics and Religion III Page 94

- A Sociological Study of Challenges in Career Development among Second-Generation Muslim Migrants in Japan
Tomoko Fukuda (Chiba University)

Migration and Translocality in Rural Communities in Japan (1): A Case study of N Seaside Village in the Amami Islands

Tadaastu Tajima (Reitaku University)

Migration and Translocality in Rural Communities in Japan (2): A Case Study of S Mountain Village in Nagano-Prefecture

Ritsu Fuyutsuki (Reitaku University)

DAY 3 | 13:10-14:20 | ROOM A

Religion, Economics, and New Religion in the Modern World Page 97

Becoming a Modern Buddhist Subject in Contemporary China

Megan Rogers (Duke Kunshan University)

Yixin Gu (Duke Kunshan University)

Devotion, Discipline, and Capital: Rethinking Religion under Neoliberal Conditions

Nicha Tovankasame (Faculty of International Studies, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus)

(Re)Making Miracles: Agency and the Reconfiguration of Religious Experience within and beyond a Korean Christian New Religion

Jongseok Bak (Korea University)

DAY 3 | 13:10-14:20 | ROOM B

Religious Resilience and Innovation in the Digital Age III Page 100

Digital Appeals, Women's Engagement and House Church-State Conflict in L City

Xinuo Liang (SOAS, University of London)

Technologies of Capture: Embodiment, Infection, and the Dynamics of Immersion and Documentation in Taiwanese Popular Religion

Jacob Tischer (Charles University Prague)

Lucky Charms as Mobile Materiality: Portability, Multiplicity, and Authenticity beyond the Sacred/Secular Divide

Kazuto Hosono (University of Tokyo)

DAY 3 | 13:10-14:20 | ROOM C

Digital Faith Communities Page 103

A Theology of Media and Communication: An Ode to the Ideas of Dissemination, Mediation, and Technology

Seung Min Hong (International Christian University)

Tenrikyo Missionary Work and the Digital Society: Is Door-to-Door Missionary Work Sustainable?

Midori Horiuchi (Oyasato Institute for the Study of Religion, Tenri University)

Transmission of Vernacular Ritual Traditions in the Digital Age: A Preliminary Study

Jiayue Sun (The University of Hong Kong)

Living the "Buddhist" Dharma and the Question of the Animal in the Age of the Anthropocene

Anne Mette Fisker-Nielsen (*Soka University*)

How do people rationalize disposing of the bodies and lives of billions of other species is a deeply ethical and existential question in our contemporary world. Answering this entails an investigation into the praxis of meat consumption – how meat/animals relate to notions of personhood, identity, socioeconomic relationships, and everyday sociality. My firsthand research on carnivorism in Japan show how meat eaters often feel threatened by plant-based diets. This is not surprising since not-eating meat involves disowning long-learned commitments to eat like everyone else and with gratitude for the ‘self-sacrificing’ animal, which is a practice taught from young and central to performing Japanese social ‘harmony’. Not eating meat thus challenges the Japanese ‘moral’ community and national identity. This makes the animal question a deeply embodied political question that reveal institutionalised hierarchical relations of power rather than a simple personal choice. The animal question is also central to responding to the Anthropocene. That is human activities driven by the paradigm of growth rooted in promoting human overconsumption. With industrialized farming being a leading cause of global heating and a sixth mass extinction underway, any claim to global citizenship or acting with responsibly for the climate crises will need to address the animal question. Here I discuss the Nichiren Buddhist organization Soka Gakkai youth responses. Challenging the culture of carnivorism involves stepping into an uncomfortable domain of un-silencing the myths that surround meat consumption, which also happen to be central to Japanese capitalism, patriarchy and notions of progress and its work ethic. How do Soka Gakkai youth members’ respond to this multifaceted, macro-micro level praxis of carnivorism? The talk considers the need to reframe postwar dharma practice in Japan in ways that challenge deeply ingrained speciesism and the arbitrary distinctions made to eradicate not only the similarities between humans and animals but also the notion upheld so far of what an interdependent world means as basic to Buddhist thought.

Religion as a Buffer against Social Atomization: Soka Gakkai and the Ethics of Rebuilding Social Relations

Youngyun Yeo (*Korea University*)

This paper examines how religion can function as a normative "buffer" against social atomization in modern society, using Soka Gakkai as a focused case. Whereas much existing scholarship explains religion's social relevance through participation, networks, or organizational capacities, this study foregrounds an ideational and philosophical mechanism: how religious thought constructs moral reasons for living together, defines the contours of a good life, and justifies obligations to others under conditions of weakened social ties, shared norms, and meaning structures. The analysis is anchored in three working concepts. First, social atomization refers not simply to the spread of individualism, but to the erosion of social relations, moral vocabularies, and meaning frameworks that leaves persons as socially isolated units. Second, moral anthropology denotes the implicit view of the person presupposed by a tradition—most importantly, whether the self is framed as an autonomous individual or a relational being, and what ethical duties follow from that framing. Third, common good/solidarity captures the normative vocabulary through which communal life is justified and duties to others are grounded beyond contractual, instrumental, or purely rights-based reasoning. Methodologically, the paper adopts an interpretive, hermeneutic discourse (textual) analysis of Soka Gakkai materials. Building on core doctrinal concepts (e.g., "human revolution" and Buddhist humanism), it investigates how these concepts are translated into ethical prescriptions for repairing social relations through two complementary genres: (1) proposals that address contemporary social problems and articulate normative orientations for action, and (2) published dialogues that explicitly engage diagnoses of modernity and civilizational crisis in conversation with broader intellectual traditions. To ensure feasibility at this initial stage, the corpus will be constructed via purposive, transparent criteria: problem-fit (explicit engagement with fragmentation, isolation, social division, or the loss of meaning), prescription-fit (clear ethical pathways linking views of the person to duties and communal practices), and bridge-fit (direct engagement with themes central to Western modernity). Texts will be coded along four dimensions: moral anthropology, the telos of the good life, the justification of duties to others (solidarity, compassion, responsibility), and the implied model of a "good community," including attention to potential risks of exclusion or moral authoritarian drift. The expected contribution is a portable interpretive framework and a pilot map of Soka Gakkai's ethical repertoire for rebuilding social relations under modern atomization, offering a clear roadmap for subsequent corpus expansion and comparative extensions across traditions.

The Future We Make: Climate Change Governance for the Common Good of Humankind through Makiguchi Tsunesaburo's Concept of Humanitarian Competition

Jiyun Jeong (*Sookmyung Women's University*)

This study asks whether the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (PACC) reflects a normative shift toward the form of "humanitarian competition" articulated by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi in 1903. In *Geography of Human Life* (1903), Makiguchi—a prominent philosopher and educator and founder of Value-Creating Education (Soka)—critically examined prevailing military, political, and economic forms of competition. He maintained that these zero-sum, winner-takes-all models exhaust human energies and fail to generate lasting peace or well-being. As an alternative, he proposed "humanitarian competition," a concept that acknowledges the necessity of competition while reorienting it around human values and ethical principles. This shift represented, for Makiguchi, a qualitative transformation from adversarial competition to a conscious, cooperative, win-win approach that reconciles competition with collaboration. Building on this theoretical framework, this study examines selected countries—both developed and developing—together with Soka Gakkai International (SGI) organizations operating within those countries, analyzing their attitudes toward and practices related to the SDGs and the PACC. It further seeks to test the hypothesis that, given the institutional design of these agreements—characterized by voluntary commitments, transparency, periodic review over time, and support through global mechanisms and funds—states and civil society actors can employ humanitarian competition in the process of implementing the goals set forth in these agreements.

Weaving Faith into Citizenship: Digital Resources and Face-to-Face Community in SGI-Korea's Peace Practice.

Suhyun Lee (*IRCC, Kyung Hee University*)

This study examines how SGI-Korea's religious practices are being curated through online platforms in the digital age and analyzes their impact on the formation of global citizenship in contemporary society. Following the tradition of Japan's Soka Gakkai, KSIGI(Korea Soka Gakkai International) has built its religious identity through face-to-face communication practices centered on discussion meetings, one-on-one dialogue, and shared experiences. Alongside humanistic value practices rooted in Nichiren Buddhism, the organization has recently strengthened its use of digital platforms for archive building and content distribution. This digital transformation goes beyond simply recording face-to-face experiences; it functions as a bridge for public development by reconstructing religious values into universal civic ethics. KSIGI operates multiple digital platforms including its official website, the online journal Hwagwang Shinmun, YouTube channels, the Ikeda Daisaku website, and affiliated organizational sites, continuously developing online archive content. Through this process, the organization creates value by curating content—selecting, organizing, and re-editing materials according to specific values and purposes. This is significant in that it gives meaning to members' experiences, delivers the teachings of Buddhist philosophy and three presidents of Soka Gakkai's leadership, and extends offline organizational solidarity into digital networks, fostering a sense of connection that transcends time and space. KSIGI's online archive therefore serves not merely as a repository for records, but as a foundation that spreads the values and capabilities of face-to-face communities into the digital sphere through curation processes, transforming religious resources into global citizenship education and cultural assets. This study is meaningful in that it examines not only the phenomenon of religious digitalization, but also the specific pathways and methodologies through which religion-based organizations spread global civic values through digital networks.

At the Intersection of Religious Salvation and Public Welfare Foster Care and Children's Freedom of Religion: The Case of Tenrikyo

Shigeru Aoki (*Institute of Science Tokyo*)

In Japan, the number of children placed in social care due to abuse and other factors has been steadily increasing, accompanied by a corresponding rise in foster households. This trend can be attributed to two primary developments: (1) the growing visibility of child abuse, leading to more children being taken into protective custody by child consultation centers, and (2) a policy shift from institutional care toward family-based foster care within general households. Notably, over 10 percent of foster families nationwide are followers of Tenrikyo, a new religious movement in Japan (the Children and Families Agency and Tenrikyo). This highlights how a key aspect of national child welfare is being carried out as a form of religiously motivated social contribution. Many Tenrikyo foster parents are married couples who serve as head ministers of branch churches, often providing care within church buildings that are their homes. Their motivation is rooted in Tenrikyo teachings, especially the concept of *otasuke* (salvation). This creates a space where state responsibility and religious practice intersect. At the same time, it presents challenges—particularly concerning the protection of children's rights under Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Given the inherent power asymmetry between foster parents and children, concerns persist regarding the potential for religious coercion or proselytization. This paper examines how children's religious freedom is experienced and interpreted in everyday life. This study critically examines the life trajectory of an adult who was raised in Tenrikyo-affiliated foster households, with particular attention to the formation of religious self-understanding in relation to the child's right to religious freedom. It addresses four analytical dimensions: (1) the relationship between the religious environment and post-independence religious orientation; (2) the individual's engagement with religion following independence; and (3) the continuity of ties with the foster family after exiting care. Methodologically, the analysis is grounded in qualitative data derived from an in-depth interview with "A". Although born into a Tenrikyo church family, "A" lost both parents at an early age and was subsequently placed with another Tenrikyo household. During his formative years, he exhibited neither strong interest in nor resistance to religion. However, after encountering significant personal hardships in his twenties, he formally joined Tenrikyo. In his thirties, he succeeded his foster parents as head minister of their church and later became actively engaged in foster care himself. The case illustrates a form of delayed and life-course-based conversion. This demonstrates that religious influence on foster children is non-linear, contingent upon developmental stages, and shaped through long-term socialization processes. While regulations to protect children's freedom of thought, conscience, and religion are gaining attention, empirical research remains limited. This paper uses a case study to explore how foster parents may influence foster children's religion, examining related challenges from a life-stage perspective and offering insights into religious freedom and foster care systems.

Characteristics of Forest Protection Activities by Religions in Contemporary Japan

Norihito Takahashi (*Toyo University*)

Environmental issues, particularly climate change driven by global warming, are significant social challenges worldwide. However, interest in these issues within Japanese society is relatively low compared to Western countries. Moreover, religious organizations in Japan show even less engagement with environmental issues than general corporations and social activity groups, including environmental protection organizations. Nonetheless, some religious groups and figures are actively pursuing initiatives focused on environmental concerns, and their influence should not be underestimated. This presentation will first outline the current situation of major environmental initiatives within Japanese religions. It will then focus on forest conservation projects, where efforts are more developed among Japanese religious groups, and examine their characteristics. Specifically, I will look at projects aimed at protecting and regenerating forests owned by Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Japanese society is home to numerous shrines and temples that serve as places for residents to practice traditional beliefs, conduct rituals, and engage in social interactions within their local communities. These shrines and temples often have grounds that include woodlands or forests, which residents share and have been responsible for maintaining for a long time. However, due to population shifts from rural areas to cities, along with the ongoing depopulation of local communities driven by declining birth rates and an aging population, the number of adherents supporting the shrines and temples is decreasing. As a result, the survival of the shrines and temples across Japan is at risk. Inevitably, the forests surrounding them are also facing challenges in their sustainability. Additionally, this presentation will also highlight examples of temples engaged in forest protection and regeneration within natural burial (tree burial) cemeteries, which have become increasingly popular in recent years. These initiatives by religious organizations not only serve to protect the environment but also fulfill various social roles. These include revitalizing local communities facing depopulation, preserving traditional woodworking cultures and techniques, enabling personal fulfillment through connection with nature, disaster prevention, and ensuring the sustainable management of shrines and temples. Therefore, the activities of religious organizations related to forest conservation and regeneration can be evaluated in the contexts of "public religion" (Jose Casanova) or social activities of religious groups. They also represent a strategy for the sustainability of religious organizations facing declining adherents.

Grief Care and Activities of Religious Practitioners

Shunichi Miyajima (*Hokkaido University*)

Urbanization and individualization have eroded traditional communities, leaving bereaved individuals without adequate support. Consequently, modern society increasingly recognizes the need for grief care, with religious practitioners such as interfaith chaplains now fulfilling this vital role. The concept of "perspectives on death" lies behind the necessity of grief care. Vladimir Jankélévitch's "La Mort" (1966) popularized the perspectives on death. In Japan, Kunio Yanagita's work "Sacrifice - 11 of Our Brain Dead Son" (1995) also addressed these perspectives. When contemplating death, three perspectives should be distinguished: our own death, "first-person death," the death of someone close to us, "second-person death," and the death of a stranger or death in general, "third-person death." First-person death is unique in that we cannot experience our own death. Furthermore, although we can experience the death of others from the outside or comprehend it as knowledge, we perceive the death of someone close to us differently from that of a stranger. Thus, second-person death is characterized by the experience of grief. Grief care is necessary for the grief associated with second-person death, and in Europe and the USA, Christian chaplains fulfill this role. However, in Japan, religious professionals such as interfaith chaplains (Rinsho-shuukyoushi) are expected to take on this role. Whether second-person death should be treated as something special and whether it possesses universal characteristics remain questionable. Second-person death is not necessarily accompanied by grief. The idea that second-person death brings grief rests on a modern view of the family, potentially constraining our understanding of loss. Older adults living alone in Hokkaido, Japan, were interviewed. The results revealed that some people found it difficult to accept the death of someone close to them, such as a spouse, whereas others were still in the process of overcoming grief. Furthermore, some people seemed to be extremely cheerful and did not appear to feel any grief. Of course, some people grieve over the death of someone close to them, and grief care can help them alleviate that grief. However, there is a risk that assuming grief is the default response creates a climate where grieving is seen as natural and not grieving as strange. Therefore, how people experience death should be accurately understood through repeated studies, and the necessity of religious or spiritual activity should not be overemphasized. Importantly, religious practitioners should also recognize the diversity of grief and no-grief.

Religion and Welfare: Why There Is No Confucian Welfare State?

Andre Laliberte *(University of Ottawa)*

By paying attention to the religious dimension of the historical origins of the welfare state, recent scholarship has drawn attention to how the different branches of Christianity have shaped a variety of distinct institutional arrangements in the Western world to provide care, education, and relief. The inevitable question that arises from the observation generated by that research is how much other religious traditions before the colonial era could have exercised a comparable impact, especially in areas of the world far remote from any Christian influence before the first colonial contacts. East Asian societies present comparative researchers with an important example of most different cases research design to test some of the hypotheses generated by this nascent research tradition. My paper will introduce three key methodological issues that need to be addressed prior to establishing a research program that investigates the development of a variety of welfare states in societies influenced by the Confucian tradition. Firstly, I propose a deconstruction of Confucianism, noting its lack of coherence and its uses, on occasions, as a contemporary ideological instrument used in the legitimation of conservative and residual approaches to the welfare state implemented by some governments. Secondly, I draw attention to the consequences of deep religious diversity on the path dependency of different governments' choices for a more or less inclusive approach to social security, assistance, and relief. Finally, I stress the relevance of salvationist religions and redemptive societies that have provided inspirations for more or less universalist approaches to welfare. My discussion on these issues results from decades of research in societies where the tenets of Confucianism have presumably shaped the views of people about the responsibilities of states, communities, and families. This is part of a broader project that seeks to decenter our look about the origins of the welfare state, paying attention to the relevance of different religious traditions.

"Cult" Controversies in Asia: Democratic Neutrality, Delegitimization and the Erosion of Religious Liberty

Massimo Introvigne (*CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)*)

Marco Respinti (*The Journal of CESNUR, Milan, Italy*)

This paper analyzes contemporary threats to religious liberty by distinguishing four categories of actors: secularist states and their bureaucratic agencies; terrorist organizations invoking ideological or religious "purity"; majoritarian religious institutions that politicize faith and marginalize dissent; and anti-cult movements that employ the term "cult" as an instrument of delegitimization. Particular attention is given to the latter and to the sociopolitical function of the label "cult," a category devoid of scientific validity and largely abandoned within the academic study of religion. The paper further examines democratic states that formally endorse religious neutrality in the name of tolerance yet frequently diverge from this normative commitment in practice. Focusing on recent developments in the Republic of China (Taiwan), Japan, and South Korea, it argues that the convergence of political discourse, media framing, and anti-cult activism can generate structural pressures on minority religious communities, thereby raising substantive constitutional concerns regarding the effective protection of religious liberty.

Human Rights, Religious Liberty, and the Limits of Legal Reform: Lessons from Contemporary Taiwanese Cases

Rowena Lee (*Independent scholar, Taipei, Taiwan*)

This paper examines the relationship between tax administration and human rights and religious liberty protections in Taiwan through a comparative analysis of several high-profile tax disputes. Although Taiwan incorporated the two International Human Rights Covenants into domestic law sixteen years ago, recent cases suggest that gaps remain between formal commitments and administrative practice. Drawing on multiple examples—including but not limited to the long-running Tai Ji Men case—the paper identifies recurring issues in the treatment of minority groups within the tax system. By situating these cases within broader discussions of transitional justice, administrative accountability, and the protection of freedom of religion or belief, the paper argues that unresolved tax disputes function as indicators of deeper structural tensions within Taiwan’s governance framework. It concludes by considering how institutional reforms could strengthen procedural fairness and reinforce Taiwan’s stated commitment to human rights and freedom of religion or belief.

Religious Freedom and Institutional Path Dependency: Rethinking the Tai Ji Men Tax Controversy in Taiwan

Chih-chung Wu (*Independent scholar, Taipei, Taiwan*)

This paper examines the long-running Tai Ji Men tax and legal controversy in Taiwan as a case study in the intersection of religious freedom, administrative practice, and institutional incentives. Following Taiwan's first direct presidential election in 1996, several religious and spiritual groups—including Tai Ji Men—became the focus of intensified state scrutiny. Although the criminal charges brought against Tai Ji Men were ultimately dismissed, and courts confirmed that no tax evasion or fraud had occurred, administrative tax penalties persisted. These penalties were later used to justify the confiscation of land intended for spiritual cultivation, raising questions about the durability of bureaucratic decisions even after judicial clarification. The paper situates this case within broader discussions of how incentive structures within tax and enforcement agencies may shape administrative behavior. It examines Taiwan's evolving regulatory framework, including the legacy of bonus-based tax collection systems, and compares it with international norms such as conflict-of-interest standards and taxpayer rights protections. The persistence of the Tai Ji Men case over nearly three decades illustrates how institutional path dependency, administrative autonomy, and historical governance practices can affect the protection of religious liberty. The paper concludes by considering potential reforms to strengthen due process and ensure that tax administration does not inadvertently infringe on constitutionally protected freedoms.

Religious Gifts, Transitional Justice, and Incentive Structures: A Three-Dimensional Analysis of Taiwan's Tai Ji Men Case

Shang-Bin Wen (*Tai Ji Men Qigong Academy*)

This paper offers a three-part analytical examination of the Tai Ji Men tax dispute, focusing on how tax classification, transitional justice, and administrative incentives intersect in contemporary Taiwan. First, it considers the implications of treating traditional "red envelope" offerings—customary gifts exchanged within master disciple relationships—as taxable income. This classification raises questions about how fiscal policy interacts with the protection of freedom of religion or belief, particularly for groups whose practices do not fit neatly within established bureaucratic categories. Second, the paper situates the case within Taiwan's ongoing process of democratic consolidation, arguing that certain investigative habits inherited from earlier political eras continue to shape administrative responses and may contribute to the persistence of unresolved cases. Third, it examines the role of performance-based incentives within tax agencies and how these mechanisms can unintentionally discourage the correction of erroneous assessments. By integrating these three dimensions, the paper highlights how institutional design and administrative culture can influence the treatment of minority spiritual communities and suggests avenues for reform aimed at strengthening fairness, transparency, and public trust in Taiwan's tax governance.

Beyond Guan Yin's Shadow: Zhao Cai Tong Zi (招财童子) and the Dynamics of Folk Buddhist Deity Centralization in Malaysia

Li Ying Sam (*Independent Researcher*)

This study explores the unique worship of Zhao Cai Tong Zi (Wealth-Attracting Boy 招财童子), a minor deity traditionally associated with the Bodhisattva Guanyin (观音), at Shee Cing King Temple (东甲慈灵宫) in Tangkak, Johor, Malaysia. Unlike typical temples where principal deities receive primary focus, this temple centres its devotion on Zhao Cai Tong Zi, raising questions about the reasons behind this unconventional hierarchy and the deity's appeal. Through field research, interviews with temple members and the spirit medium, and comparative analysis with other temples like Kian Hoon Keng Temple (东甲蜚云宫) in Tangkak and Yong Chuan Tian Temple (马六甲怡力勇全殿) in Malacca, this research investigates the origins, roles, and iconographic features of Zhao Cai Tong Zi, examining the social and religious context that has shaped his prominence. The findings suggest that the deity's perceived efficacy and central position are influenced by the community's needs, the temple's founding circumstances, and local customs, reflecting a symbiotic relationship between humans and deities or, alternatively, the projection of collective subconscious desires onto a deified entity. The study also considers the impact of Buddhism on folk beliefs and the challenges faced by traditional temples in modern society, highlighting the need for further research into the origins and significance of Zhao Cai Tong Zi and the dynamics of deity worship in localized contexts.

Merit, Virtue, and Power: Rethinking Buddhist "Economy of Merit" through Myanmar's Free Funeral Service Movement

Mu-Lung Hsu *(National Yang Ming Chiao Tung University)*

In Southeast Asian Buddhist studies, the 'economy of merit' has long served as a dominant paradigm to explain the nexus between merit-making practices, social hierarchy, and power. This framework typically posits a transactional logic: the exchange of material goods for symbolic capital, merit, facilitates the centralization of charisma and the legitimation of political authority. While insightful, this paper argues that the 'economy of merit' model reduces power to an externalized resource acquired through exchange, thereby obscuring the internal and virtuous dimensions of charismatic authority pursued through asceticism. Drawing on ethnographic research on Myanmar's Free Funeral Service Movement, this paper proposes an alternative framework that approaches merit-making as a self-disciplinary practice. My ethnographic accounts demonstrate how funeral volunteers engage with this novel Buddhist practice—which synthesizes charitable action with death contemplation—to transform themselves by fostering and embodying specific socially and soteriologically meaningful virtues. I argue that the virtuous dispositions and habits thus developed serve as an embodied basis of a decentralized form of charismatic authority. By refocusing on the ascetic subject, this study engages with the classical interventions of Benedict Anderson, among others, on the nature of Southeast Asian charismatic power. My work suggests that funeral volunteers acquire what Anderson identified as "Power" through everyday ethical work that signifies one's own virtues, disciplined self, and radiating potency.

Chris Maria: Goddess in Cross-Cultural Maritime Belief?

Mingqian Xu (*Center for Asia-Pacific Area Studies (CAPAS), Research Center for Humanities and Social Studies (RCHSS), Academia Sinica*)

It may not seem immediately apparent, yet close analysis of selected cases demonstrates that maritime-oriented beliefs are from time to time across cultural boundaries. This quality derives from the circulatory nature of sea travel, which carries people from one shore to another. Cultural encounters and interactions thus give rise to forms of syncretism. The focus of this study is a tutelary goddess enshrined on Ko Chik, an island located along the eastern periphery of the Gulf of Siam in Thailand. While she was curiously called Chris Maria in Thai (RTGS: Khrit Maria), and now more generally as Chao Mae Ko Chik, local tradition holds that the goddess is of khaek origin, the term referring to people from India or the Middle East. Pork is prohibited as ritual offering. On the other hand, her festival observances integrate both Chinese and Thai elements. The birthday celebration largely follows that of Heavenly Empress (Tianhou Mazu 天后媽祖), known as the Chinese Amphitrite, on April 19 each year. Evidence also suggests that, for an extended period, she was venerated in the form of Immortal Maiden He (He Xianggu 何仙姑). Previous studies have examined Chao Mae Ko Chik in relation to Chinese dialect groups on the island, particularly the Taechiu, as well as gendered implications associated with her as a female deity. Here, we draw on Chinese historical materials of maritime navigation since the Ming dynasty, and seek to consider Ko Chik as a significant waypoint for vessels entering the port of Siam in the past. Such an approach could facilitate an understanding of the potential links between migration and the complex process of cultural adoption and negotiation that constitute this belief. At the same time, through recent field investigations, reflecting on the potential for a cross-cultural maritime belief.

The Unexamined Unification Church in Japan: The Trial of the Suspect in the Assassination of Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

Yoshihide Sakurai (*Hokkaido University*)

On January 21, 2026, the Nara District Court sentenced Tetsuya Yamagami to life imprisonment. Yamagami assassinated former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8, 2022, using a modified firearm while Abe was delivering a campaign speech in support of a candidate in the House of Councilors election. I attended all fifteen court sessions held between October and December 2025, during which I provided expert testimony for the defense. Nevertheless, the judgment entirely disregarded my professional assessment as well as the defense's arguments, instead fully endorsing the prosecution's sentencing request and its underlying rationale. The defense identified two principal factors underlying the crime and the defendant's motivation. First, we emphasized the religious exploitation and child abuse experienced by the Yamagami family. Yamagami's mother was driven into bankruptcy through deceptive recruitment practices and an enormous donation of approximately ¥100 million to the Unification Church, leading to severe familial discord. As a result, the children were raised in conditions marked by neglect and sustained psychological abuse. Second, the defense highlighted the longstanding collusive relationship between the Liberal Democratic Party and the Unification Church over the past five decades, as well as the failure of the judiciary and administrative authorities to respond adequately to the Church's illegal activities. A representative example is the video message in which Shinzo Abe, together with President Donald Trump, publicly praised Hak Ja Han at a Universal Peace Federation event. Although the court acknowledged the defendant's adverse upbringing and recognized the motives underlying the offense against the victim, it ultimately attributed both causation and responsibility for the crime to the defendant's deficient normative consciousness. This conclusion rested primarily on the assertion that resorting to violence as a means of resolution constituted an unjustifiable logical leap. This presentation first reviews the central issues of the Yamagami trial, which has proceeded to the appellate stage, and then analyzes the broader relationship between politics and religion in Japan. It further examines the structural incapacity of Japan's judiciary to hold the Unification Church accountable and critically assesses its enduring relationship with the Liberal Democratic Party.

Two Impeachments and the Development of Protestant Fundamentalism in Korea: Mobilizing Infrastructures and Justificatory Frames in the Park and Yoon Cases

Hyung Chull Jang (*Induk University*)

This study examines why Korean Protestant opposition to impeachment differed between the Geun Hye Park and Suk Yeol Yoon crises despite a shared anti-impeachment stance. As a comparative case study, it maps the mobilizing infrastructures that enabled collective action, focusing on coalition-building, organizational networks, and media platforms. It also analyzes justificatory frames such as rule of law, constitutional order, regime legitimacy, and the recurring claims about defending liberal democracy against communism. Drawing on organizational statements, rally announcements, speeches, sermons, and texts from online Christian media, the analysis traces how organizational form and media ecology shape framing choices, frame diffusion, and mobilization outcomes. And it finally discusses how these shifts and divergences can be understood as part of the development of fundamentalism within Korean Protestantism.

Why did the Monks Take Part in the Imjin War? A Question of Corrupted Monks or Institutional Necessity

Sung-Eun Thomas Kim (*Dongguk University*)

Why did the Buddhist monks take part in wars? We seem to ask this question because it is rather odd that monks who received monastic precepts, including "not to kill life," took part in killings. Not only that, we have also painted a picture of Buddhism in general as a "gloss packaged" philosophy of peace, mindfulness, and calm meditation. When answering this question for the case of premodern Korea, such contradiction has so far been explained as a matter of corrupted monks failing to follow monastic precepts. The implication is that such questioning leads to issues mainly related to the problem of breaking precepts. Thus, the issue becomes a matter of corrupt monks, also during at time when Buddhism in Korea was known purportedly to be at its lowest period of degeneration. However, this narrative of corrupt monks only serves to perpetuate an ideal perception of Buddhism and does not explain the real societal and political forces to which the Buddhist community had to response and in effect shaped the behavior of the Buddhist institution. This paper phrases the question differently, more pragmatically; what did the monks get out of doing this? What was the end goal and what were the means available to them? In asking questions as such, the answer appears to be somewhat different. While accepting that keeping the precepts seem to be a secondary matter, I argue that the reason was a combination of two factors: 1) The sangha didn't really have much of a choice on the matter of whether to keep or break the precepts because of its submissive relationship with the state. 2) More importantly, the issue was to return to their former position situated in the center of socio-political power. This will not only reinstate the sangha to a favorable position in relation to the royal court whose ideals were heavily based on Neo-Confucianism, but this will also return them to the former position of economic power. In hindsight we can tell that violating the precepts was an easy trade-off and adopting the Confucian virtue, such as ch'ung, or loyalty, was skillful means towards the end goal of regaining their position in the center of the socio-political realm.

A Study of Master Hsing Yun's Humanistic Buddhism in the Digital Age: A Case Study of the "Buddhist Maritime Silk Road - New Media Art Exhibition " at the Buddha Museum

Miaolin Shi (*Administrative Center, Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center*)

This study, based on the modern concept of Humanistic Buddhism advocated by Master Hsing Yun, explores the cultural translation and practical models of Buddhism in the digital age. Using the "Buddhist Maritime Silk Road — New Media Art Exhibition " at the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Memorial Center as a case study, it analyzes how religions respond to contemporary societal changes through new media art and technological performances. Faced with rapid globalization and digitalization, religions not only face transformations in their media and belief systems but also continuously seek new avenues for interpretation and transformation in culture, education, and public spaces. Master Hsing Yun proposed that Buddhism should become more humanistic, integrated into daily life, modernized, and internationalized, with the core focus on cultural propagation of Buddhism. This would enable Buddhism to function as a disseminator of knowledge and a bridge between cultures in contemporary society, gradually developing a religious cultural practice model with public implications. This article first traces the intellectual trajectory of the modernization of Humanistic Buddhism, explaining how it responds to modern society's reconstruction of the meaning of religion through cross-disciplinary practices in culture, art, and education. Secondly, using a new media art exhibition as a case study, it explores how the exhibition utilizes digital imagery, immersive interaction, and curatorial narrative to re-emphasize... The historical significance of Buddhism's spread via the Maritime Silk Road is explored, transforming religious culture into a perceptible and participatory public cultural experience. Through this form of presentation, Buddhism is no longer confined to traditional religious spaces, but rather, through the combination of digital technology and cultural creativity, forms a new model for propagation and cultural communication. Furthermore, this study also focuses on the cultural impact of digital religious exhibitions. Researchers, with long-term involvement in guided tours of special exhibitions, analyzed the understanding and interpretation of Buddhist history, culture, and spiritual connotations formed by visitors, groups, and VIPs through interactions and observations. The feedback and exchanges observed during the guided tours demonstrate that new media performances help promote cultural understanding, contextual experience, and meaning construction, enabling religious culture to inspire and resonate with the public sphere. This study indicates that this special exhibition embodies the innovative practices of Humanistic Buddhism in the digital age, showcasing how religion adapts and transforms through technological media, artistic vocabulary, and cultural narratives. Simultaneously, digital curation serves as a crucial bridge connecting religious ideals with public experience, deepening viewers' understanding of Buddhist culture and expanding the cultural influence and public engagement of religion in modern society. This research, through a combination of theoretical analysis and field observation, presents the practical forms of Humanistic Buddhism within the contemporary digital cultural context and provides concrete cases and research references for the translation and development of religion in the digital world.

Mapping Buddhist Knowledge: The Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism as a Dataset for the Scientific Study of Religion

Miao Guang Shih (*Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism*)

This paper examines the Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism (FGDB) as a large-scale institutional project of knowledge production and as a structured dataset with significant implications for the scientific study of religion. While traditionally understood as a reference work, the FGDB can also be analyzed as a system that organizes Buddhist doctrine, practice, history, and institutional identity into formalized conceptual categories. In its ongoing digitization and translation, the dictionary increasingly functions as a relational database in which terms, scriptural sources, doctrinal systems, historical figures, and practices are explicitly interconnected. Approaching the FGDB as a dataset enables new methodological questions. How are doctrinal classifications constructed and hierarchized? What conceptual clusters emerge around key themes such as compassion, emptiness, precepts, meditation, and liberation? How does the modern orientation of Humanistic Buddhism influence which categories are foregrounded, cross-referenced, or reinterpreted? By mapping relational linkages among entries, one can identify patterns of doctrinal emphasis, internal diversity, and institutional framing. This paper situates the FGDB within broader conversations in digital humanities and data-driven religious studies. It argues that lexicographic projects are not merely descriptive compilations of inherited knowledge but active sites of conceptual standardization and negotiation. Dictionaries contribute to shaping religious authority, defining orthodoxy, and mediating intra-traditional plurality. As a structured corpus, the FGDB offers an empirical resource for analyzing how contemporary Buddhism articulates its intellectual architecture and ethical priorities. By treating religious dictionaries as analyzable data infrastructures, this study highlights how structured knowledge systems both reflect and shape modern Buddhist identity in a global, pluralistic context.

Organizational Design and East Asian Religions in the Era of AI

Edward Irons (*Hong Kong Institute For Culture, Commerce And Religion*)

Religions are organizations. Whether virtual, physical or hybrid, they are rooted in time and space and so take on organizational form. This paper examines theories of religious organization and how they are impacted by current social developments. While not focusing on technology per se, the discussion inevitably deals with the how our lives have been transformed by such social currents as digitalization, gamification, attention deficiency, and data overload. The specific question is how such developments will impact the way religions function and organize. For instance, will religions ditch physical meeting places altogether? Will virtual networks replace church-centered communities? Will hierarchies dissolve? After reviewing research into organizational design, the discussion proposes a template for understanding the impact of disruptive technologies and practices. We then attempt to apply the template with a number of religions active in East Asia. Many but not all of these religious organizations will be new religious movements. But established groups need to be included as well, since the impact of technology is universal. A focus on organization will, hopefully, orient research to significant developments as they break.

A Study on the Perceptions and Current Status of Companion Animals in Korean Protestantism: From the Perspective of Human-Nonhuman Reciprocity

Andrew Eungi Kim *(Division of International Studies, Korea University)*

Jongman Kim *(Institute for Religion and Civic Culture, Kyung Hee University)*

This article aims to phenomenologically reveal the gap between the increasingly prevalent tendency in contemporary Korean society to regard companion animals as family members and the anthropocentric perception of companion animals that still remains within Korean Protestantism. By comparing and analyzing public discourse and cultural practices regarding companion animals in contemporary Korea with the understandings and practices observed among Protestant believers and in pastoral settings, the research describes the differing structures of perception between these two spheres. The findings show that, while Korean society increasingly views companion animals as family members and as partners in emotional and ethical relationships, Korean Protestantism still tends to marginalize them within an anthropocentric framework of salvation and pastoral practice. Rather than proposing new theological or pastoral norms, this study focuses on delineating the current position and limitations of Protestant perceptions of companion animals, thereby providing a basic descriptive groundwork for future theological and pastoral discussions.

Imposing Spirituality on Non-Human Companions in the Hyper-connected Community

Kwang Suk Yoo (*IRCC, Kyung Hee University*)

Dong-Uhn Suh (*Kyung Hee University*)

This study attempts to explain the rapidly increasing interdependence of human and non-human companion bodies in a hyper-connected society as a phenomenon of spiritualization of companion bodies. The purpose of this study is to find out that the phenomenon of "humanization" of both companion animals and robots does not simply reflect the prevalence of atheistic values, but also entails a diverse and personalized pursuit of spirituality even in a technology-dominant hyper-connected society. By identifying and comparing the spiritual sympathy and relationship with dogs, cats, care robots, and sex robots in the cross-cultural context, this paper will provide religious-sociological and policy insights into the qualitative changes and properties of future society.

Posthuman Care Practices among People with Type 1 Diabetes Using DIY Artificial Pancreas Systems: Implications for the Sociology of Religion

Min Kyung Cha *(Kyung Hee University)*

Woosung Jang *(Kyung Hee University)*

Prior to modernity, cure and care in Western medicine were managed together under the influence of religious institutions. The scientization and secularization of medicine separated care from the medical domain, reducing the religious role and function of care to a spiritual role that complements holistic care. Yet, as aging and the rise of chronic diseases expand the secularization of care, the religious understanding of care also requires renewed reflection. This is because care is both a secular practice and a religious practice. Particularly in a posthuman society where concerns are raised that the development of robots and artificial intelligence replacing human care may threaten holistic religious practice, care is being reconfigured as a practice that traverses the dichotomies of religion-secularism and human-technology. Against this backdrop, this study sheds new light on the profound religious significance inherent in post-human care practices. To this end, it empirically explores the care practices of Korean people with Type 1 diabetes who manage their disease using a DIY Artificial Pancreas System (APS). To understand how these individuals manage their disease with DIY APS, this case analyzes the human-machine relationship through the lens of Science and Technology Studies (STS) and reinterprets the religious significance embedded in these care practices using Bailey's concept of implicit religion.

Quantum Consciousness Theory and Its Implications for the Sociology of Spirituality/Religion: Focusing on the Orch-OR Theory

Francis Jae-ryong Song (*Kyung Hee University*)

Hyun Woo Kim (*Chungbuk National University*)

Recently, an increasing number of quantum scientists have proposed the hypothesis of 'quantum consciousness', suggesting that the mechanisms of the quantum phenomena operate within the realm of human consciousness. A theory of quantum consciousness that actively embraces the insightful implications of foundational concepts such as quantum entanglement, superposition, (de)coherence, wave function collapse, and non-locality, deeply resonates with the profound significance of holistic spiritual and religious traditions, which transcend the traditional (modernist) dualism of mind and body, affirming the interconnectedness of consciousness and matter, the individual and the cosmos. This paper will examine the "Orch-OR Theory", a quantum consciousness theory that resonates with this insight. This endeavour will serve as an introductory attempt to explore the possibility of new intellectual discourses, such as the concept of "quantum spirituality", by triggering a kind of reflexive shift in sociological approaches to spiritual and religious experiences.

Christianity in Hong Kong Under Political Change: Strategies of Religious Adaptation

Ka Shing Ng (*Hokkaido University*)

Since the late 2010s, Hong Kong has undergone significant political and social change. The 2019 protest movement, followed by the implementation of the National Security Law in 2020 and a series of institutional reforms, has altered the landscape of civil society, reshaping public discourse and narrowing the space for collective action. These developments have also affected religious communities, particularly Christian churches that have long been active in education, social services, and, at times, public engagement. This paper explores how Christianity in Hong Kong has responded to these shifts and considers the ways religious actors seek to sustain their institutional presence, moral authority, and social relevance under changing political conditions. Approaching the issue from a sociological perspective, the paper moves beyond a simple opposition between resistance and compliance. Instead, it understands religious responses as forms of strategic adaptation within a transformed state–society relationship. Drawing on sermons, church statements, organizational practices, and existing studies, the analysis highlights three overlapping patterns. First, many churches have turned away from visible involvement in contentious public debates and placed greater emphasis on pastoral care, spiritual formation, and the cultivation of internal community life. This should not be read simply as withdrawal, but as a reorientation of mission in a more constrained environment. Second, Christian organizations have continued—and in some cases expanded—their work in education, counseling, charity, and other forms of social service. By stressing these contributions to social well-being, churches retain public credibility while avoiding direct political confrontation. Third, transnational and diasporic ties have taken on new importance, as clergy and lay members connect with overseas congregations and networks, creating alternative spaces for exchange, reflection, and the maintenance of shared identity. These developments suggest that Christianity in Hong Kong is neither disappearing from public life nor remaining unchanged. Rather, it is being reshaped through a process of careful adjustment, balancing continuity with new constraints.

The Contraction of Religion's Interstitial Social Space in China: The Case of a Jiangnan Three-Self Church, 2015-2026

Megan Rogers *(Duke Kunshan University)*

Zhenyu Tian *(Duke Kunshan University)*

Haozhe Lou *(Duke Kunshan University)*

With Chinese president Xi Jinping's calls for the Sinicization of religion in 2015 and 2016 and the revision of the Regulations on Religious Affairs in 2017, observers of Christianity in China raised concerns about increasing political control over religion, particularly "foreign" religions such as Protestantism. In this study we draw on Yanfei Sun's (2026) concept of "interstitial social space" to examine the impact these changes have had on a registered Three-Self church in a wealthy city in the Jiangnan region. Using ethnographic fieldwork and a comparison of sermons from 2015-6 and 2024-5, we find support for Sun's argument that these shifts in religious policy reflect a stricter application of existing religious laws, which results in the closing of the interstitial social space that had previously allowed religions and practices to flourish in a legal gray area. For example, the church no longer provides Sunday school for minors, offers English-language Bible study, or hosts visiting pastors from other parts of China or overseas. On the other hand, while we identify shifts in preaching styles and topics, explicit political messaging is not present in sermons from either period, suggesting that these policy changes have produced greater bureaucratic compliance but not theological transformation.

The Exodus of the Grey and the Black: A Comparative Study of the Survival Strategies of Two Out-migrating Churches from China

Mingui Gao (*Purdue University*)

This study examines the collective migration of two Chinese house churches to Indonesia and the US in response to increasing religious suppression in China. Using the Triple Market Theory and Transnationalism, it investigates: 1) the motivations behind their migration, 2) whether and how they attempt to sustain community-based church operations abroad, and 3) the methods and impacts of their transnational ties with churches and connections in China. The study hypothesizes that religious restrictions prompted their migration from China's "grey" and "black" religious markets; that churches from the black market are more likely to preserve their communal structures; and that those from the grey market maintain stronger transnational communication with their home-country networks. Data collection includes 60 in-depth interviews with church members and leaders, supplemented by analysis of church documents. Preliminary findings reveal that both churches were driven by religious repression, with the black-market church prioritizing communal unity and the grey market church focusing on maintaining ties with Chinese Christian communities. This study offers theoretical and practical insights into the dynamics of transnational religious migration under global political pressures.

Transnational Religious Networks of Mongolia and the Mongolian Diaspora in the United States

Katsuhiko Takizawa (*Osaka University of Economics*)

This presentation examines the influence of the global networks of religions surrounding Mongolia on the Mongolian community in the United States, drawing on the theory of public religion. In contemporary Mongolia, religions such as Buddhism and Christianity—both embedded in transnational networks—play significant roles in various spheres, including politics, education, and social welfare. Their importance extends beyond Mongolia itself to the broader Mongolian diaspora. Focusing specifically on the Mongolian community in the United States, this presentation explores how these religious networks function within diasporic contexts. Approximately twenty ethnic Mongolian churches are active in various U.S. cities, serving as local hubs embedded within broader transnational religious networks. In contrast, relatively few Buddhist temples cater specifically to Mongolians. However, events featuring high-ranking Tibetan or Mongolian monks provide opportunities for transethnic religious engagement. These gatherings attract participants not only from Mongolia but also from Mongol ethnic groups in Inner Mongolia, Kalmykia, and other regions, as well as Tibetans, Chinese, and Americans. These religious institutions and events play a vital role not only in religious practice but also in transmitting ethnic culture to younger generations, fostering ethnic consciousness, and building social networks within the Mongolian diaspora. By examining the concrete activities of these religious actors and institutions, this presentation highlights the significance of religious networks within the expanding global Mongolian community and offers a critical reconsideration of the theory of public religion toward the development of a more comprehensive global analytical framework.

Perception of AI Civilization in Daesoon Thought

Soyeon Joo (*Daejin University*)

Gyungwon Lee (*Daejin University*)

This presentation aims to discover how, in Daesoon thought, the coming era of highly advanced technology, AI civilization is perceived as an aspect of earthly paradise. Daesoon thought indicates a theological and philosophical thought of a Korean new religion, Daesoon Jinrihoe. It originated from Kang Jeungsan (1871-1909)'s religious works and teachings, and established by his two successors, Jo Jeongsan (1895-1958) and Park Wudang (1917-1996). In the scripture, Jeon-gyeong, the vision of an earthly paradise is shown in various aspects. One aspect is about the future of advanced high technology. Such view of the civilization can be characterized in three ways. First, the machinery civilization developed from the West is an imitation of heaven and was offered by divine beings to humans. But it resulted in the humans' arrogance and brought crisis in whole world. Despite the negative result, Kang Jeungsan said the machinery civilization will be kept and be used for humans' convenience. Second, the earthly paradise is described as a magical world where one would find food and clothing whenever they open a box, everything will be made of gold and people will put on golden shoes, and people can communicate without language barrier. Such magical world can be seen as the result of the aids of divine beings using AI that will bring innovation for human lives. Third, the high-tech paradise come together with humans who are ethically cultivated and be in harmony divine beings. In summary, the earthly paradise of AI civilization seems to be the result of humans' endeavor to reach personally perfected state and achieve harmony with divine beings to use the magic-like technology for the world of peace and harmony.

The Relationship of Youth with Hui Ethnicity and Islam in Modern Chinese City: A Case Study Based in Shenzhen

Tianlin Gao (*Hokkaido University*)

In recent years, the development, expansion, and conflicts of Islamic culture in modern society have repeatedly come to international focus. The relationship between Islam and modernity is gradually becoming an important topic. In China, Islam is often linked to the self-identity of ethnic minorities, primarily the Hui people. However, the characteristics of modern society including mobility, urbanization, and secularization, has impacted this relationship between religion, minorities, urban, and self-identity which faces direct challenges and reshaping. In the current academic field, there is a lack of understanding of the living conditions of young Muslims in Chinese cities and their relationship with religion. Based on these considerations, this study uses young Hui people in Shenzhen, China, as a case study. Through examining the realities of young Hui Muslims in urban society and the changes in their relationship with Islam, this study aims to understand the relationship between young Hui Muslims, the city, and religion. Moreover, this study attempts to investigate the relationship and with the changes occurring between young people and religion in modern cities through this case study, pushing the consideration of continuation and reshaping of religion in the modern context. This study is based on interviews with more than 20 young Hui people who are currently living in Shenzhen. The most prominent differences observed during this study includes two groups: 1) highly educated young people with stable jobs in cities and 2) young immigrant workers with low levels of education and low incomes. They have different understandings of their ethnic-religion identities, and these identities have different impacts and constraints on their urban lives. The former group actively adjust their balance between religious discipline and urban life, distancing themselves from and avoiding traditional Hui communities and mosques. They also avoid expressing their ethnic-religion identity in their daily lives. However, this does not mean that religion does not play an important role in their urban lives. The latter group experiences a sense of rejection and alienation from urban life. For them, the city represents a transient stage in their lives. This also keeps them on the margins of the city, making it difficult for them to integrate.

Threads of Merit: Affect, Affordance, and Ethics in Digital Taiwan

Yu-ting Lin *(National Tsing Hua University)*

C. Julia Huang *(National Tsing Hua University)*

On September 23, 2025, Super Typhoon Ragasa caused a catastrophic barrier lake breach in Hualien, Taiwan. Soon after, waves of unorganized volunteers began arriving spontaneously by train at the disaster's epicenter. By early November, approximately 450,000 volunteer visits had been made. Aptly called "shovel heroes," these individuals performed hard physical labor alongside the military and established religious groups like the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation. Crucially, many mobilized in response to calls for help on Threads, a social media platform that has recently become a hub for Gen Z in Taiwan. This raises our primary research question: How can we explain this sudden mass of unorganized "shovel heroes" mobilizing for physical labor? Initiated by Yu-ting Lin's foundational digital ethnography of Threads during the catastrophe's onset, this paper analyzes the shovel heroes as a moment of collective "ethicalization" (Lambek 2010). We synthesize Lin's real-time connective ethnography (Hine 2015) with Huang's long-term research on religion and charity. Engaging with religion is essential, as ground zero was heavily populated by institutionalized groups like Tzu Chi, while Threads was simultaneously inundated with posts reflecting younger users' novel impressions of Tzu Chi's presence. This mobilization of digital natives thus intersects notably with Taiwan's "religious renaissance" (Madisen 2007) built by older generations. This massive response of altruistic physical labor challenges standard models of social media mobilization, which typically focus on digital protest and advocacy (e.g., Bonilla and Rosa 2015). To unpack this, we bridge digital activism with the anthropology of ethics. We utilize Webb Keane's concept of affordance to analyze how the platform's specific architecture enables distinct moral actions, alongside Michael Lambek's conditions of being present to explain the drive for on-the-ground physical labor. Ultimately, we propose that this phenomenon marks a distinct generational transition: a shift from an older generation of organized, institutionalized "good persons" to a younger generation defined by media-savvy, individualized, yet deeply impactful unorganized ethical actions. The shovel heroes illustrate a novel combination of ordinary and transcendental ethics in the digital age.

What Does It Mean to Answer "Don't Know" to Questions on Religious Belief? Patterns in the ISSP 2018 Japan Survey

Koki Shimizu (*Doshisha University*)

Researchers in East Asia have repeatedly pointed out that many survey questions on religion in cross-national research are implicitly shaped by Western and Christian-centered assumptions. This issue becomes especially visible when we examine "Don't know" (DK) responses. Drawing on the Japanese sample of the ISSP 2018 Religion module, this paper focuses on the unusually high proportion of respondents who choose DK for questions on religious belief. For example, 27.6% of respondents answered DK to the question on belief in an afterlife. Similarly high DK rates were observed for belief in heaven (29.9%), hell (31.2%), religious miracles (31.2%), and the spiritual power of ancestors (27.6%). Notably, even when respondents were asked about the religion they were raised in, 15.1% still answered DK—again higher than in many other countries. Rather than discarding these items as unusable, or treating DK responses simply as missing data or measurement error, this study examines DK as a potentially informative response category for understanding Japanese religiosity. The central question is what substantive meanings DK carries in the Japanese context. This paper considers two hypotheses. The first is that DK reflects interpretive difficulty: respondents may find it hard to understand what survey terms such as "belief" or "religion" are intended to mean. The second hypothesis is that DK represents a distinctive position that is neither "believe" nor "do not believe," and that it is qualitatively different from a neutral response such as "neither agree nor disagree." To investigate these possibilities, the paper will apply factor analysis and latent class analysis to response patterns across belief items in ISSP 2018. Through this analysis, the study aims to clarify whether DK responses reflect misunderstanding, an intermediate but meaningful attitude, or a combination of both. The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions about functional equivalence in international survey research on religion, particularly from an East Asian perspective.

A Study on the Experience of LGBTQ+ Members of Soka Gakkai Japan: What Is There to Be Learnt about the Current Status of Gender Equality Advocacy within the Organisation?

Margot Colletti (*Graduate School of Social Sciences, Waseda University*)

Soka Gakkai represents the biggest lay Buddhist organisation in Japan with ties extending domestically to the Japanese political landscape through its 'sister' political party Komeito and to the rest of the world thanks to its high membership internationally. Since 2021, the organisation has advocated for the realisation of the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), including gender equality. This aligns with one of the core values of Nichiren Buddhism that opposes all forms of discrimination. In light of such values, this organisation has been the home of numerous LGBTQ+ members who, especially in Europe and the United States, have perceived Soka Gakkai's Buddhism as a welcoming spirituality while struggling to cope with the discrimination within 'traditional' monotheistic religions such as Catholicism and Islam. Even the last honorary president Ikeda praised the efforts of the LGBTQ members for their engagement in the organisation. Nevertheless, the structure and activities engaged by the organisation – especially until 2021 when women were divided into Young and Married Women's divisions – seem to follow a scheme of 'Sex Complementarity' as indicated by the study on gender dynamics by Inose Yuri (2017). According to this pattern, men and women hold equal positions with specific roles which are not always interchangeable. While the advocacy of the SDGs and the generational shift have been signalling change within the organisation, the position of LGBTQ+ members and their relationship to the vision of gender equality advocated by SG, especially in Japan, remain largely unexplored in contemporary scholarship. This paper aims to look into the experience of LGBTQ+ Gakkai members in Japan and inquire what the organisation represents and means to them, how nonbinary and transgender members engage with the activities that fall within the gender binary and finally how the lack of same sex partnership and marriage (in Japan) affects their engagement within the organisation.

"Middle Women Rising (zhongnǚ jueqi)": Framing Gendered Empowerment on Chinese Social Media

Jialin Chen (*The University of Hong Kongersity*)

Yang Wang (*The University of Hong Kong*)

Beginning in late 2023 the notion of "nine purple li fire trend (jiuzi lihuo yun 九紫离火运)" started to emerge on various Chinese media platforms. The trend (yun 运) is a temporal unit of twenty years from 2024 to 2043 during which the Chinese world enters the final stage in the cosmic cycle of Three Phases and Nine Trends (sanyuan jiuyun 三元九运). The popular articulation of "nine purple li fire" is closely tied to the predicted rising (jueqi 崛起), or awakening (juexing 觉醒), of middle women (zhongnǚ 中女) in the next twenty years. According to the Book of Changes (Yijing 易经), the eight trigrams can be mapped onto a traditional household in which the li trigram is the "second daughter" (zhongnǚ, same characters as "middle women" in Chinese). The category of zhongnǚ, however, has been widely interpreted as middle-aged women (zhongnian nǚxing 中年女性) in their thirties, who became increasingly visible in mediascapes to advocate both spiritual and social empowerment. This proposed study examines the social construct of "middle women (zhongnǚ)", both on social media platforms (WeChat and Red Note) and in spiritual healing spaces (privately owned studios that provide spiritual spaces for healing services in urban China), with which female spiritual practitioners frame their everyday experiences and life projects anchoring a cosmic pattern of rising femininity envisioned by the "nine purple li fire trend". The idea of "middle women rising (zhongnǚ jueqi)", as a spiritual message corresponding to the cosmic trend of nine purple li fire, gives rise to a form of popular feminism on digital platforms and becomes internalized by female spiritual practitioners who identify with the trend (Banet-Weiser et al., 9). Such a spiritually enlightened feminism shares similar contents with what Wu and Dong call the "non-cooperative strand" of "made-in-China feminism" (481-5); indeed, "middle women rising" also underlies the liberation of female sexuality from marriage and family, and as such "heighten(s) meritocracy and women's earned spots in the class hierarchy" (483). However, it does mark a unique realm of discourses and sensibilities that views women's rising, or empowerment, as a correspondence (ganying 感应) to the cosmic pattern, rather than a form of socio-political activism for gender equality. This aspect of feminist discourses and experiences inspired by the so-called ancient Chinese wisdom brings different understandings of what feminism means in the Chinese context and provokes new dynamics between Chinese men and women during a time of gynocentrism envisioned by the cosmic trend. By bringing in the voices of those who subscribe to this gendered spiritual empowerment, this research adds to the ambivalences in feminist discussion both within and beyond China (Banet-Weiser et al., 15-19). Moreover, it also calls for more postcolonial sensitivity in an intersectional approach to the study of women in non-Western contexts in which the interplay of gender, age and spirituality inspire and sustain the narratives of empowerment.

Too Religious for Our Group: Digital Gate-keeping, Queer Resilience, and the Threat of Religious Change

Tzu-Chien Yen (*Academia Sinica*)

In this paper, I examine digital gatekeeping as a practice of freedom among queer Muslims in Indonesia amid decades of Islamic pietisation. The Cucok Meong gang was a group of young, practising Muslims who were also fabulous queer dancers devoted to the K-pop group Girls' Generation. Their community was made possible through digital technology. As precarious shift workers whose lives took place in different corners of the Jakarta metropolitan region, they relied on WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram to maintain their friendship. Social media chat groups permeated their every waking hour, where they bantered with each other, discussed personal troubles and relationships, celebrate queerness and sexuality, and experimented with gender nonconformity. More than fostering long-distance, intimate sociality, chat groups were key sites of identity formation, where they played with identities beyond the moralising scrutiny that shapes much of public life—a subcultural space they dubbed "Cucok Meong," where they could be comfortably queer and sexual. Maintaining Cucok Meong required vigilant boundary work. As their circle grew, core members faced a challenge: whom should they admit, and whom should they exclude? Among their many considerations, my interlocutors were hypervigilant—even paranoid—about keeping out Muslims who were "too religious." By tracing how my interlocutors assessed others' religiosity and navigated a member's sudden turn toward religious piety, I illuminate broader anxieties about religious change and forms of piety they saw as posing a threat to the fragile sociality and modes of selfhood their digital world sustained. Moreover, I argue that digital gatekeeping should be understood as a practice of freedom oriented toward queer resilience. In a context marked by recurrent moral panics over homosexuality, routine ridicule of gender nonconformity, and the potentially deadly consequences of being gay, digital gatekeeping enabled my interlocutors to secure a vital social space—even as, in doing so, they sometimes reproduced harmful prejudicial assumptions about visibly pious Muslims. My interlocutors also complicate liberal narratives of sexual minority politics. Social recognition and acceptance were not desired—indeed, they often appeared as a distant privilege foreign to their native land. Nor did they wish their sexuality to become the defining feature of their selfhood. Instead, they valued a status quo that allowed them to maintain control over their self-narratives within carefully curated digital circles, to code-switch across contexts, and to inhabit multiple, shifting identities without being reduced to sexuality or religiosity alone.

Religion as a Contentious Space of Authoritarian Influence: United Front Networks and the Contestation of Civil Society in Taiwan

Ray Wang (*National Chengchi University*)

Religion is often conceptualized as a core component of civil society, providing social trust, transnational networks, and normative resources that sustain democratic life. Yet religious organizations can also serve as channels of political influence, particularly when embedded in cross-border ethnic, cultural, and organizational ties. This paper examines how religion functions as a battleground for authoritarian influence in Taiwan. Drawing on the concept of legitimation, the study analyses how the People's Republic of China engages religious associations, temple networks, pilgrimage exchanges, and diaspora-linked organizations to cultivate cross-strait social embeddedness. Rather than focusing on overt coercion, the paper highlights relational mechanisms: symbolic integration, resource provision, elite co-optation, and network brokerage. These mechanisms operate through existing religious infrastructures, allowing influence to diffuse through culturally legitimate and socially trusted institutions. Taiwan provides a critical case for examining how democratic civil society interacts with external authoritarian power. By investigating religious networks as both carriers of social capital and potential conduits of political leverage, this paper contributes to academic debates on civil society, transnationalism, and the political sociology of religion. It argues that the boundary between civic autonomy and geopolitical contestation is increasingly blurred, and that religion—far from being peripheral—occupies a central position in contemporary struggles over democratic resilience and authoritarian expansion.

Religious Nationalism: The Reconfiguration of Taoism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Shamanic Cultures in Phuket, Thailand

Jakraphan Chaopreecha *(Prince of Songkla University, Phuket)*

In the Thai Constitution, rewritten by the military government in 2017, the terms morality, ethics, and virtue are emphasized at the outset. The government claimed that the revised constitution aims to strengthen democracy and combat corruption and fraud, portrayed as persistent problems in Thai politics. Without clear definitions or a concrete framework for these notions of virtue, an abstract image of the corrupt, unpatriotic, and subversive individual is constructed throughout the text. The government therefore referred to it as an "anti-corruption edition." However, closer examination shows that the framework of virtue is articulated in Section 67 in reference to Theravada Buddhism. This suggests a contradiction in the concept of religion within Thailand, which claims to be non-secular and has been shaped by the pressures of colonization in the mid-nineteenth century and the Cold War in the mid-twentieth century. During this historical period, Theravada Buddhism was designated as the religion of the nation and revised by emphasizing treatises aligned with rational and scientific modes of thinking. In order to modernize the country and respond to the challenges of modernity, Thai Theravada Buddhism was gradually disengaged from local practices and became stripped of collective emotional resonance. Many forms of monastic participation in local communities were restricted. The Vinaya came to be more strictly enforced, while the religious system was centralized under state authority, culminating in the formation of a formal religious institution. Religious nationalism thus emerged as a project to consolidate the nation-state through the triadic ideology of Nation, Religion, and King. This research does not focus on Theravada Buddhism itself, but rather examines how local practices, shamanic culture, Taoism, and Mahayana Buddhism in Thailand's frontier regions have been incorporated into religious nationalism, as their core concepts were reshaped under political and economic pressures during nation-building. In Phuket, shamanic cultures are integrated with Mahayana Buddhism and Taoist doctrine and are transmitted through non-institutionalized, household-based learning traditions. These doctrines were inherited among Chinese migrants who settled there in search of opportunities in the tin-mining industry from the mid-nineteenth century onward. Huatkua (法官) refers to a knowledgeable ritual specialist who conducts ceremonies and teaches the meaning of the Dhamma through ritual practice. Buddhist treatises were embedded within these rituals, enabling them to integrate into local communities. However, during periods of political repression, Chinese descendants were compelled to adopt the Thai language and abandon the use of Chinese. They gradually adopted Theravada Buddhism and incorporated it into their traditional ritual practices. This paper examines the cosmology of these integrated religious formations, which have been absorbed into religious nationalism, and seeks to explain how shamanic cultures in frontier regions come to function as part of the state apparatus.

Latent and Syncretic Patterns of Religiosity in Contemporary Urban China

Xiaozhao Yang (*Sun Yat-sen University*)

Religiosity is commonly conceptualized as comprising belief, behavior, and belonging, yet empirical research often assumes congruence among these dimensions and relies on exclusive religious categories. Such assumptions are poorly suited to the Chinese context, where religiosity has long been syncretic and institutionally stigmatized. As a result, belief, behavior, and belonging may diverge substantially, rendering conventional measures of religiosity inadequate. Using an online survey of urban China conducted between 2024 and 2025 (N = 3,625), this study develops a non-exclusive, latent measurement of religiosity. I combined multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to map the relational structure of religious indicators, followed by latent class analysis (LCA) to identify empirically distinct religious profiles. The multiple correspondence analysis and latent class analysis used non-exclusive indicators of Buddhist, Taoist, Confucian, folk, Christian, and Islamic belief, behavior, and belonging. The results showed a complex religious landscape. A substantial proportion of respondents exhibit beliefs in religious traditions, particularly Eastern traditions, without any religious belonging or behavior. For Buddhist and Taoist traditions, belonging, behavior and beliefs do not often present simultaneously, suggesting diffuse forms of religiosity. However, for Christian, Islamic, and Confucian traditions, belonging, behavior, and beliefs are often closely aligned. Buddhist, Taoist, and Folk religions tend to be more closely clustered with non-religions; while Christian, Islamic, and Confucian traditions each has their own cluster. Notably, a small but theoretically significant group of religious "omnivores" endorses multiple traditions across all dimensions.

On the Social Quantum Hypothesis of Spirituality and Religion

ChinChen Cheng *(Institute of Religion, National Chengchi University)*

In the early stages of human civilization, people revered deities. Faced with the unknown, they used divination and mediums to interpret the will of the gods, which gave rise to philosophical doctrines, spells, and religious rituals in order to communicate with the divine. After the Enlightenment, scientific research and other scientific approaches became the foundation of the modern mainstream ideology, while disenchantment further weakened the position of traditional religion in the minds of most people. The contemporary spiritual movement's various methods and courses, diverse supplementary products, and the emergence of monks and masters from different schools of thought are gaining popularity among urban residents with capitalist tendencies who are both lonely and under immense pressure. "Spiritual but not religious" has become a popular keyword. Religious scholars and sociologists are eager to understand these phenomena and are conducting multifaceted research using social sciences. While observing whether changes in the environment and ecology are the primary cause of change is an important reference, it is difficult to summarize and generalize the ever-changing needs of people and the environment, even with the best efforts. I would like to propose an essential but interdisciplinary hypothesis: there are shared social needs and commonalities between spirituality (primarily individualistic) and religion (primarily collectivist). Healing activities that help people escape suffering and attain happiness. This study will attempt to use quantum science theory to hypothesize, explain, and infer, using both theory and practice to establish the hypothesis. It is hoped that scientific progress will allow the results to be experimentally verified. The main discussion will revolve around whether the power of religious practices such as magic, grace, blessings, and darsan can be made effective through quantum hypotheses. When various theories of torsion fields and quantum technology are presented, it will be as if a master has appeared to bless the audience.

Who is My Neighbor – Moral Community Formation in Urban Chinese House Churches

Cole Carnesecca (*Chung Yuan Christian University*)

Part of Durkheim's definition of religion nested it within what he called a "moral community." Moral community, for Durkheim, is shaped by shared ritual participation, collective consciousness, mutually discernable symbols and languages, and shared moral distinctions (sacred/profane). It leads to a sense of solidarity, to emergent norms, and to a conception as to the boundaries that delineate who is and is not part of that community. However, studies drawing on Durkheim's original work have taken up individual concepts, such as solidarity, the sacred/profane, among others, but have generally abandoned "moral community" as a theoretical concept. Drawing on interviews with members of house churches in a large urban context, I apply original understanding of moral community to unregistered house churches in China both to analyze the emergence of moral community among unregistered Protestant churches and to test whether Durkheim's categories provide a suitable metric for understanding the nature and scope of moral community as a theoretical category. Unregistered house churches in China engage in significant amounts of boundary work both as a product of their Protestant heritage and as a safety mechanism to guard against pressure from the state. That boundary work has also facilitated the development not just of collective identity but of distinct moral communities. Identifying and defining moral community within specifically bounded social groups helps clarify debate about both community in general and moral community in particular, bringing back the original Durkheimian conception as more than just a means of behavioral norm enforcement. Respondents repeatedly came back to the "difference" engendered by the patterns of life inherent in such distinct moral communities. Difference was both a marker to outsiders and a point of interest for some who moved from outsider to insider. The emergence of moral community in and among these churches also points to sources of resilience among unregistered house churches in the face of decades of suppression and harassment.

Interpreting Manifestation and Resonance as Religious Experience: Yiguandao Field Narratives in Indonesia

Yeh-Ying Shen (*Singapore University of Social Sciences*)

This paper examines how religious experiences interpreted as manifestation (xianhua 顯化) and resonance (ganying 感應) are narratively framed and socially mobilised within Yiguandao's missionary context in Indonesia. Rather than addressing the ontological validity of these experiences, the study adopts an interpretive and sociological approach to analyse how believers perceive, articulate, and assign religious meaning to such events. Drawing on field narratives among predominantly Chinese Yiguandao adherents in Indonesia, the paper examines how religious experiences of manifestation and resonance are narrated, interpreted, and shared in the course of local transmission. Experiences understood as manifestation refer to externally observable events that attract communal attention, while resonance denotes individuals' subjective awareness of what they interpret as sacred presence or response. Through doctrinal interpretation and ritual practices, these experiences are rendered intelligible, communicable, and socially consequential within the religious community. The analysis situates these findings within a broader comparison of contemporary religious transmission. In highly institutionalised and scientifically rationalised societies such as Taiwan and Singapore, religious legitimacy tends to be established through rational doctrinal discourse, inner cultivation, and ethical self-transformation. In contrast, in certain transnational missionary settings, concrete and perceptible religious experiences—interpreted through manifestation and resonance—appear to function as a more immediate and persuasive mechanism for initiating belief. The paper argues that the successful interpretation of such experiences expands Yiguandao's plausibility structure in heterogeneous religious environments, thereby increasing its missionary viability and suggesting potential pathways for future cross-cultural transmission.

Modern Missionaries: Developing a Power-Sensitive Theory of Transnational Chinese Religious Propagation

Naomi Fastovsky (*Harvard University*)

This paper analyses the transnational propagation of the Chinese religious group Yiguandao 一貫道 not as power-neutral cross-cultural exchanges, but as complex, power-laden civilizing missions. In doing so, it seeks to answer the broader question: in a post-colonial world, how can we reckon with flows of power—particularly as they are tied to nongovernmental religious activity—without either reducing them to the historical dynamics of colonialism or dismissing them as totally exceptional to the legacy of those dynamics? Emerging in China in any recognizable form in the early twentieth century, the group was subsequently subject to persecution in both mainland China and later Taiwan during the middle and latter half of the twentieth century. This persecution, with subsequent legal recognition in Taiwan by 1987 and continued illegality in mainland China even today, created three tendencies characteristic of Yiguandao in the twenty-first century: its global spread, its grassroots flexibility based on the house temple model, and finally a core center of its mainstream and most vocal branches in Taiwan. Therefore, while Yiguandao is far from unique in its missionary efforts (indeed, I will offer several similar corollaries), I find its status as a non-Euro-American, distinctly grassroots, and marginalized group offers the ideal nexus of complexity from which to approach a much broader topic: how to theorize power dynamics of religious missions in the twenty-first century, particularly those who are non-Christian or non-Euro-American. Concretely, using fieldwork conducted over the past 4 years on mostly the Fayi Chongde 發一崇德 branch of Yiguandao in the United States, Singapore, South Africa, and Taiwan, the paper will tackle complex issues like charity, salvation, missionizing, and south-south relationships, taking them not at face value, but rather as subject of critical analysis. Such analysis intends to make conclusions relevant not only to the specific situation of Yiguandao, but also to modern transnational religious activity and even global modernity writ large.

Politicized Dao: Propaganda and Antireligious Literacy in the Anti-Yiguandao Campaigns in the Early People's Republic of China, 1949-1953

Nikolas Broy (*Rikkyo University*)

This presentation explores the wide range of cultural products used in anti-Yiguandao campaigns in the early years of the People's Republic of China (PRC). Yiguandao 一貫道, a new religious movement born of China's rich sectarian tradition, was established as an autonomous religious group in late nineteenth-century Shandong province and became a nationwide movement during the 1930s and 40s. Banned already in 1945 by the nationalist KMT government for its purported collaboration with the Japanese army during the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), Yiguandao was also banned by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) along with many other sectarian groups in 1949. It subsequently evolved into the primary target of the first mass campaigns in the early PRC, where it was relentlessly suppressed. While earlier researchers, such as Hung Chang-tai 洪長泰, Mitani Takeshi 三谷孝, Qin Baoqi 秦寶琦, and others, have focused on the CCP's mass campaigns and political activities aimed at eradicating Yiguandao, this paper seeks to analyze the diverse propagandistic tools more closely. These include stage plays, novels, nonfiction education books, traditional operas (such as yanggeju 秧歌劇), comic dialogs (xiangsheng 相聲), films, and Chinese comics (lianhuanhua 連環畫). These diverse cultural products were deliberately used to address a wide range of audiences beyond the narrow circle of literate elites and urban populations. The paper argues that these works not only express politically motivated criticisms aimed at vilifying Yiguandao as the people's enemy, but they also contain a wealth of factually accurate information about Yiguandao symbols, beliefs, and practices. These works thus constitute what might be called a politicized attempt at antireligious literacy, i.e., to enable people to understand Yiguandao and its perceived harmfulness. By analyzing their contents, the paper also addresses the potential risks and benefits of using these works as primary sources for studying the history of Yiguandao in the late Republican (1912-1949) and early PRC eras.

Dao, Crisis and Security: The Environmental Turn of Vegetarian Discourse in Yiguandao and the Construction of Dual Security

William Ng *(Department of History, National Taiwan Normal University)*

This article examines the transformation of vegetarian discourse in Yiguandao (一貫道) in response to contemporary environmental crises and argues that this shift constitutes a significant "environmental turn" in its religious ethics. Existing scholarship has largely interpreted Yiguandao vegetarianism through conventional frameworks such as non-killing, karmic retribution, reincarnation, or community discipline. While valuable, these approaches tend to understate the structural relationship between vegetarian practice and Yiguandao's eschatological worldview, particularly its teachings on end-time calamities (jie 劫) and salvation (jiujie 救劫). This study proposes that vegetarianism in Yiguandao should be understood not merely as a moral precept, but as a technology of religious security in a world perceived as facing existential crisis. Traditionally, vegetarian practice functioned as a means of cultivating merit, purifying body and mind, and reducing karmic burden, thereby offering salvific security amid impending cosmic catastrophe. This form of security was primarily transcendental, oriented toward spiritual survival beyond the mundane world. In recent decades, however, ecological degradation and environmental risk have entered Yiguandao discourse, reshaping the meaning of vegetarian ethics. Vegetarianism is increasingly framed not only as preparation for salvation, but also as a concrete response to environmental crisis, collective vulnerability, and the protection of life. Rather than representing secularization or strategic accommodation to modern environmentalism, this shift reflects a reconfiguration of religious meaning under conditions of global risk. To conceptualize this transformation, the article introduces the notion of "dual security," referring to the co-construction of religious salvific security and secular human security within contemporary Yiguandao discourse. Vegetarianism thus operates simultaneously within an eschatological framework of rescue and a worldly framework of environmental protection.

Building the Kingdom: Infrastructuring Religion and the Formation of a Worker-Student Subjectivity in Taitung, Taiwan

Shu-Ling Yeh (*National Taitung University*)

Sin Wen Lau (*University of Otago*)

This paper examines how the Catholic Bethlehem Mission Society (SMB) nurtured the formation of a worker-student subjectivity in 1960s Taitung, a sensibility that propelled Taiwan onto the world stage. Specifically, it draws on ethnographic fieldwork and archival analysis to examine the establishment of a religiously oriented educational infrastructure in and around Taitung. This school system comprises of the St Joseph Technical Senior High School (公東高工) which provided vocational high school education to Taitung's youth, the Eastern Region Vocational Training Centre (東區職訓中心) that ran evening training classes for apprentices working in Taitung's factories, and P'ei Chih Yüan (培質院), a dormitory for students studying in Taitung city. Structured around the idea of the "worker-student" and aligned with the Taiwanese government's political ideology, this education system aimed to alleviate poverty in Taitung's communities by teaching youth a skill that helped them secure jobs in a society that was undergoing profound change. At the same time, this ostensibly secular educational structure was animated by religious ideas that emphasized Christian stewardship, leaned on the influence of the Catholic Church, and relied on support from European Christian communities like the Swiss Catholic Labour Movement and the Swiss Apprentices' Association. Led by SMB missionary, Reverend Jakob Hilber, this globe-spanning infrastructural project transformed the way Taitung's youth understood the meaning of work, nurtured skilled craftsmen, and produced modern citizens that won international awards for Taiwan. This cultural shift continues to resonate in the region today as graduates of the SMB educational infrastructure continue to see themselves as skilled craftsmen driven by a sense of Christian stewardship and professional dignity. In doing so, this paper aims to illuminate how a religious ethos spilled into the civic realm of education, a process where religious ideas engaged geopolitics, local government policies, and entrenched social norms.

Exploring Faith-Based Active Citizenship: The Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee and Its Role in the Labor Movement

Shun Hing Chan (*Hong Kong Baptist University*)

This paper examines the intersection of faith-based active citizenship and labor advocacy through the case study of the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee (HKCIC). Spanning the years 1968 to 1992, the study highlights how Christian principles fostered civic awareness among laborers during a period marked by rapid industrialization and inadequate government intervention. The HKCIC emerged as a crucial advocate for labor rights, addressing the exploitation faced by workers who lacked the knowledge and resources to defend their rights. The HKCIC's theological framework positioned labor rights as moral imperatives, distinguishing it from secular labor organizations and emphasizing both the dignity of work and the call for social justice through collective action. The paper outlines the HKCIC's innovative approaches, including labor education programs, legal counseling hotlines, and community outreach efforts, which empowered workers and cultivated a strong sense of civic identity. By training worker-leaders and engaging in significant labor disputes, the HKCIC became a catalyst for grassroots mobilization rooted in Christian values. Ultimately, this research underscores the HKCIC's role in shaping a socially aware and active Chinese community in Hong Kong, illustrating how faith can significantly influence social movements. Through the HKCIC's labor advocacy, the study illustrates the broader implications of faith-based active citizenship in promoting labor rights and social justice, offering insights into the potential for religion to drive community engagement and empowerment in labor movements.

Religion and Society: How University Courses Can Connect with Religion in Taiwan

Wei Ting Liu *(Tamkang University General Education and Core Curriculum Center)*

In the development of religious education in Taiwan, general education courses have been a crucial source of intellectuals, cultivating independent thinking, observation, and analytical judgment. General education courses on religion are uncommon in Taiwanese universities. I point to two reasons: a shortage of qualified faculty and a lack of discussion about religion on campus, resulting in a significant deficiency in religious education in Taiwan. This article explores how religious courses can be integrated into the general education framework in Taiwan. I use Tamkang University's general education curriculum as an example, focusing on "Taiwanese Religion" as a case study. The article discusses how the course integrates with festival culture, teaches students to use digital tools to create reports, learns to "do religion," and understands the relationship between religion and Taiwanese society.

Syncretism of Buddhism and Daoism in Community Culture: The Religious Life of Kam Tin and Sha Tin Nine Alliances Jiao Festivals

Hau Sze Wong (*Saint Francis University*)

The Kam Tin and Sha Tin Nine Alliances Jiao festivals are renowned ethno-religious events in Hong Kong, exemplifying the syncretism of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs and reinforcing community cohesion. Previous studies, such as those by Dr. Kung Tak-wai and Dr. Kung Wai-han on the Hungry Ghost Festival and Chaozhou traditions, highlight intangible cultural heritage and communal religious life; Chan Sau-yan and Cheng Hong-kan focus on Cantonese opera and ritual theatre structures. Building on their work, this study aims to analyze how the integration of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs is reflected and symbolised in the Jiao festivals and ritual theatre in Hong Kong. In addition, it explores to what extent these practices embody communal spirit and sustain communal cohesion. The findings of this study are triangulated through multiple research methods, including documentary historical analysis and fieldwork research, with an emphasis on Kam Tin's "restoration gratitude" origins and Sha Tin's epidemic prevention rituals. This study argues that Jiao festivals are an exemplary example of Buddhist and Daoist syncretism. These festivals integrate Daoist rituals (purification, blessings), Buddhist chanting (salvation of souls) as well as local customs (ritual theatre, deity worship), forming a cross-traditional religious practice that strengthens kinship, territorial ties, and communal collaboration in the Kam Tin and Sha Tin region. Through a critical discussion of religiosity, secularity, and pluralism in the Global East, this study illustrates the ethno-religious uniqueness of Hong Kong's rural religious rituals. It calls for a new perspective on advancing our understanding of the religious life of this special context.

How Religion and Religiosity Shape Subjective Well-Being? The Mediating Role of Social Isolation

Myeong Hwan Hwang (*Department of Sociology, Yonsei University*)

This study aims to examine whether social isolation mediates the association between religion/religiosity and subjective well-being (SWB). Using data from the 2023 Korean General Social Survey (KGSS), I estimate structural equation model (SEM) to assess direct and indirect associations. The research hypotheses are as follows: H1. Religious affiliations and higher levels of religiosity are associated with lower social isolation. H2. Greater social isolation is associated with lower subjective well-being.

H3. Religious affiliation and religiosity are positively associated with subjective well-being. H4. Social isolation mediates the relationship between religious affiliation, religiosity and subjective well-being. In this study, religiosity is categorized into three components: (1) frequency of religious ritual attendance, (2) extrinsic religiosity (measured by 'perception of religion as a means to success'), (3) intrinsic religiosity (assessed by the degree of belief). Regarding social isolation, it is a multidimensional concept that is difficult to measure with a single variable. Thus, in order to grasp both quantitative and qualitative aspects of social isolation, the researcher subdivides social isolation into two types: (1) social disconnectedness and (2) perceived isolation. Social disconnectedness is measured by (1) small social network, (2) infrequent interaction, (3) lack of confidants, and (4) infrequent volunteer activity participation. On the other hand, perceived isolation is assessed by (1) feelings of loneliness and (2) a lack of social support. The findings imply that religion-SWB association operates through social disconnectedness and perceived isolation, but the direction and strength vary across the types of religiosity. In other words, religiosity matters more than religion: Intrinsic religiosity is positively associated with SWB, while extrinsic religiosity has a negative relationship with SWB via perceived isolation (feelings of loneliness). Among the dimensions of isolation, loneliness shows the most consistent and strongest association with both positive affect and the absence of negative affect, while social proxies for social disconnectedness play a smaller and more selective mediating role. This study empirically identifies how religion and religiosity lessen social isolation and enhance subjective well-being in contemporary Korea. Therefore, it can be an important reference for following welfare policy development in that it implies that religious resources can contribute to mitigating social isolation and promoting quality of life.

Religious Diversity Around the World

Yunping Tong (*Pew research center*)

This study describes religious diversity in 201 countries and territories. We measure diversity based on how evenly each country's population is distributed among seven groups: Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, adherents of all other religions and people with no religious affiliation. We find that, Singapore is the world's most religiously diverse country as of 2020, while Taiwan and South Korea rank 3rd and 4th. Yemen is the least religiously diverse country. In addition, we will present some preliminary findings about whether a country's level of religious diversity is correlated with its economic development, religious restrictions, and religious tolerance.

Religious Practice and Negative Life Attitudes: A Comparison Between Taiwan Soka Gakkai Members and Other Buddhists

Gang-Hua Fan (*Soochow University*)

Existing scholarship suggests that religious faith shapes individuals' interpretations of, and emotional responses to, life adversity through three interrelated dimensions: belief systems, organizational embeddedness, and religious practices. Religious beliefs provide adherents with a coherent worldview and a framework of ultimate meaning, enabling them to construe suffering as a trial or an opportunity for personal growth. Such interpretive resources may mitigate feelings of future uncertainty and existential emptiness. In addition, participation in religious organizations cultivates stable interpersonal networks and emotional support, thereby strengthening social integration and a sense of belonging while reducing isolation and helplessness. Religious practices—including prayer, chanting, and collective gatherings—further contribute to emotional regulation and stress alleviation, and may enhance perceived self-efficacy. Although both identify as Buddhist, members of Taiwan Soka Gakkai and adherents of other Buddhist groups differ substantially in organizational structure and religious practice. Taiwan Soka Gakkai is primarily composed of lay believers, characterized by a highly institutionalized and mobilized organizational system, a strong emphasis on chanting practice, and an orientation toward engagement in worldly affairs, including social and political participation. In contrast, traditional Buddhist groups are generally monastic-led, incorporate more diverse forms of cultivation, and tend to emphasize a relatively otherworldly orientation. Despite these distinctions, empirical evidence remains limited regarding whether such organizational and practical differences are associated with variation in negative life attitudes—defined here as perceptions of future uncertainty and beliefs that life is marked by misfortune and existential emptiness. To address this gap, the present study draws on two datasets: the 2023 Religion Module of the Taiwan Social Change Survey and a 2024 survey of Taiwan Soka Gakkai members. This paper first examines whether significant differences in negative life attitudes exist between Soka Gakkai members and other Buddhists, and then employs multiple regression analyses to assess whether any observed differences persist after controlling for sociodemographic characteristics, and whether they can be accounted for by variations in religious beliefs and patterns of religious participation. Preliminary results indicate that Taiwan Soka Gakkai members report significantly lower levels of negative life attitudes than other Buddhists. Moreover, these lower levels are positively associated with stronger religious beliefs and more frequent engagement in personal spiritual practices.

Transcending the Self or Loving Thy Neighbor? Religious Traditions and Core Discussion Networks in East Asia

Kuo-Hsien Su (*National Taiwan University*)

A large body of research has shown that religion is associated with the size, composition, and homogeneity of personal (ego-centric) networks through mechanisms such as interpersonal influence, self-selection, boundary maintenance, and social exclusion. Studies of Western monotheistic traditions—especially Christianity—suggest that religious individuals tend to maintain larger, denser, and more religiously homogeneous networks than the religiously unaffiliated. However, much less is known about how personal networks vary among adherents of non-Western and traditional religions, particularly in East Asian contexts. Relationality occupies different theological and philosophical positions across religious traditions. Moreover, the pluralistic and overlapping nature of religious identities in East Asia may shape personal networks in ways that differ from patterns observed in Western societies. Drawing on survey data from the Global East Survey of Religion and Spirituality, this study examines variation in core discussion networks across adherents of different religious traditions. We analyze differences in network size, the prevalence of social isolation, religious homophily, and the configuration of confidant ties. The results show that the religiously unaffiliated have the highest proportion of social isolates and the smallest networks overall. Among respondents identifying with one or more religious beliefs, Christians nominate more core discussants than followers of other religions. Among adherents of traditional religions, individuals with multiple religious identities report more confidants than those identifying with a single religion, while Buddhists exhibit the smallest personal networks on average. In terms of religious homophily, Daoist adherents show the highest level of same-religion ties, whereas followers of folk religions and the religiously unaffiliated report more religiously diverse confidant networks. Overall, the findings suggest that religion plays a significant role in structuring both the size and composition of core discussion networks in East Asia. The study concludes by discussing potential mechanisms—such as organizational embeddedness, family and cultural traditions, ritual participation, and theological orientations toward social ties—through which religious traditions may shape personal networks.

Between Legitimation and Marginalization: Female Spiritual Practitioners in Contemporary Chinese Mazu Belief

Ming-Chun Ku (*Institute of Sociology, National Tsing Hua University*)

In recent years, popular religions endowed with Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) status have been promoted within state agendas as components of ‘fine traditional Chinese culture’ (中華優秀傳統文化)—official discourse designed to align historical values with contemporary socialist ideals and national development objectives. Chinese popular religions have thus shed their former stigma as ‘feudal superstition’ (封建迷信) and acquired cultural legitimacy. Yet, as spiritual experiences and practices constitute essential dimensions of Chinese popular religions, how are they positioned within these newly legitimated cultural spaces? How does state-led legitimization affect the religious experiences and practices of predominantly female practitioners—particularly female spirit mediums (靈媒) and women devotees pursuing spiritual cultivation? To answer the above questions, this paper examines the spiritual practices and experiences of female Mazu devotees in contemporary China, focusing on spirit mediumship and spiritual cultivation performed primarily by women. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in Gangli village, Fujian Province, I analyze how female spiritual experiences and practices—including those of female spirit mediums and women engaged in spiritual cultivation (靈修)—manifest within the temples, ritual spaces, and informal networks of Mazu belief. However, this legitimation process reveals a paradox: while Mazu worship gains official recognition, women’s spiritual experiences remain suspect and marginalized within officially sanctioned religious spaces. Through the stories of three female devotees—one local and two from overseas Mazu belief communities—in Gangli village, this paper illuminates how women with spiritual power move between the frontstage and backstage of Mazu belief spaces: either their spiritual experiences are reframed by the official narratives or their spiritual practices take place at the backstage.

Open Places, Transnational Networks: Guanyin Citta and the Relational Infrastructures of Urban Buddhism

Weishan Huang (*Hong Kong Shue Yan University*)

Building on Massey's notion of a progressive sense of place, this paper examines the Guanyin Citta network in New York, showing how religious practices are intertwined with the material and social infrastructures of cities while reflecting the uneven power relations embedded in urban placemaking. The ways Buddhist practitioners engage urban infrastructures are shaped by intersecting social positions and global flows of capital and migration. Women devotees, working-class immigrants, and transnational elites encounter and negotiate religious spaces differently, revealing how infrastructural practices contest inequalities. Guanyin Citta's transnational Buddhist networks can be understood not as bounded, self-contained communities but as open, relational nodes within global urban infrastructures. Rather than treating religious spaces as fixed or insular, this perspective emphasizes how Guanyin Citta's practices are constituted through flows of people, capital, and cultural meanings across cities.

The Guanyin's Power of Healing Recorded in the Buddhist Miracle Tales in the first Two Decades of Post-war Taiwan

Yu-Chen Li (*Institute of Religion, National Chengchi University*)

This paper compares representations of "healing power" in four widely circulated Guanyin miracle narratives in order to examine the formation and function of Guanyin belief in postwar Taiwan. These texts, all of which enjoyed considerable popularity, articulate particular modes of healing that address both physical illness and psychosomatic disorders associated with combat trauma. The trauma of war experienced by an entire generation is both pervasive and difficult to articulate. Individuals often turn to narratives of miracles or transcendence as a means of coping. In the aftermath of social upheaval and armed conflict, religion may function as a framework for healing, enabling people to process, record, and give meaning to their suffering. In this article, the term "healing" as applied to Guanyin worship refers primarily to the alleviation of the physical suffering discussed above. It differs from the biomedical notion of "cure" and extends beyond the treatment of illness alone to encompass broader forms of physical and psychological support. Within Buddhism, the ultimate aim is the realization and propagation of the Buddha's teachings as a path to liberation. Accordingly, Buddhist modes of diagnosis and therapy—along with their perceived causes, effects, and prescriptions—are grounded in soteriological principles. They should therefore not be assessed solely through the epistemological framework of modern Western medicine. Rather, these healing practices illuminate the distinctive features of contemporary Guanyin worship.

Negotiating Islamic Education: Migrant Muslim Motherhood, Informal Schooling, and Religious Adaptation in Taiwan

Syuan Yuan Chiou *(Department of Sociology, National Chengchi University)*

How do religious minorities sustain faith transmission when formal educational institutions do not recognize their religious needs? This paper examines how Muslim mothers negotiate their children's Islamic education in a predominantly non-Muslim East Asian society. Focusing on Taiwan as an understudied site of Muslim minority life, the study explores how everyday practices of child-rearing become key arenas for religious adaptation, cultural transmission, and claims to belonging. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork and preliminary educational ethnography, the research centers on three groups of Muslim mothers: migrant workers and international student families, Taiwanese women who converted to Islam through marriage, and Muslim women who married non-Muslim Taiwanese men. Although these groups differ in their migration trajectories and legal status, they share the experience of navigating linguistic, institutional, and religious boundaries while seeking to provide Islamic education for their children. Through in-depth interviews, participant observation of temporary Qur'an classes and home-based learning, and systematic field investigation at an Islamic educational institution in New Taipei, this study documents how mothers mobilize community resources and create informal learning spaces in response to the absence of formal Islamic schooling. The findings show that Muslim motherhood functions as a critical site of mediation between family, religion, and state institutions. Rather than relying on officially recognized schools, mothers organize mosque-based classes, community gatherings, and home instruction to transmit religious knowledge and cultural values. These practices reveal forms of everyday agency that compensate for institutional exclusion, limited resources, and social indifference. In this sense, informal Islamic education emerges not simply as a substitute for formal schooling but as an adaptive strategy through which minority families reconstruct religious life under conditions of structural constraint. Conceptually, the paper brings together the notions of boundary-crossing, migrant motherhood, and cultural citizenship to highlight how religious belonging is negotiated through intimate and domestic practices. By situating Muslim education within broader debates on migration, family, and minority rights, the study contributes to the sociology of religion and education by demonstrating how religious communities in East Asia innovate and sustain faith transmission beyond formal institutional frameworks. The case of Taiwan thus offers new empirical insight into how religion persists, adapts, and gains resilience in secular and pluralistic societies.

Preserving Faith Abroad: Islamic Education, Islamic School, and Indonesian Muslim Mothers in Educating Children in South Korea

Amelia Burhan (*University of Indonesia*)

Within the sociology of religion, education is widely recognized as a key arena through which religious minorities negotiate identity, belonging, and continuity in diaspora contexts. Focusing on Islamic education for children, this study examines how Muslim minorities preserve faith abroad under minority conditions. It explores the case of the Islamic school in Seoul—the only formal Islamic school in South Korea—and the educational practices within the Indonesian Muslim diaspora in Korea, particularly those organized through the community of Indonesian Muslim women, Rumaisa (Rumah MuslimAh IndoneSiA), the largest Indonesian Muslim women's organization in South Korea. The main research question asks how Muslim minority communities sustain religious faith among their children through Islamic education in a non-Muslim society. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research analyzes two interconnected domains: formal Islamic schooling in Seoul and community-based supplementary religious education among Indonesian Muslims. The findings indicate that the Islamic school in Seoul has not been able to fully maximize its role in educating Muslim children due to structural constraints, especially cost and distance. While public schools in Korea are free, the Islamic school requires tuition fees, and the spatial dispersion of Muslim families across the country—contrasted with the school's concentration in Seoul—creates significant time and logistical burdens despite Korea's advanced transportation infrastructure. In response to these limitations, the Indonesian Muslim community develops adaptive educational practices that reflect forms of religious resilience in a diaspora and minority context. Community initiatives such as those organized by Rumaisa function as alternative and complementary educational spaces that help maintain children's Islamic knowledge and practices beyond formal institutions. This study argues that in a minority setting, preserving faith among Muslim children depends not only on formal Islamic schools but also on flexible, community-based educational strategies that enable religious continuity under structural constraints.

Teacher Involvement and Mental Health Support in Islamic Education in Taiwan

Irna Kartina *(National Taipei University of Nursing and Health Sciences)*

Syuan-yuan Chiou *(National Chengchi University)*

Taiwan's Muslim population remains small and institutionally marginalized, and the limited availability of formal Islamic educational institutions has long posed challenges for religious transmission and community sustainability. With only one developing Islamic school and scarce state recognition or structural support, Islamic education in Taiwan largely depends on community-based initiatives and the dedication of local educators. Within this fragile educational ecology, teachers often assume responsibilities that extend far beyond classroom instruction. This study investigates the extent and nature of teachers' involvement in supporting not only religious learning but also the mental and emotional well-being of Muslim children in Taiwan. Employing a qualitative research design that combines literature review, field observation, and contextual analysis, this study examines how Islamic teachers function as key actors within a minority religious setting characterized by limited institutional resources. Rather than serving solely as subject instructors, teachers frequently act as mentors, counsellors, and psychosocial supporters. They provide spiritual and emotional guidance, assist students in coping with stress and identity-related challenges, and cultivate resilience through religious practices. For example, daily prayers, Qur'anic recitation, and moral instruction are integrated into pedagogical routines to foster inner calm, emotional regulation, and ethical self-discipline. The findings identify four primary dimensions of teacher involvement. First, teachers offer spiritual and emotional counselling, guiding students through personal and developmental difficulties. Second, they link faith practices with mental well-being, framing religious discipline as a source of psychological stability. Third, through role modelling (known in Islamic pedagogy as *uswatun hasanah*), teachers embody virtues such as patience, humility, and compassion, thereby shaping students' emotional and moral dispositions. Fourth, teachers actively collaborate with parents and caregivers to monitor behavioral changes and to create supportive environments beyond school settings. By highlighting these expanded roles, this study argues that Islamic educators in Taiwan operate as crucial mediators between religion, family, and community under conditions of institutional scarcity. Their work demonstrates how minority religious education adapts through informal care networks and relational forms of support. Conceptually, the paper contributes to discussions on religion and education by showing that faith-based schooling in marginalized contexts cannot be understood solely in curricular terms but must also be analyzed as a site of psychosocial care and community resilience. Strengthening teacher capacity and building sustainable Islamic educational infrastructures are therefore essential not only for educational quality but also for the overall well-being of Muslim children in Taiwan.

An Overview of Cross-ethnic Religious Practices in Contemporary Indonesian Buddhism: A Case Study of the Sangha Agung Indonesia

Tzu-Lung Chiu (*Nashua University*)

How does a religion long labeled as "Chinese" take root among non-Chinese communities in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation? This paper addresses that question through ethnographic fieldwork I conducted on Java between 2024 and 2025, visiting temples and Buddhist centers in Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Semarang, and Bogor. Drawing on participant observation, interviews with Mahāyāna and Theravāda monastics and lay practitioners, and textual analysis, I use Homi Bhabha's notion of the third space alongside Glenn Bowman's concept of religious sharing to make sense of what I encountered on the ground. The story begins with Ashin Jinarakkhita (1923–2002), a Peranakan Chinese from Bogor who could not read Chinese but spoke five languages. Trained first as a Mahāyāna novice in Jakarta and then ordained as a Theravāda bhikkhu under Mahāsi Sayādaw in Rangoon, Jinarakkhita spent decades building a distinctly Indonesian form of Buddhism—what he called Buddhayāna. His movement deliberately cut across sectarian lines, adopted Indonesian as its liturgical language, and navigated the political pressures of the Suharto era by proposing the Sang Hyang Ādi-Buddha as a supreme deity compatible with Pancasila's monotheistic requirement. The cost was real: organizational splits followed, yet the framework survived and continues to shape Buddhist life in Indonesia. What struck me most during fieldwork was how differently Buddhism operates in urban and rural settings. In Jakarta, the Guanghua Yicheng Chan Monastery remains overwhelmingly Chinese—about ninety percent, as one interviewee put it bluntly. The temple runs a modest medical clinic where I watched Muslim women in hijabs waiting for affordable consultations, chatting casually with the resident monk. In that small waiting room, the ethnic boundaries that supposedly define Indonesian Buddhism were quietly dissolving. The rural picture near Bandung was even more surprising. At a village temple that looked like an ordinary house, Theravāda monks in orange robes chanted before Mahāyāna-style Buddha statues—a scene hard to imagine anywhere in Taiwan or Myanmar. Every person in the congregation was a local Indonesian; there was not a single ethnic Chinese participant. They wore white, knelt, and joined in prayer as if this blended practice were the most natural thing in the world. And for them, it was. Beyond these Buddhist spaces, I also found striking patterns of everyday religious mixing. In Yogyakarta, Muslims visit Chinese temples to draw divination lots interpreted by Christian volunteers—a three-way encounter that no official interfaith program designed. Muslim staff have worked in Buddhist temples for over twenty years, sometimes joining the chanting, not out of conversion but out of familiarity and mutual respect. These observations point to three interrelated processes: a loosening of the old tie between Buddhism and Chinese ethnicity, especially in rural areas; the creation of hybrid ritual spaces where sectarian distinctions lose their hard edges; and a pervasive, organic pattern of religious sharing shaped by Indonesia's pluralist traditions under Pancasila. Together, they suggest that Jinarakkhita's vision of an inclusive, non-sectarian Buddhism was not merely aspirational—it has, in specific settings, become lived reality. The challenge going forward is whether this inclusivity can be sustained as Indonesia's religious landscape continues to shift.

Beyond Sinicization: From Datuk Gong to To Worship in Multi-Ethnic Southern Thailand

Yu-sheng Lin (*Academia Sinica*)

Across Southern Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, various forms of popular religion involve the veneration of Muslim-associated spiritual figures. Earlier scholarship has focused primarily on Datuk Gong worship in West Malaysia, arguing that the cult originated in pre-Islamic Malay datuk beliefs and, amid the increasing orthodoxy of Islam and intensifying ethnic tensions, gradually transformed into a religious practice predominantly embraced by Chinese devotees. This trajectory has often been interpreted as a process of sinicization, in which a Malay spirit tradition was reconfigured within a Chinese ritual framework. However, in East Malaysia, Indonesia, and Southern Thailand, similar forms of worship display far greater ethnic and ritual diversity, rather than following the Sinicizing pattern identified in West Malaysia. In Southern Thailand, the figure known as To is particularly noteworthy. To is typically represented in the form of a Muslim elder and bears strong resemblance to Datuk Gong worship in the Malay world. Yet its historical development and contemporary ritual expressions differ significantly from the Malaysian case. My previous preliminary research in Phuket examined the establishment of To shrines and identified several interrelated dimensions of practice, including their association with land guardian spirits, vow-fulfillment rituals, and spirit-medium religious services. Unlike the trajectory observed in West Malaysia, the development of To worship in Phuket appears to be shaped less by ethnic tension and more by local patterns of economic transformation, regional development, and shifting configurations of social power across different historical periods. Building on this earlier work, the present study shifts the analytical focus from shrine formation to ritual performance across ethnic communities. In contemporary Phuket, To is embedded in diverse ritual contexts: it is invoked in the Wai Khru rituals of Sino-Thai communities, incorporated into ancestor-related ceremonies organized by local Thai authorities, and associated with the boat-floating rituals of the Austronesian seafaring group, the Urak Lawoi. Rather than belonging exclusively to any single ethnic or religious tradition, To becomes a flexible ritual figure whose meanings are continuously reinterpreted within different social settings. By examining these To-related rituals comparatively, this paper explores how Sino-Thai communities, Thai local government actors, and Urak Lawoi ritual specialists engage with and redefine a Muslim-associated spiritual figure. Through this case, I argue that Muslim-form spirits in maritime Southeast Asia should not be understood solely through the lens of ethnic tension or religious boundary-making, but rather as sites of negotiation shaped by economic change, local governance, and interethnic ritual collaboration. The study thus contributes to broader discussions on religious pluralism, materialized sovereignty, and the dynamic reconfiguration of spiritual authority in Southeast Asia.

The Deity's Keeper: A Study of the Role of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in Sustaining Chinese Folk Religions in Singapore and Malaysia.

Li Ying Sam (*Independent Researcher*)

This paper examines the role of Chinese Mahayana Buddhism in sustaining Chinese folk religions in Singapore and Malaysia. It explores how Chinese Mahayana Buddhists assist local Chinese folk temples, often taking on roles beyond Dharma propagation. The study investigates this phenomenon through case studies in Singapore and Malaysia, focusing on the syncretism between Chinese Mahayana Buddhism and Chinese folk culture. The study reviews the sociological definition of "Buddhism" in Singapore, highlighting the syncretic blend of Buddhist, Confucian, and Taoist beliefs. It also examines the historical syncretisation of Mahayana Buddhism in China, including the localization of figures like the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara. The essay further explores the role of Chinese monks as caretakers of Chinese folk temples, particularly during colonial times. The research questions address the motivations behind monks' involvement, the influence of Buddhist associations on Chinese folk temples, and the extent of Buddhism's impact. The methodology includes a literature review and fieldwork studies on temples with Buddhist monks or elements. Case studies include Lian Shan Shuang Lin Cheng Huang Temple in Singapore and Cheng Hoon Temple in Melaka. The former, managed by a Buddhist monastery, showcases a blend of Taoist and folk deities with subtle Buddhist influences. The latter, with Avalokiteshvara as the main deity, demonstrates a strong Buddhist influence, despite the presence of Confucianism and Taoism. The paper also examines Soon Tian Keing Temple, an independent Taoist temple in Singapore that used to employ Buddhist monks, and the Xian Tian Dao Sect, a Chinese folk religious sect seeking legitimacy through the Singapore Buddhist Federation. The analysis reveals that Buddhism's inclusive and flexible nature, its soft power in expansion, and the shifting identities of Chinese monastics contribute to this phenomenon. The paper concludes that Chinese Mahayana Buddhism plays a significant role in sustaining struggling Chinese folk temples. Further research questions include the origins of specific temple involvement and the extent of syncretisation's impact on Buddhist doctrines.

Buddha's Birthday Celebrations and the Social Impact of Buddhist Organizations in Hong Kong: A Case Study of the Hong Kong Buddhist Association and Fo Guang Vihara Hong Kong

Bing Wang (*Hong Kong Chu Hai College*)

Buddha's Birthday is a statutory public holiday in Hong Kong with major religious, cultural, and social significance. Buddhist organizations—especially the Hong Kong Buddhist Association (HKBA) and Fo Guang Vihara Hong Kong (F.G.V HK)—organize large-scale celebrations that move beyond worship to include charity, civic participation, and environmental advocacy. This study examines how these activities shape public life, moral education, and social services, and evaluates their influence on community cohesion, ethical debate, and civic responsibility. The research adopts a mixed-method design, combining qualitative data (literature review, participant observation, and interviews with Buddhist leaders, volunteers, and participants) with quantitative evidence (survey data, government statistics, and organizational reports). It compares the two organizers' emphases: HKBA prioritizes conventional rituals and merit-making, including large-scale Buddha bathing ceremonies, prayer gatherings, and charitable programs conducted mainly in temples and public venues. F.G.V HK focuses on modern outreach, centering the Victoria Park Buddha's Birthday Festival with youth programs, cultural exhibitions, sustainability initiatives such as "Green Vesak," and public promotion through tram advertising. Findings suggest that Buddha's Birthday strengthens cultural identity and supports interfaith interaction, while promoting compassion, altruism, and environmental awareness through volunteering, community service, and public education. At the same time, the celebrations face challenges from secularization, generational shifts in participation, and the need for renewed outreach to engage younger audiences. Drawing on historical sources, official data, media coverage, and field observation, the paper offers a comparative assessment of HKBA and F.G.V HK in Hong Kong's contemporary socio-religious landscape and proposes ways religious festivals can further contribute to civic education, public engagement, and sustainable development in a plural society.

Emotional Resilience of Filial Piety in the East Asian Society: Dialogue between Science and Humanities

Wenxu Zhang (*The Chinese University of Hong Kong*)

Is filial piety (xiao) still relevant to the contemporary East Asian societies? While modernization and individualistic ideologies seem to diminish traditional family values, empirical evidence in social science have revealed a persistent willingness in filial behaviors, especially at critical life moments such as aging and death. Moments of life vulnerability are usually the moments when human emotions prevail over rationality, and some hidden cultural values would become activated. It is noteworthy that the Confucian traditions, which prevailed in the East Asian culture particularly emphasize filial piety in the rituals of life and death. Insights from the evolutionary theory and neuroscience also explain the biological foundations of human filial behaviors. This study synthesizes the humanistic analysis of Confucian ritual propriety as a cultural script for emotional regulation with contemporary socio-psychological surveys documenting the persistence of filial behavior in hospice care, while further examining the biological foundations of filial piety through evolutionary theory and the neural mechanisms of empathy and attachment. By weaving humanistic, social science, and natural science perspectives, this paper explores the emotional resilience of filial piety and to rethink East Asian societies as a dynamic web of relations where biological instincts and cultural traditions intersect. I tend to argue that in intense filial moments, Confucian rituals provide a structured framework for instinctive emotional responses, effectively translating biological empathy into orderly social action. This research aims to provide supportive theoretical resources for modern individuals, re-imagining tradition not as an outdated moral norm, but as a vital source of emotional resilience amidst the profound anxieties of life and death.

The Belief of Emperor Fuyou 孚佑帝君 in Taiwan's Morality Books Before and After World War II: Centered on the Collection of Books by Venerable Yuanman Dezhi 圓滿德治法師

Weng-Ching Chen (*Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University*)

The founding abbot of Xinzhuang Jueming Temple (新莊覺明寺), Venerable Yuanman Dezhi (圓滿德治法師, 1902 - 1971), lived through the Japanese colonial period and the Republic of China era, and left behind about 300 morality books after his death, covering Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and popular beliefs, of which about 50 are Luan books (鸞書) made in various periods. Lu Zu (呂祖) is one of the "Northern Five Patriarchs" (北五祖) of Quanzhen Dao (全真道), and he is pioneer of the Five Sects of Dan Dao (丹道). Zhonglu Neidan Dao (鍾呂內丹道) had a great influence on the later inner alchemy of Quanzhen Dao. Lu Zu took compassion as the path to enlightenment, vowed to become an immortal after saving sentient beings, and was also revered for his elixir to save the world. Yuanman Dezhi compiled the "Record of Effective Prescriptions" (良方錄), donated to medical groups to sponsor the society, and the master's writing "The Right Way" (正道) recorded that rituals were used to pray for disaster relief and life prolongation. The returning gift in Taiwan's funeral ceremonies has also kept pace with the times, with devout bereaved families presenting portable versions of the "Medicine Buddha Sutra" (藥師經), which not only gain merit but also promote the Medicine Buddha Method. Yuanman Dezhi collected books and edited works to decorate them with Luan verses (鸞詩) to increase reputation of books. This article first outlines the origin, evolution, and core doctrines of the belief in the Emperor Fuyou, and the doctrines compares to Foucault's "self-technology", and then focuses on Venerable Yuanman's collection of books to explore the belief in Emperor Fuyou in Taiwan's morality books before and after World War II. Explain the relevant editions in the collection, select representative scriptures, and explore the relationship between Confucianism, Luan Tang (鸞堂), institutions and personnel in the information of publications, the personnel are represented by Huang, Zan-jun (黃贊鈞) and describe him more, so as to get a glimpse of the social beliefs and the reception of believers at that time. Finally, it discusses the healing matters of Lu Zu and Yuanman Dezhi.

The Localization of Humanistic Buddhism in Latin America: The Global Outreach of Fo Guang Shan

Wei-hsian Chi (*Institute of Sociology, Academia Sinica*)

Fo Guang Shan (FGS) is a preeminent representative of Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan. Since 1992, it has expanded its presence across Latin America, establishing over eight missionary centers in Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and Chile over the last three decades. Currently, thirteen resident monastics (nuns) oversee these operations. This paper explores two critical pillars that sustain FGS's development in the region: institutionalization and localization. Unlike other Buddhist organizations in Latin America, FGS utilizes a unique monastic system that ensures a highly systematic approach to outreach. This structure is centralized in Brazil and operates in strict alignment with the FGS headquarters in Taiwan, preventing individual centers from acting independently of the global leadership. Furthermore, FGS has successfully attracted a significant local following through localized policies that integrate indigenous populations into the organization's human resource framework. Consequently, we identify a resulting "dual-track" model of engagement, where activities are strategically differentiated to serve both Chinese migrant communities and the local Latin American populace.

Bandwagon Pilgrimage: Imitative Rituals on Social Media — A Case Study of the Communication of Black Myth: Wukong

Zhongwang Lyu (*Hong Kong Shue Yan University*)

This paper examines how digital entertainment in China gives rise to ritualized emotional practices and affective convergence through the case of *Black Myth: Wukong*, a highly anticipated large-scale Chinese video game. It should be noted that the "Bandwagon Pilgrimage" in this study evolves from traditional religious pilgrimage in Buddhism, which originally refers to the devout practice of believers traveling to Buddhist sacred sites to pay homage and seek spiritual sustenance; in the context of this research, it is extended to the collective imitative behavior formed by users around the game on social media. Notably, the game's production team drew direct inspiration from iconic Buddhist architectural sites across China—such as the Dazu Rock Carvings, the Leshan Giant Buddha, and the ancient Xiaoxitian (Little Western Paradise) temple complex—infusing its visual and narrative world with profound religious and cultural symbolism. Drawing on user-generated content (UGC) from Xiaohongshu, this paper analyzes how fragmented discourses, visual memes, and narrative projections coalesce into a platform-mediated "bandwagon pilgrimage." Employing digital ethnography, visual analysis, and qualitative content analysis, this research investigates how users collectively construct anticipatory rituals, ethno-religious imaginaries, and identity rehearsals both prior to and following the game's release. Findings indicate that emotional investment in *Black Myth: Wukong* is less centered on product consumption and more focused on affective alignment, symbolic participation, and mediated mimicry enabled by platform affordances. The Xiaohongshu ecosystem—through its algorithmic visibility, aesthetic norms, and emotionally charged semiotic templates—facilitates the transformation of entertainment anticipation into a quasi-ritual practice. By conceptualizing this process as a "bandwagon pilgrimage," this research contributes to the understanding of how emotionally charged, platform-driven fan discourse can simulate collective ritual, generate symbolic cohesion, and sustain shared affective orientation over time. This study further advances the development of digital ritual studies by demonstrating that bandwagon pilgrimage emerges not as a fleeting trend, but as a structured, ongoing form of mediated participation embedded in China's entertainment and platform ecologies.

Platformed Cross-Reading: Marian–Guanyin Functional Equivalence in Social Media Contexts

Nan Ma (*Jinan University (Guangzhou, China)*)

This research looks at how social media platforms reshape "cross-reading" between Marian and Guanyin-centered devotional traditions in today's digital world. Taking a practice-first view, it understands similarity not as agreement in doctrine, but as something produced through online circulation: images, short stories of help and protection, and repeated ways of speaking and praying that can be understood across religious boundaries. Using public social-media materials (short videos, posts, hashtags, and comment threads) from Chinese and Southeast Asian diasporic settings, the study explores three questions: (1) how platform features and systems of visibility make the Virgin Mary and Guanyin appear more or less similar; (2) how users draw and defend boundaries in comment discussions when they debate what is acceptable or mistaken; and (3) how everyday words for mercy, protection, and rescue move across languages and communities to create a sense of shared function without involving theological debate. Methodologically, the research uses a simple form of digital content analysis based on publicly available data. It selects posts that clearly place Marian and Guanyin images or language side by side and codes them according to (a) media form, (b) common interaction patterns (such as praying, giving thanks, or telling miracle stories), (c) signs of boundary-setting in comments, and (d) visible forms of platform control (such as deletion, restriction, or moderation notices). The analysis shows that platforms do more than provide a space for religious change: by favoring certain story types and visual styles, they shape how cross-reading takes place, turning complex ritual knowledge into easily shared pieces of content. The research will finally suggest adding "platform regime" as a new factor in comparative studies of religious images, to show how resilience and innovation are increasingly shaped by platform-driven visibility and rules.

Rednote (Xiao hong shu 小紅書) as Method: Theorizing Religious Repertoires in Global Chinese Sphere

Kai Shmushko (*University of Amsterdam*)

Online sphere-related transformations of religious traditions in the Chinese language sphere are increasingly gaining attention. Scholars have explored how religious traditions, networks, and institutions are adapting to the robust entanglement of the cybersphere with individuals and communities (Zhang 2017; Travagnin 2021; Han 2022; Huang 2017; Shmushko 2022). Taking online platforms as tools for meaning-making, religious rituals, and the creation of religious networks has become essential for the work of sociologists, anthropologists, and the transdisciplinary study of religion in Chinese society. However, beyond tools for the dissemination of religious content and the representation of religious communities and events, we should be studying the interactions, discourses, rhetoric, and aesthetics of online platforms, taking them as religious expressions (Meyer 2010). Taking Rednote as a method, I suggest that social media platforms are not only repositories of religious phenomena but also produce new forms of religious engagement. These forms are often discarded as the by-products of an internet-connected world and not seen as an essence of spiritual dispositions and religious identities. This paper suggests looking further and developing adequate tools to understand religion from within the human-generated algorithmic dynamics in which it currently thrives. Examining Rednote, I discuss two facets of religious dynamics. The first is what I refer to as the creations of religious repertoires- exploring user accounts as a depository of experiences, intention declarations, value signalling, and practices. I look at how partitioners perform micro-practices of belonging (2024) by sharing, watching, posting, and liking. The second facet is the cyclic algorithmic process (Zhang et al. 2022) connecting material and spatial religious phenomena (e.g., heritage, pilgrimage, and sacred spaces) with their online, digital formulations. I suggest that the complex relationship between the digital and the material should be understood as dialectic and not dichotomic. Re-thinking Christianity, Mazuism, and Buddhism (as examples) through the media logic of Rednote, as a transnational platform, can produce new theoretical perspectives of religiosity and shed light on connected societal dynamics in the Chinese sphere, such as national identity constructions and diasporic religiosity.

Translation Edit Rates (TER) of Current LLMs for the Chinese to English Translation of the Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism: Correlations with Taishō Canon Mapping

Zhi Yue Shih (*Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism*)

This study expands upon a previous research on error analysis and Translation Edit Rates (TER) across leading Large Language Models (LLMs) in translating the Fo Guang Dictionary of Buddhism (FGDB) from Chinese into English. TER is a metric calculating the number of edits needed for a machine translation to match a reference (human) translation, providing a quantitative indicator of translation quality. The FGDB is a dictionary on Buddhist studies that was first published in 1988, followed by an expanded edition in 2014. The initiation of its English translation project began in 2015 and is currently ongoing. With over 32,000 entries and 10 million Chinese characters covering a wide range of Buddhist studies, the FGDB presents unique challenges as well as opportunities for insight into machine-assisted translation in the digital humanities. Previous findings from March 2024 identified GPT-4 and Claude 3 Opus as the leading models for most FGDB categories despite limitations in specialized content such as Chan gong'an and Buddhist terminology. Because LLM models are continuously evolving, it is necessary to reevaluate using the most current LLMs (including GPT-4o, Claude 3.5 Sonnet, and Llama 3). As such, this study updates the aforementioned research and introduces an additional dimension: correlations between TER scores and the source references of FGDB headwords within the Taishō canon. By integrating Taishō canon-based analysis, this paper hopes to enhance our understanding of current LLM capabilities and limitations in translating Buddhist texts, thereby contributing to the ongoing development of machine-assisted translation in Buddhist studies. As its methodology, the study first links FGDB entries to the Taishō canon through Taishō numbers, thereby creating the set of sample entries to be analyzed. Next, LLM-generated translations for sample entries are then compared to human translations using the TER metric and further analyzed using an analysis of variance to identify whether significant differences exist across various parts of the Taishō or Buddhist schools. It is hypothesized that parts of the Taishō canon that have more existing published human translations will incur lower TER scores, indicating higher translation accuracy, as compared to other sections with fewer existing scholarly works.

Abiding Nowhere: An Inquiry into the Diamond Sutra in the Perspective of Liquid Modernity

Yining Liu (*Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Dharma Drum Institute of Liberal Arts*)

In the theory of "liquid modernity," Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman points out that the rise of light capitalism in consumer society brings individuals greater freedom, opportunities, and choices. However, it also weakens interpersonal connections and social foundations, leading individuals into a cultural crisis of instability and insecurity as the collective order and stable social structures of the industrial era gradually disintegrate. Against this backdrop, this study engages in an interdisciplinary dialogue between Bauman's theory of liquid modernity and the Chinese Chan Buddhist classic, the Diamond Sutra. The sutra's teaching, "arouse the mind without abiding anywhere," advocates cultivating mindful action without attachment. This self-reflective awareness may provide an alternative approach to the restless and unstable conditions of liquid modernity, offering an alternative to the logic of consumerism and instrumental rationality. The discussion will focus on Master Hsing Yun Master Sheng Yen's interpretation of the Diamond Sutra on "mind without abiding" teaching and their advocacy of the Chan meditation in everyday life. It aims to address two core questions: First, how can the Diamond Sutra's emphasis on "non-abiding" observation be transformed into a practical method for establishing a mindful and meaningful life in the context of liquid modernity? Second, how can Chan meditation, as a method of self-reflection, facilitate the dissolution of the self to generate self-awareness that responds to the fluidity of liquid modernity? The study proposes a contemporary sociological perspective on Chan meditation that balances personal self-settlement and social connectedness. It reflects on how meditation can alleviate self-anxiety caused by excessive individualization in modern society and foster a more reflexive attitude toward everyday life.

From Charismatic Technology to Generative Charisma: Understanding Technology and Religion in the Age of A.I.

Francis Khek Gee Lim (*Nanyang Technological University*)

In many parts of Asia today, artificial intelligence is reshaping the conditions of religious life in profound ways. For example, robot priests recite sutras to Buddhist congregations in Japan; algorithmically personalized fatwa services attract many Indonesian users; AI-reconstructed avatars of the dead are consulted by grieving families at Chinese funeral rites; and state AI projects in Singapore and China are ardently promoted using the language of national destiny. In these developments, technology is not experienced as neutral infrastructure; it commands authority, inspires trust, and generates strong commitment. Some years ago, I proposed the concept of charismatic technology to describe the capacity of modern technologies to attract quasi-sacral authority, command collective submission, and structure relations of dedication and trust in ways analogous to the dynamics of religious charisma. The concept was developed in relation to primarily broadcast media and the internet, technologies that distribute and extend what human agents produce. However, AI is structurally different. It generates content, simulates understanding, adapts continuously to individual users, and operates without any clearly identifiable human author behind its outputs. In this paper, I propose the concept of generative charisma as a reformulation that preserves the original concept's Weberian foundations while recasting three of its primary assumptions. While charismatic technology examines a transmission model of authority, generative charisma examines a compositional one: authority is built from the AI system's generated outputs, its institutional endorsements, and the intimacy trust formed through sustained private interactions. In addition to studying collective, broadcast-style recognition, generative charisma also analyzes the dyadic, one-to-one encounters through which AI guidance and companion systems acquire authority in practitioners' private lives. Lastly, generative charisma replaces a linear routinization process with an oscillating model of enchantment tied to AI model updates, capability announcements, and version releases, which can re-enchant user communities that have settled into familiarity. Given Asia's religious plurality, and with its traditions of intimate spiritual authority (e.g. the guru, the confessor, the master teacher), rapid AI development, and history of melding technological ambition with national purpose, generative charisma provides a set of useful analytical tools for understanding the intricate intersections of AI and religion in Asia.

Rhizomatic Religion and Cosmovisiones

Daan F. Oostveen *(University of Humanistic Studies)*

The study of religion has historically alternated between a focus on the transcendent and ultimate truths and the human realm. Environmental and technological revolutions are changing the world we inhabit. Why still religion? What makes 'religion' seen as an independent object of research? Will religious sciences retain its place alongside theology, the humanities and social sciences? 'Religion' in this seems to be a placeholder for precisely that unspeakable or ineffable thing that also makes the humanities so elusive. Moreover, we see strong ontological and materialist turns in philosophy which, on **the contrary**, look again for the real and the tangible, beyond the social constructivism of the end of the last century. With this, a struggle for 'reality', between theology, humanities, and natural sciences becomes inevitable. Religion is imagination; it is the imaginative practice in the universe. Rather than study religion either with a focus on the projection of transcendence, or as a social phenomenon about human relations, by studying religion by looking at the planetary entanglements religion engenders and the rhizomatic structures are commonly understood as "religion" we can arrive at new ways to imagine the meaning of spirituality. Whatever we call "religion", among the most common understandings of the difference between religion and the secular is the idea that religion deals with transcendent matters, whereas the secular is focused on immanence. Certain "religious traditions", e.g. Daoism, do have a strong emphasis on immanence, though we might consider these the exception that proves the rule. How does religion as imaginative practice produce life worlds on earth in a more-than-human environment? How can indigenous perspectives on spirituality, such as cosmovisiones, enhance the imaginative potential of religion towards sustainable futures? This paper would deliver a critical theory of imagination, which shows how posthuman relations are shaping religious and spiritual constellations.

Unify by Mission: Evangelical Network Growth via Intragroup Tensions

En-Ya Tsai (*Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame*)

Studies have applied religious economy theory to explain church growth, viewing churches as autonomous actors in competition within the religious market (Han 1994; Iannaccone 1994; Miller 1994; Iannaccone et al. 1995; Stark & Finke 2000; Kim 2015; Offutt 2015; Christerson & Flory 2017; Marti 2017). Also, transnational Evangelical networks succeed through charismatic leaders' hierarchical management (Christerson and Flory 2017; Offutt 2015), effective global-local resource integration (Wuthnow and Offutt 2008; Offutt 2015), and shared identity cultivation (Brison 2023; Offutt 2015). Following the inclinations of building bureaucratic religious organizations (Niebuhr 1956; Lucas 1995; Robbins et al. 2007), charismatic religious entrepreneurs make the flow of resources possible (Offutt 2015; Christerson and Flory 2017; Pitt 2021). Yet, existing literature has not explored the negotiations and co-productions for the network between religious entrepreneurs in diverse contexts. Emphasizing individuals might risk ignoring how interaction plays a part in networked church growth. Interviewing thirty-eight religious leaders from the BoL Global Apostolic Network (BGAN 靈糧全球使徒性網絡) in Taiwan and Northern Thailand, I explore how an Evangelical movement expanded transnationally despite the persistence of intra-group diversity. Due to the relational nature of networks, the paper follows the transactional and interaction approach (Emirbayer 1997; Hallett and Hawbaker 2021) in demonstrating the interactive processes between organizational goals, the institution, and BGAN branches. The interviews capture BGAN pastors' connections to the institution, the respective home churches, and the local religious contexts. BGAN pastors experience structural and cultural independence from the home churches so as to survive in the local religious market ecology. However, the independence process creates huge network differences, creating tensions that might push branches away from the network. Therefore, I argue that interaction matters for the expansion process under a network expansion case due to the group tension created. When interaction exists, the decoupling process from tightly coupled to loosely coupled with the home church and the BGAN creates tensions between branches and the BGAN, propelling pastors to prove their alignment with the BGAN mission. Thus, the tension experienced serves as the mobilizer for pastors to achieve church expansion, resulting in the network expansion. However, when pastors cannot feel the tension, oftentimes, the pastors are highly marginalized or choose to leave the network eventually. Finally, the BGAN case presents how interaction complicates the market ecology model of church expansion. Applying the individual-focused market theory to the network expansion case, I argue that interaction is a missing variable that can change the predicted result, depending on whether the coupling exists and the tension is experienced. Analyzing the coupling configurations of the branches demonstrates whether tension propels network connection and the BGAN network expansion. The paper contributes to studies of transnational network expansion in the globalization and modern digital era, showing future research on network expansion from a relational aspect.

Between Temple and Museum: Religious Publicness and Sacred-Secular Compatibility in the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum

Teng-Hsiang Chen (*Fo Guang Shan Institute of Humanistic Buddhism*)

Centering on the Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum (FGSBM) as a seminal case study, this paper interrogates the emergence of a "religious publicness" defined by the systemic compatibility of the sacred and the secular. Since its inauguration in late 2011, the FGSBM has subverted traditional institutional boundaries by integrating conventional museum functions—exhibition, education, and preservation—with the lived practices of religious veneration and pilgrimage. This study endeavors to transcend the sacred-secular dichotomy prevalent in conventional museological discourse, arguing that the FGSBM constitutes neither a "temple-centric museum" nor a "secularized sanctuary." Instead, it represents a hybridized public sphere integrating a diverse array of elements, manifesting a unique institutional character situated in the liminal space between the "temple" and the "museum." The FGSBM is not restricted by conventional secular museum models; rather, it reshapes the museum form into a vital platform for spreading the Dharma and fostering public participation. This distinctive religiosity is manifested through the museum's core architectural and ritual features: the Avalokitesvara Shrine, which facilitates the "Collecting Ambrosia Water" ritual through interactive technology; the Golden Buddha Shrine, which incorporates traditional merit-making and the drawing of "Dharma Word" oracle slips; and the Jade Buddha Shrine, which enshrines the Buddha's Tooth Relic and hosts daily collective liturgy and the annual Buddha Bathing Festival. In addition, rituals such as walking around the rooftop stupas and the "cultural sealing" of items in the Underground Palaces—where sacred relics are placed alongside everyday objects—highlight how the museum creates a public space through its ritual settings. This approach encourages people from various backgrounds to participate, reaching well beyond the traditional Buddhist community. Ultimately, this study explains how the FGSBM combines religious rituals, museum exhibitions, and public communication. By doing so, it serves as a leading example of how Taiwan's Humanistic Buddhism (Renjian Fojiao) interacts with the public in a modern society. Viewing the FGSBM in this context provides a deeper understanding of Fo Guang Shan's cultural strategies. Furthermore, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in museum studies and the sociology of religion by showing how the museum acts as a unique space where sacred and secular elements achieve symbiotic compatibility.

Song Singing, Love, and Virtue: State Led Confucian Moral and Affective Formation in Chinese Music Education

Wai Chung Ho (*Hong Kong Baptist University*)

This paper examines how the Confucian concepts of love and virtue are mobilized through song singing in contemporary Chinese music education as part of a state led project of moral and affective formation. While Confucianism is often discussed either as a classical philosophical tradition or as a revived cultural resource in modern China, comparatively little attention has been paid to how its moral ideas are systematically embedded and operationalized in everyday educational practices, particularly through the arts. Focusing on school music education, the study explored song singing as a key pedagogical medium through which Confucian moral values are recontextualized, structured, and linked to national sentiment. The study adopted a qualitative, document based research design drawing on two interrelated sources of data. First, it analyzed official policy and curriculum documents concerning music education, moral education, aesthetic education, and the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture. These texts outline the ideological and institutional framework through which Confucian moral discourse is articulated and legitimized in contemporary schooling. Second, the study conducted a close reading of selected state approved primary and secondary school music textbooks, with particular attention to prescribed song repertoires, lyrics, thematic organization, and accompanying pedagogical guidance. These textbooks are treated as state sanctioned cultural artifacts that translate policy discourse into concrete classroom practices. The analysis found that the selection and organization of the songs in the official textbooks are not random, but instead follow a discernible moral structure grounded in Confucian ethics. In particular, song repertoires are organized around themes associated with *ren* ('love', or 'humane affection') and *de* ('virtue', or 'moral cultivation'). The songs frequently emphasize affection, care, and interpersonal harmony, often beginning with representations of familial relationships and everyday moral conduct, and gradually extending toward broader forms of collective responsibility and devotion to the nation. Through this carefully structured progression, song singing is positioned not merely as a means of developing musical skills, but also as an embodied and affective practice central to moral education. Collective singing encourages students to internalize values such as empathy, respect, harmony, and loyalty, while emotional attachment to the nation is fostered through lyrical references to the homeland, shared history, and cultural continuity. The paper argues that this process reflects a form of state led Confucian moral governance, in which Confucianism functions less as an institutional religion than as a moral cultural tradition embedded in educational and artistic practices. By foregrounding song singing as a site of moral and affective formation, the study's findings contribute to broader discussions on religion and the arts, as well as on the adaptation and resilience of ethical traditions in modern East Asian societies. These findings also show how music education operates as an important mechanism through which moral subjectivities and national sentiment continue to be shaped in contemporary China.

The Monastic Influencers: Art, Digital Space, and the Tiantai Diaspora

Yasmin Cho (*The University of Chicago*)

It is rare to witness Buddhist monastics performing in a professional symphony orchestra or a synchronized dance troupe. It is equally unusual to find a nun acting as a digital "influencer," live-streaming product sales to sustain her temple's infrastructure. While traditionalists might denounce these activities as "pseudo-Buddhism" or a departure from monastic asceticism, these practitioners belong to the Tiantai lineage—a Chinese Buddhist tradition with roots spanning over a millennium. Historically recognized as a center for Chan Buddhist practice in Hubei, China, the monastery underwent a radical demographic and geographic shift in the early 2020s. Under the leadership of their abbot, the majority of the monastery's young monastics relocated to Madagascar. In this East African context, they assembled a full-scale orchestra and constructed a dedicated theater, launching a performance-based outreach program aimed at Europe and the United States. This proposed project examines the uncanny intersections of art, technology, and Buddhist practice within the context of China's transnational engagements. By weaving together artistic performance, monastic survival, and the expansion of Chinese cultural influence in the Global South, the Tiantai case offers a unique window into the mechanics of modern religious transmission. The research specifically investigates the role of "monastic influencers" and the utilization of online communities, identifying these digital platforms as vital sites for examining the dynamic relationship between ancient dogma and modern technology. Furthermore, the paper explores how the Tiantai monastics navigate the complexities of the Global South and the West through "art as a universal language." This mission is rooted in the belief that aesthetic experience can transcend ethnic, linguistic, and cultural divides that traditional proselytizing cannot. By analyzing this move to Madagascar, the paper looks at a dynamic form of "Buddhist living" where the digital space serves as the primary bridge between a geographically remote monastery and its global audience. Ultimately, this research challenges traditional boundaries of religious transmission, suggesting that the future of ancient traditions may lie in their ability to pivot toward high-tech, performance-driven, and transnational identities. It invites a reconsideration of what constitutes "authentic" practice in an era where the monastery is no longer a static site, but a mobile, digital, and symphonic entity.

Artificial Intelligence in Taiwanese Folk Religion: The Dual Dynamics of Protection and Peril at Beigang Wude Temple

Ching-chih Lin (*Graduate Institute of Religious Studies, National Chengchi University*)

As modern society transitions into the era of artificial intelligence, religious institutions in East Asia are increasingly negotiating their functions and forms within digital modernity. Drawing on the framework of "Religion and Digital Worlds," this paper explores the latest trends in the application of AI within Taiwanese folk religion. While recent academic surveys highlight the emergence of AI in temple management, online blessings, and scripture interpretation, this study provides a focused analysis of the Beigang Wude Temple (北港武德宮) as a paradigmatic case of comprehensive AI integration. The paper analyzes three distinct modes of AI application at Wude Temple. First, in the realm of hermeneutics and believer interaction, the temple has evolved from basic chatbots to deploying Generative AI. This technology is used to decipher esoteric "Phoenix scripts" (planchette writing) and interpret fortune sticks, bridging the literacy gap for younger generations unable to read classical religious texts. Second, in the domain of physical security, the temple employs AI-driven surveillance systems (referred to as "AI Door Gods") for crowd control, anti-theft, and fire prevention. A critical instance demonstrating the efficacy of this system occurred on February 5, 2026. At 5:30 AM, the AI system detected smoke from an exploding power bank in an unmanned office and immediately alerted staff and the fire department. This early warning allowed the fire to be extinguished within minutes, limiting damage to a single cabinet and preserving the temple's historic infrastructure. However, the paper argues that AI represents a "double-edged sword"—a technology that can both "float the boat and capsize it." While AI safeguards the temple's physical and cultural assets, it simultaneously introduces new vulnerabilities. The study examines the recent wave of "Deepfake" scams targeting the temple, where generative AI was used to clone the face and voice of Chairman Lin An-le to solicit funds and spread fraudulent investment advice. By juxtaposing the successful prevention of a physical disaster via AI monitoring against the reputational threat posed by AI-generated fraud, this paper highlights the complex resilience required of modern religious institutions. It concludes that the adaptation to intelligent technologies in Taiwanese folk religion is not merely a matter of administrative efficiency, but a continuous dialectic struggle between utilizing digital tools for protection and defending religious authority against digital malfeasance.

Buddhism's Recent Decline in East Asia

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Dalia Fahmy *(Pew Research Center)*

Buddhism is the only major religion in the world with a falling number of adherents, according to Pew Research Center estimates for 2010 and 2020. This decline is largely driven by changes in East Asia, where many people who were raised Buddhist no longer identify with the religion. In this data essay, we discuss various factors contributing to Buddhism's decline in Japan and South Korea, drawing on interviews conducted in Tokyo and Seoul in 2024. Our fieldwork offers rich insights into how and why people in Japan and South Korea are drifting away from Buddhism.

Digital Footprints and Spiritual Navigation: An AI-Driven Framework for Religious Resilience and Visual Narratives of Humanistic Buddhism at Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan (2005–2025)

Chih-lin Liu (*National Cheng Kung University (Republic of China)*)

As religion increasingly unfolds within algorithmically mediated environments, scholars face a methodological turning point: how can digital religion be studied at scale without sacrificing conceptual precision? This paper proposes an AI-driven framework for the quantitative sociology of religion, demonstrating how large-scale visual data from social media can be systematically analyzed to reveal structural patterns of religious adaptation and resilience. Focusing on Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan, the study examines how a major Buddhist institution-Fo Guang Shan-is reconstructed within digital worlds between 2005 and 2025. The dataset consists of 51,936 Flickr images, from which 4,898 geolocated photographs within a defined 800 meters radius were analyzed in depth. Using OpenAI's Contrastive Language-Image Pre-training model (CLIP), the study develops a dual-layer computational framework: (1) a 15-category schema derived from Humanistic Buddhist praxis, and (2) a continuous Valence-Arousal affective model grounded in international emotion theory. This approach enables the operationalization of theological-ritual distinctions as measurable visual-affective variables. Statistical testing demonstrates significant differentiation across categories (ANOVA, η^2 up to .28), indicating that ritual intensity and monumentality manifest as stable affective structures within digital circulation. To address common methodological concerns in social media research, the study integrates inequality metrics (Gini = .739) and photographer-level modeling to control for contributor dominance. Despite high production concentration, affective and categorical structures remain stable across users, demonstrating spatial-affective coherence rather than distortion by a few digital actors. This multilevel control framework contributes to the development of reproducible, scalable methodologies for religion in quantitative focus and AI-mediated environments. Beyond methodological innovation, the findings illuminate how digital platforms selectively amplify certain dimensions of religion. Cross-cultural analysis reveals a bifurcated logic of representation: Western users disproportionately reproduce monumental architectural imagery ("spectacular gaze"), while Taiwanese and Greater Chinese users more frequently depict ritual participation, education, and communal practices ("participatory gaze"). Digital religion thus emerges as an affective-spatial system shaped simultaneously by institutional design and platform logics. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) provides a critical test case for religious resilience. Although physical participation was globally constrained, visual data indicate sustained monumentality, ritual symbolism, and affective continuity. Rather than evidencing decline, digital representation stabilized institutional visibility and ritual identity, suggesting that resilience operates not merely through online substitution but through the preservation of affective-spatial coherence in networked publics. By combining big data extraction, AI-based visual semantics, inequality controls, and multilevel statistical modeling, this paper advances the quantitative and computational turn in religious studies. It argues that religion in digital worlds is not simply communicated through social media but reorganized as measurable affective infrastructures. Humanistic Buddhism in Taiwan demonstrates how religious systems adapt to AI-expanded environments by embedding identity, ritual intensity, and monumentality into digitally reproducible visual forms-revealing a new mode of religious resilience in the age of artificial intelligence.

A Sociological Study of Challenges in Career Development among Second-Generation Muslim Migrants in Japan

Tomoko Fukuda (*Chiba University*)

This Paper examines the mechanisms of career development among second-generation Muslim migrants, including 1.5-generation migrants, from the perspectives of religion, employment, and education, through a sociological analysis. This study is based on data obtained through practical activities conducted from 2023 to 2026, including field surveys, guest lectures, and career education workshops. Previous research on the employment situation of Muslim migrants in Japan tends to focus on the working conditions of Indonesian Technical Intern Trainees. From a demographic perspective, most Muslim workers in Japan are Indonesian Technical Intern Trainees, who constitute the first-generation Muslim migrants. On the other hand, little attention has been paid to the employment of second-generation Muslim migrants, who have become relatively well-established in Japanese society. Why has little attention been paid to the employment of second-generation Muslim migrants? While the reasons remain unclear, several hypotheses can be proposed. First, most second-generation Muslim migrants were children of couples of Muslim migrant fathers and Japanese mothers. Holding Japanese citizenship (nationality) and having native Japanese language skills, they likely either did not face significant employment discrimination or such challenges were not widely recognized. Second, second-generation Muslim migrants whose parents were Muslim migrants have faced persistent employment discrimination, yet this has gone largely unnoticed. Due to their small numbers, this discrimination has remained inconspicuous. Third, second-generation Muslim migrants often relocate to their parents' country of origin or to a third country during their educational years, particularly in upper secondary or higher education. This movement, aimed at avoiding employment discrimination in Japan's rigid and exclusionary job market and maintaining a continuous back-and-forth between Japan and their country of origin or a third country, may not have been recognized as a career development challenge in Japan. What structural challenges exist in career development for second-generation Muslim migrants? Case studies on second-generation Muslim migrants seeking employment after high school graduation have pointed out that they tend not to pursue career advancement and often give up on new possibilities. Furthermore, they are said to frequently choose nepotism-based hiring through introductions from co-ethnic migrants rather than seeking stable jobs through public employment channels. Particularly prominent among nepotism-based hires is employment in family-run trading companies. In employment contexts, issues of intersectionality emerge, involving not only religion but also gender and other multiple factors. Examining the challenges surrounding career development for second-generation Muslim migrants is an urgent issue for Japanese society.

Migration and Translocality in Rural Communities in Japan (1): A Case study of N Seaside Village in the Amami Islands

Tadaastu Tajima (*Reitaku University*)

This presentation, together with the next speaker, Dr. Fuyutsuki, will report on how translocality contributes to the social transformation of two typical villages which preserve Japan's original landscapes of sea and mountain, using these village communities as case studies. In Tajima's presentation, at first, the working concept of it will be explained, then, how the translocality of the seaside village facilitates establishing its own migrants' associations (郷友会) in 1923 in Osaka area after rural-to-urban migration was popular among the villagers. Since then, this migrant's association proliferated various cities such as Tokyo, Okinawa and even in the Mainland Amami island. Then, in use of the Amami traditional ancestral ritual, the mother village where their ancestors buried have attracted the migrants and their families and relatives, and has influenced each other to transform the mother village and the migrant's association into the 'Extended Village Community'. However, this extended village community faces crisis in accordance with the depopulation of mother village. Through this presentation, I will discuss what is essence of locality through translocality and social transformation in mother village. The data of this presentation is based on the fieldworks which started from 1978 and the documents printed by the members of this migrants' association for distribution among them.

Migration and Translocality in Rural Communities in Japan (2): A Case Study of S Mountain Village in Nagano-Prefecture

Ritsu Fuyutsuki (*Reitaku University*)

Following Tajima's analysis of a seaside village in the Amami Islands, this presentation examines how translocality contributes to social transformation in a depopulating mountain community in rural Japan. While Tajima highlights migrants' associations (*kōyūkai/gōyūkai*) as institutional bridges linking the mother village and urban destinations, my case focuses on shrine-centered networks and the role of Shinto priests (*shinshoku*) as mediators between residents and extra-local actors. Based on qualitative fieldwork conducted in S Mountain Village in Nagano Prefecture—including semi-structured interviews with priests, *ujiko*(parishioners), community leaders, and non-resident participants, as well as participant observation of festivals and related activities—this study explores how religious practices function as platforms for translocal engagement. Here, translocality is operationalized as a condition in which (1) people, resources, and knowledge circulate beyond the village; (2) shrine rituals and spaces provide legitimate occasions for reconnection; and (3) local roles and responsibilities are reorganized through repeated interaction across places. The findings indicate that priests actively design graduated forms of participation that extend beyond traditional *ujiko* membership. These range from short-term volunteering and event attendance to continuous involvement in documentation, publicity, fundraising, and project coordination. Through such arrangements, the shrine becomes a node that connects aging local residents with non-resident supporters often described as "relationship populations" (*kankei-jinkō*). This process not only supplements declining labor and financial resources but also redefines who may legitimately participate in sustaining ritual and community life. At the same time, the expansion of participation generates tensions concerning ritual authority, decision-making, and the boundaries of belonging. The negotiation of these tensions reveals how depopulation compels rural communities to reconsider the meaning of locality itself. In dialogue with Tajima's concept of the "Extended Village Community," this case suggests that shrine-based translocal networks similarly stretch community boundaries beyond geographic residence. However, they also demonstrate that locality is not merely extended but actively reconstructed through religious mediation. By analyzing these dynamics, this presentation contributes to a comparative understanding of how migration and translocality reshape rural Japan's social and religious landscapes.

Becoming a Modern Buddhist Subject in Contemporary China

Megan Rogers *(Duke Kunshan University)*

Yixin Gu *(Duke Kunshan University)*

Previous research has shown how religious practitioners draw on various practices to develop themselves into particular types of religious subjects, a process that Adam Yuet Chau (2012) calls "religious subjectification." Yet much of this research has focused on Abrahamic religions, often in Western contexts, and it generally does not account for the role the sociopolitical context can play in encouraging or discouraging the development of certain types of religious subjects. Drawing on textual analysis, ethnography, and interviews, this paper examines the religious practices and teachings of a registered lay Buddhist group in China, arguing that they produce a rationalized and privatized "modern" Buddhist subject whose religious subjectivity remains confined to the limited forms and locations of religion that the Chinese state permits. Three practices are key for this group: individual study of the master's teachings, group study, and volunteering within the group. Although group members report that successful religious subjectification significantly reduces their suffering in their everyday lives, these practices do not orient them towards challenging or addressing the structural roots of their suffering. Yet despite encouraging a religious subjectivity that does not challenge the state, the group was abruptly disbanded in 2022, illustrating how the state's regulatory power focuses primarily on controlling organizational capacity rather than individual religious subjectivity.

Devotion, Discipline, and Capital: Rethinking Religion under Neoliberal Conditions

Nicha Tovankasame *(Faculty of International Studies, Prince of Songkla University, Phuket Campus)*

In the compressed modern world driven by economic development, people's lives have become increasingly accelerated. As a result, many alternative religions and belief systems have been examined as evidence of their growing prominence in helping individuals cope with uncertainty and overwhelming pressures, particularly among those living in developing countries. However, this study proposes a different perspective. Rather than viewing religion solely as a response to uncertainty, it argues that religion actively accommodates and even drives individuals' efforts to accumulate wealth and sustain livelihoods under neoliberal conditions. In this sense, religious practice is not merely compensatory but constitutive of economic aspiration and survival. According to Max Weber, this logic is evident in the Protestant context, where religion serves as a major force shaping economic discipline and human motivation. However, in Asian settings, further explanation is required regarding the cultural logics, strategies, and forms of discipline involved, rather than simply describing such phenomena as prosperity cults focused on transactional or exchange-based notions of belief. By exploring the spiritual world of overseas Chinese descendants in Phuket, this study identifies significant findings regarding the success of businesses intertwined with syncretic religious practices and folk beliefs. The case study demonstrates how many mine-owning clans and laborers have worshipped the Muslim mining guardian deity known as Toh Tamee, regarded as a Muslim treasure deity. They built statues of Toh Tamee, constructed spirit houses and large shrines in his honor, and celebrated his annual birthday anniversary. Although there is no historical evidence indicating when the worship of Toh Tamee began, it can be traced back to the boom of the mining industry in Phuket during the 1920s. This period was likely when many overseas Chinese business clans began constructing his statues and shrines. At present, as the mining industry has transformed into a tourism-based economy, the popularity of honoring Toh Tamee has changed. Spirit mediums who become possessed by Toh Tamee continue to exist, along with groups of sponsors who support his worship. These followers maintain disciplined and self-regulated devotional practices, believing that such commitment will lead to success in return. By situating religious practice at the center of economic aspiration, this study reconceptualizes neoliberal subjectivity as a formation constituted through everyday devotional discipline rather than secular rationality alone.

(Re)Making Miracles: Agency and the Reconfiguration of Religious Experience within and beyond a Korean Christian New Religion

Jongseok Bak (*Korea University*)

Through pandemic-era quarantine violations and political unrest during the 2024 martial law crisis, Christian new religions in Korea have been widely perceived as "cults" or dangerous collective others. Conversely, counter-discourses portray them as marginalized minorities deprived of full citizenship through processes of stigmatization. Within this polarized discursive landscape, scholarly attention to the dynamics of (new) religions—how they emerge, transgress, and negotiate boundaries—and to believers who live their religion as practiced rather than prescribed has remained limited. To address this gap, this study adopts a case study approach focusing on members of Church A, a Christian new religion. Founded in 1982 amid the Pentecostal-Charismatic revival movement, Church A evolved into a socially and religiously controversial new religion in 1999 and declined following the conviction of its leader in 2018. Drawing on in-depth interviews, this study examines changes in believers' mystical experiences across four periods: prior to expulsion from the denomination, the transitional phase, the consolidation of a new religious identity, and the church's decline and subsequent member withdrawals. In the 1990s, miraculous experiences in Church A reflected broader charismatic revival practices, emphasizing divine healing and glossolalia. After the church's stigmatization and expulsion in 1999, miracles in the 2000s were reinterpreted as evidence of institutional legitimacy in the face of heresy accusations, increasing both in variety and frequency. In the 2010s, as the church developed a more closed and hierarchical structure, miracle narratives became linked to spiritual status while simultaneously encouraging spontaneous practices among believers. During and after their withdrawal, believers re-signified these experiences independently of the leader's charisma, thereby preserving and reconstructing their personal faith beyond the organization. The findings suggest that even under conditions shaped by stigma and organizational constraints, believers retain a reflective and fluid capacity to reinterpret experience and pursue meaning in the course of living their religion.

Digital Appeals, Women's Engagement and House Church–State Conflict in L City

Xinuo Liang (*SOAS, University of London*)

This paper examines why conflict between house churches and local authorities in L City, the coal industrial city in north China, repeatedly escalated in the last 34 years and generated a long running digital "appeal narrative" on difference online platforms. In L City, the Three-Self system functions not only as a legal religious space, but also as an interface for local governance. House churches respond through organisational adaptation and through narrative strategies that seek recognition beyond the local state. The paper material comes from four perspectives, interviews conducted in the local Three-Self church, local governance and Three-Self "transformation" documents, publicly circulated house church materials, and family memory. Reading these materials against each other shows how digital platforms reshape both conflict and resilience. Online circulation allows appeals, prayers, and testimonies to persist across time, to travel across jurisdictions, and to be reactivated with each new episode of enforcement. Especially after pandemic, digital platforms such as WeChat and Zoom support a practical continuity of preaching and coordination when offline gathering becomes risky, making organisational life less dependent on stable physical space. This paper is trying to offer the difference answers to today's China Christianity institutions governance. Women are not only prominent as moral subjects in public appeals but also appear as key organisers on both sides of the boundary. As Three-Self elders and coordinators in "transformation" work, and as mid-level leaders sustaining house church networks and digital routines. By tracing how women's organisational and narrative labour (Ministry) becomes most visible at moments of boundary tightening, the paper reframes "digital religion" in this case as a form of resilience that is inseparable from local governance structures, family ties, and contested legitimacy.

Technologies of Capture: Embodiment, Infection, and the Dynamics of Immersion and Documentation in Taiwanese Popular Religion

Jacob Tischer (*Charles University Prague*)

Based on twelve months of participant observation with a Pak-koan music troupe in Taipei's historic Dadaocheng district, this chapter introduces technologies of capture to discuss a tension between immersion and documentation in the technology-assisted mediation of divine presence in Taiwanese popular religion. Pak-koan troupe members use the term "infection" (ganran) to frame their motivation to continue playing traditional music that most residents consider outdated and noisy. Like its English equivalent, ganran puns on an inherent ambiguity, emphasizing personal incentive while ceding agency to an intermediary transmission between host and infectant. In practice, infection operates by creating an atmosphere (qifen) of "hot and noisy" (renao) excitement between bodies at social events such as temple festivals. Owing to its social nature, infection involves capturing public space and attention. Following the territorial logic of Taiwanese communal cults, the Pak-koan troupe purports to represent the entire neighborhood of Dadaocheng. Aware of a history of political suppression and the diminished social status of temple festivals, however, interlocutors feel an urgent need to make every performance an opportunity to document and preserve traditional practice. These twin objectives—documenting practices while enhancing immersive experience—shape the technologies of capture used in divine interaction. The specific divine devices explored here operate as techniques of immersion, mediating interaction with material things in kaiguang rituals, divination, or cleaning deity-bodies. Because of the drive to "save" tradition, these techniques inevitably converge with devices of documentation, especially video cameras and smartphones. But to capture the details of ritual virtuosity, such devices need prime access to ritual space, which easily disrupts the flow between participants and the material things they use for sensory immersion. By enabling the "enchantment of technology" (Gell 1998), immersion fosters a sense of immediacy, central to religious experience. However, the ability to immerse oneself and be affected—or infected—itself rests on technologies of mediation (Meyer 2011). In this context, the concept of infection is heuristically ingenious because it extends the dialectic of mediation beyond social interaction. By highlighting socio-somatic processes, infection forefronts how technologies of capture engender different, situated consequences in different environments. This matters because devices of immersion and documentation produce uneven effects across physical and virtual spaces. With ritual practice saturated by devices of documentation, the digital sphere becomes a significant site for consuming technologies of enchantment. Digital technologies may help individuals gain access to and appreciate ritual virtuosity. However, the video format offers little opportunity for social interaction. Thus, while digitized content may enhance individual immersion (e.g., via VR), it creates a mediatized distance. Being hosted on profit-maximizing platforms like YouTube and Facebook, any potential for immersion yields to a commodifying logic that detracts from lived religious experience. The virtual sphere lacks embodied social exchange, which undermines the very conditions for infection. To be incorporated effectively into regular religious practice, digital technologies must address social embeddedness and immersion over documentation and extraction. After all, infection effectively requires social co-presence and exchange between bodies to conjure hot-and-noisy atmospheres before mediatization can potentially alienate it.

Lucky Charms as Mobile Materiality: Portability, Multiplicity, and Authenticity beyond the Sacred/Secular Divide

Kazuto Hosono (*University of Tokyo*)

This presentation proposes the concept of the "lucky charm" as a form of mobile materiality in order to expand the scope of material culture studies both globally and beyond the conventional boundary between the sacred and the secular. The term lucky charm encompasses the ambivalent characteristics of objects that have traditionally been classified as amulets or talismans. According to the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (second edition, vol. 1), amulets are intended to repel what is baneful, whereas talismans are designed to attract what is beneficial. At the same time, this distinction is acknowledged as not always clear-cut. In this presentation, objects previously referred to as amulets or talismans are collectively redefined as lucky charm. I propose an analytical framework that conceptualizes them through the functional intertwinement of three elements: portability, multiplicity, and authenticity. First, portability refers to the capacity through which an object's meaning, value, and position within the sacred–secular spectrum is transformed as it moves across geographical and cultural boundaries. Ethnographic reportage on Chinese by the folklorist Ōtani Tōru highlights lucky charms featuring the motif of the nine-tailed fox circulating across Southeast Asia and the Chinese cultural sphere, demonstrating how authenticity is produced in a context-dependent manner. In China, these charms—often anthropomorphized as female figures wearing revealing attire—have gained popularity, whereas in Thailand, where they are manufactured, they tend to be regarded as pseudo-authentic or non-orthodox objects. This discrepancy indicates that the authenticity of a lucky charm is not a fixed attribute but rather an effect generated within specific social and cultural contexts. Furthermore, lucky charms are objects carried by individuals and, unlike unique religious icons such as Buddhist statues or architectural structures, inherently possess multiplicity. As they circulate across national borders and markets, lucky charms may acquire authenticity in certain contexts while easily being reduced to mere consumer commodities in others. By continuously shifting between "sacred objects" and "objects of consumption," lucky charms reveal a theoretical potential to move material culture studies beyond a globalized yet reductive sacred/secular dichotomy. This presentation substantiates these arguments through case studies drawn from the presenter's areas of expertise, including Japanese omamori.

A Theology of Media and Communication: An Ode to the Ideas of Dissemination, Mediation, and Technology

Seung Min Hong (*International Christian University*)

Protestantism has been commonly understood as a tradition that tries to overcome mediated communication (by the priestly authorities) between God and humanity and seek more immediate relationship with the divine. Contemporary Protestant Christianity in many East Asian countries is also often seen as a religious outlook that promotes personal and intimate dialogue with God. In a similar vein, when it comes to religious fellowship as well as outreach, there has always been warning of over-reliance on technology. Technologically assisted communication has been regarded rather as an inferior but inevitable alternative to the ideal: the less mediated and more reciprocal in-person dialogue. Rather than rejecting such popular notions of religious communication in Protestantism altogether, this paper attempts at highlighting the theological values of highly mediated and non-reciprocal yet widely available form of communication implemented through technology in religious contexts. By borrowing ideas from both media & communication theory as well as theology, I seek to accomplish three things. First, I argue for taking dissemination – as opposed to the dialogic model of communication – to be the central model for understanding Christian revelation. Second, I also argue for a high view of mediated-ness in religious experiences that can be found in a variety of Christian sources and traditions. Finally, I try to articulate a constructive theology of media technology. In essence, this paper attempts at delivering theoretical and theological arguments that can bring back to the center a few aspects of communication that have been pushed to the sides in Protestantism.

Tenrikyo Missionary Work and the Digital Society: Is Door-to-Door Missionary Work Sustainable?

Midori Horiuchi (*Oyasato Institute for the Study of Religion, Tenri University*)

The advancement of digital society has prompted critical reflection on the traditional structures and social functions of religion. Technologies such as social networking services and artificial intelligence have come to be integrated into lived religious practices, reshaping patterns of interaction among co-religionists as well as the modalities of proselytization and missionary engagement. By transcending geographical and temporal constraints, these technologies facilitate the formation and maintenance of religious networks, enabling the sharing of beliefs, mutual support, and the dissemination of doctrine to increasingly diverse audiences. At the same time, however, digital environments characterized by brevity, immediacy, and heightened competition for attention carry the risk of doctrinal simplification and misinterpretation, potentially impeding the cultivation of deep, reflexive forms of mutual understanding. This paper examines the forms and implications of Tenrikyo's proselytization and missionary activities within the sociocultural context of a digitally mediated society.

Transmission of Vernacular Ritual Traditions in the Digital Age: A Preliminary Study

Jiayue Sun (*The University of Hong Kong*)

In mainland China, a wide range of vernacular ritual traditions (minjian fajiao 民間法教) have been transmitted at least since the mid-Qing dynasty, such as the Maoshan (茅山), Lüshan (閩山), and Pu'an (普庵) schools. Many have drawn extensively on Daoist cosmology and ritual techniques. Traditionally, their practitioners, known as ritual masters (fashi 法師), provided diverse services in rural areas, including exorcism, healing, divination, and funerary rites. They learned through family inheritance or esoteric lineages, apprenticed for many years under a master, and passed down manuscripts containing secret knowledge. Over the past decade, however, dramatic changes have reshaped this mode of transmission. On the one hand, rapid urbanization and state campaigns against "superstition" have led to the decline of formal religious groups. On the other hand, the Internet has opened unprecedented channels for circulation. The image of ritual masters increasingly appears in online fantasy novels and television series; manuscripts are easily purchased through second-hand trading platforms, often collected from discontinued lineages; individuals claiming mastery of a ritual tradition offer paid online courses, whose contents are sometimes revised and resold by their own students; and social media like WeChat and Douyin provide spaces for self-proclaimed ritual masters to communicate, attract followers, and form digital communities. Rather than disappearing, vernacular ritual traditions are being revitalized in ways that are profoundly nontraditional and previously unimaginable. In my opinion, one of the most striking features of these digital communities is their demographic composition: most participants are under 30, and many are teenagers. A significant proportion come from socioeconomically marginalized backgrounds. Their engagement with vernacular ritual traditions appears less as the continuation of established lineages than as an exploratory, self-directed, and platform-mediated search for livelihood, status, and meaning. In this sense, their activities are comparable to a non-elite version of the body-mind-spirit movement. Since 2022, in the course of my doctoral research on carpenter-sorcerers, I have joined several WeChat groups and established connections with many ritual masters active online. Based on my preliminary findings from participant observation and interviews, this paper examines how vernacular ritual traditions are reshaped or reimagined online, with particular attention to questions of authority and authenticity.

RELIGION AND DIGITAL WORLDS

DYNAMICS OF RELIGIOUS
ADAPTATION, RESILIENCE
AND INNOVATION



2026.7.1 Wed. — 7.4 Sat.

Fo Guang Shan Buddha Museum, Kaohsiung