LITERATURE REVIEW: THE RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN CHINA – COMMERCIALISM IN CHINA, OR TRANSGNATIONALISM AND OVERSEAS-CHINESE AT WORK?

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The evolving Chinese Institution of Religion is a national phenomenon catching the attentions of many both within China and the global community, seeing it as a proxy benchmark to the relative opening of China to the world. Religion like a simmered fire, aroused by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) when it came to power in 1949, institutionalized and enshrined in the constitution of China, protected and sanctioned religions came into state-religious co-appropriation where the state uses the religion and the religion uses the state. People’s Republic under Mao Zedong adopted a generally hostile stance to religion, particularly during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), when temples and churches were destroyed, scriptures burned, and religious personnel imprisoned or secularized. In this period, “management” of religion meant maintaining firm control while waiting for religion to or lingering to disappear as a remnant of “feudal society” as summarized in MacInnis. The economic reforms and openness in the years after 1978 by Deng 1 gradually re-open the religious option to the citizens. I argue that many academic papers have attributed this resurgence and revival towards the possibility of economic and stature co-benefits that come with orchestrating and organizing these revivals without due recognition of the state of mind of Chinese citizens and Overseas Chinese participants who have added flavour to our observation and argument concerning religious revival. The fixation of the economic and benefits model association has polarized religious revival research and writing of China.

CHINESE RELIGION UNDERSTANDING FRAMEWORK

To better understand the arguments present, I propose to use the framework created by Yang, who proposes in Figure 1 that the Religious markets in China be separated into three distinctive markets – Red signifying State Acceptance and blessings, while the Black signifies State Repression and Persecution of an illegal Religion and the Grey Market being a straddle between the Red and Black in that it contains elements of legality - ascribed or borrowed from legalized religions, however, segments of its religious activities also are considered illegal. Yang’s writings allow us to have a better segmented understanding of the fragmentations that exist in the religious markets, in that the Grey market is inordinately and persistently obstinate yet malleable and benignly threatening to the authorities, failing which its ranking would have been reordered to that of the Black Market. We could further surmise that if it successfully metamorphoses itself with added Red Market elements, the religion could enter the Red Market. In our study of this trend in the economic co-optation and cross-appropriation of Religion and the State, it is crucial for us to rely on a simple framework such as proposed by Yang in the classification and advancement or decline of classifications. Yang argues that “in a Monopoly or Oligopoly in exchanged for political favour or protection, the sanctioned religion must accept political restrictions and that the state will look closely for any deviance. Suppression of religious involvement by the Communist regime may lead to other forms of religiosity.

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1 Deng Xiao Ping, First Vice-Premier of the Peoples Republic of China, commonly ascribed to be architect of modern Chinese economy.
2 As argued in the lack of writings on this topic or this correlation
“Diffused Religion”, a form of religion which is less easy to control. Suppression leads to limited decline in religion and also complicates the religious market with more dynamism.”

A REVIEW OF CURRENT UNDERSTANDING – FACTORS AMELIORATING RELIGIOUS REVIVAL

This is exemplified by Chau, in the case of Heilongdawang Temple and that of its Temple Boss – Lao Wang; who meticulously transformed a Grey Religion into a historical and cultural site, school and dividend-sharing projects with the surrounding villagers and how religion is infused with the lives of the stakeholders. The ingenious shifting identities of the Religious Organization seen courting the state in diverse avenues – Cultural Connections, Heritage Sites and Preservation, Hallmarks of Cultivation and good behaviours; all these are innately and inherently positives that any government of any country should irrevocably support if the cost is not translated to them. In the face of this recognition of shifting and masquerading identities we revisit the Triple Markets Model by Yang who defined the Grey markets as state-outlawed religion with some religious legality, certain institutions of legalized religion is used in conjunction with these grey market participants. I argue that the Grey market participants are market-pushing participants who seek to legitimize their Religious Organization though remarkable vestiges of independence exist as opposed to state-sanctioned religions yet capping this independence with the cloak of sanctioned religions. If we were to identify state actions as Market Regulator’s response to the market, and the Red Response is a sign of approval, Black Response a sign of disapproval, surely the Grey Response is a sign of gradual acceptance, not amounting to approval. However, I argue also that because of the innate malleability of the state and her self-preserving characteristics, the state similar to the Religious Organization is engaged in this discourse to prioritize the importance of co-optation of the Grey Religious Organization’s into their fold rather than driving them into the Black market which adds transactional and policing cost to the state. In this Grey Channel, there is essentially dual-channel traffic, where the State and the Religious Organization seek to court each other. Similarly Sun has cited in the reinvention of Confucius Ritual Practices, the incorporation of enterprising elements – blending legitimate religious practice with self-enriching activities such as sale of “Prayer Cards” which are similar to the “ema” prayer wooden cards that are found in Japanese Shinto Temples. This clearly allows us to visualize the state of religious affairs that have developed, in reference to Chau’s exposition of the Heilongdawang and its temple boss – Lao Wang, who has tried to change the Grey Market status by incorporating Red elements into it and successfully transformed itself into a Red

3 The religious organization takes the burden away from the state, therefore this form of NGOs are well received by the state, as they assist in meeting the performance indicators yet do not cause any resources
Market participant, we can see in the case cited by Sun, the Confucius Priest seek to incorporate grey market elements into a supposed4 Red Market for a commercial profit.

D.R Yang similarly provided an understanding into modern developments of the changing elements of temple Daoism in Shanghai – where legal priest under the auspices of the Shanghai Daoist Association resort to incorporating out-law5 elements of non-legalized priest into the temple to increase the fellowship and income revenues to the temples and to themselves, collaborating with Shamans for profits, provision of Tablet Space for Sale, Sales of Amulets and the Provision of Divination Services in a fashion that enables them to continually keep their legal status yet allowing them access to lucrative non-legal religious behaviours. These actions suggest that the Temple Priest are eager to retain the legal title bestowed upon them and yet are hesitant to be fully compliant to the authorities for this would entail them to lose our monetarily, therefore, they systematically incorporate Grey Market and even Black Market elements into their Red Market practices.

These authors have consistently pointed out that religious revival come with economic benefits associated to the communities that the religious organization, body or place of worship exist. These actions by the religious organization promote consumerism and often have a markedly commercial persona, where religious activities are carried out in concert with income-creating opportunities. The preoccupation with self financial enrichment and economic growth by the local authorities oftentimes result in policy lapses and bending which is an unintended consequence of decentralized federalist6 style local governance. Local religious and administrative authorities have frequently dispensed much grace, tolerance and co-optation with these religious organizations who surreptitiously cloak non-sanctioned religious activities with Cultural, Historical, Touristic and Civic mantles – in order to achieve the intended economic agenda’s of the locale.

Chau writes about the religions revival of Popular Religion of Black Dragon King Temple in Shaanbei, North-Central China where Temples as the loci and motor of popular religions revival and for popular cultural production, interlinked performance driven indicators of the leadership – of respected local man. When the temple is well-attended and well maintained; elected temple officials can add prestige, wealth and other non-monetary perks. A bountiful temple (Black Dragon King) can add income to the locality as well, which can be well used for paving of roads and infrastructure upgrades; improving the community. In contrasting the worship of Black Dragon King – Black Market Religion with the Official’s response – we see that while official doctrine covering “Superstition” and “Illegal” religion aside of the 5 sanctioned by the State, calls for the local police force (gong an) to consider similar to social ills – gambling etc, the local policing officials are often called to attend the temple festivities. Chau suggest that the State acts against illegal-religion based on randomness of the “Fetish-zed demonstration of political efficacy” and her view of the level of penetration of this “religion” into public space and public involvement, less of which breeds less control and disdain. Chau suggests looking at the state in a two-guise manner, with one central planning body (central government) and one administrative (local state). Author proposes that Local Authorities no longer sees it beneficial (personally) to taking action against “superstition”, viz during the Cultural Revolution where this is one of the performance measurement. Client-Patron relationship is currently evolving, where the local registry office and police representing Local Authorities are cultivated and plied with soft-bribery and are beneficiaries of the growth of the temple; Local Authorities often also hide this “superstition” of the temples in the guise of “folklore”, “cultural and traditional” which are “primitive and laughable” and not worthy of efforts to eradicate. However, the

4 Confucius Worship is not recognized within the 5 Sanctioned State religions; however, I understand they are not actively pursued for religious rehabilitation or elimination.
5 Non-Legal Aspects of Religious Observation viz Legally Acceptable Daoist Religious Practices
6 China’s Governance Structure results in the Peripheral Governments reporting into the Central Government, giving the Peripheral Governments immense autonomy.
Chau draws a counter argument to “rent-seeking” nature of the Local Authorities in opposition to Birth Control Efforts\(^7\) where the spill-over of lackadaisical\(^8\) attitudes may be monetarily beneficial, the Central Government is clamping hard on the actualization of the laws which the Local Authorities cannot justify sacrificing a lucrative life-time bureaucratic career for.

Weller writes about 4 religious figures and gods in his article linking weak states with strong spirits. The Cloth-Bag Buddha – seen as the god of biased wealth (pian cai shen), whose followers pray and venerate in hope of seeking divine assistance in getting biased wealth. Ji Gong (wine-besotted monk), Tai-Zi Ye (Nuozha, patricidal child) and Sun Wukong (monkey god). Weller writes that “success appeared increasingly as the result of self-serving utilitarianism rather than community morality, fitting desperate ghost and idiosyncratic gods more than moralizing bureaucrats these capricious deities matched the capricious nature of profit itself. What had been an odd, weak undercurrent in popular religion had a stronger pull than the more standard gods in the unusual conditions of that one decade.” I propose that Weller’s exposition brings our understanding of the self-serving utilitarianism and capricious nature of self-profit of the devotees in contrast with Chau’s exposition of the self-serving nature of the temple operators. However, both writings signal the growing discursive-nature of religiousness – where followers and worshipers seek an immediate gratifying and profiting experience more than the concerns for “other-worldly”\(^9\) things and beings.

Chau and Weller provided diverging views of religious economics – we examine "Yiguan Dao: 'Heterodoxy' and Popular Religion on Taiwan," Joseph Bosco, Bosco examines the Yiguan Dao a heterodox religious movement gaining momentum in Taiwan, in this exposition we recognize that Yiguan Dao is a culmination of Guan Yin, Guan Gong, Ji Gong and the Reclining Buddha. In a bid for religious followers in search for the “efficaciousness”\(^10\) of religion, many have turn to multi-religious element – Yiguan Dao. Bosco writes that the worshipers are not bothered by what is considered heterodox or orthodox, but are more considered with immediate gratification, and as believers become savvier, there are segments of worshipers who actively seek out and shop for a religion which they believe are more efficacious. The arguments of orthodoxy was challenged by Yang that during Qing Dynasty, Buddhism and Taoism were “heterodoxy” that submitted to the state’s control and licensing requirements which give them limited legality – though they were to be established far from the urban centres and submit to the state’s demands. This provides us with two other diverging queries that existing literature does not examine.

Firstly, the level of Orthodoxy, exampled during the Qing Dynasty, suggest to us that the government in power has the prerogative to label religious organizations as heterodox and orthodox, similar to the case of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) labelling the 5 Orthodox religions and the others as Heterodox and using Yang’s triple market model, anything else with elements of the Orthodoxy can potentially be considered the Grey Market. We also see the malleability in the Qing – as in Present China that the State could co-opt, or flexibly shift its focus or characterisation of the religion to suit its policy (Weller, Chau).

Secondly, that there is a level of State-Religion interaction, this interplay is evident in present China and has been documented at least in the Qing Dynasty. This interaction allows for us to draw a thesis in so far that if the State is willing to accommodate the religion, the religion has the right to revival. In

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\(^7\) This is made in reference to the “One-Child Policy” of the Chinese Government for the majority of citizens, aside from minorities and selected people.

\(^8\) The consequences of not policing religion is argued to have lesser impact than not policing the “One-Child Policy”

\(^9\) Refers to the Supernatural, After-Life, the believe of and hope of heaven and the world after this

\(^10\) There is a constant desire and preoccupation of believers with “ling” or “Efficaciousness” in their seeking of a religion
the absence of State Consensus, the religion has only limited headroom before it will attract attention or be explicitly relegated to the Black Market.

**COUNTER-PROPOSAL – RELIGIOUS REVIVAL REKINDLED DUE TO TRANSNATIONAL EFFECTS OF THE DIASPORA AND OVERSEAS CHINESE**

I propose that while religious revival requires the State’s approval and blessings. So far, collectively these authors have presented this approval and blessings associating them with economic benefits accorded with local state agents in a decentralized and federalist style government and that the religious malleability gives religion and authorities boundless opportunities to interact and interplay.

In the absence of monetary consideration, allow me to present my thesis on the other reasons that may underpin religious revival.

The evidence of an extra-monetary social interaction in the form of Diaspora and Overseas Chinese adds some light to a recent revival of Religion in China. In a writing on the revival of Guangze Zunwang Cult and its Sino-Southeast Asian roots, Chia primarily looks at the “diasporic” nature and religious attachment of Overseas Chinese to the temple networks and ancestral temples in their Qiaoxiang (Diaspora’s Ancestral Village) the author argues that Overseas Chinese interest and monetary support has benefited the Shishan Fengshan Temple and even creates religious competition and inter-temple rivalry caused by other temples that fail to gather support, recognition and visits. Chia walks the reader through the life of Wu Hongye, whose grandfather migrated to Singapore from Nan’an, who taught in China before the CCP came to power, and also one who undertook leadership positions in both the Shishan Fengshan Temple and the Lam Ann (Nan’an) Association in Singapore. Wu who returned to see the demise of the Shishan Fengshan Temple in Nan’an after the Cultural Revolution, returned to Singapore and felt it was imperative to restore the Shishan Fengshan Temple in Nan’an and gathered members of the Lam Ann Association (Nan’an Ancestry) and worshipers of the Guangze Zunwang in Singapore, Malaysia and Philippines to give generously for the mission – Wu established the funds, with the support of the various governing bodies in Nan’an, rebuilt the temple. Chia’s research and study on the the Guangze Zunwang Cult and its Sino-Southeast Asian networks, give us a good opportunity to see Diaspora-led religious financing and revival. Funds coming from overseas alike “Missionaries coming into China” typically are altruistic in nature, without concern for profits or economic benefits, moreover, the incoming funds are from a richer regional country to a less rich country. From Chia’s Study, it is evident there is a prospect of incorporating an alternative paradigm as compared to existing writings which focuses on the economic pursuits as the fundamental underpinning of religious revival. In support of this new found Diaspora-involvement in religious revival in China.

Formoso writes that the Overseas Chinese contrast national “polities” and how they make use of De Jiao a religion to outreach to China, he writes that this religion provides new forms of identification with China and towards the Chinese people and how the Overseas Chinese businessman have been using their relative wealth and power to transmit religious revival activities back to the Motherland. This is in compliments to their Bamboo business networks establishing Chinese-Unity and Chinese-Benefits networks where businesses congregate in an obscure manner to benefit, co-operate and co-assist each other in business ties and contracts, the religious revival and donations form part of the larger social experiment and experience that these businessman seek to play as actors in a globalized

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11 Local Government that is Subordinate to the Central Government, Local Authorities
12 I wish to convey the general understanding of Western Christian-dominated Missionaries who come to China to establish Schools, Hospitals and Social Service Networks as Altruistic
business arena and as they seek positive networking experiences with existing actors in the business arena in China. Religious revival assistance and funding adds a layer of “Chinese-ness”\textsuperscript{13} and aids in bringing “Locale-Affinity”\textsuperscript{14} to this Overseas Chinese Businessman who may have otherwise adopted a “Westernized” way of life.

CONCLUSION

While there is existing literature on the prevalence of economic agenda-driving religious revival in China as evident by the collection found in this literature review, it is commonly forsaken that there is a considerable number of Overseas-Chinese representing the transnational’s, who have settled down primarily in the South-East Asia corridor, peripheral to Chinese influences. These Second, Third or even Fourth generation migrants – some of whom still hold great regard for the Chinese heritage, and the common denominator seen of Overseas Chinese Businessman who form an imperceptible and obscure Bamboo Network seek to incorporate religious revival attempts and financial assistance as an integral component of networking and “Chinese-ness”-building as they seek to promote goodwill in their business dealings. However, aside from this thesis, we cannot negate that there are some who are truly pious, having an agenda to promote the religious revival and fervency as not only complimenting their business ventures but also as a means of corporate citizenship, as a means of returning back to society.

Apart from this Bamboo-Network extensions, in the recent incident involving Malaysia Airline flight MH370 which unfortunately was concluded to have ended its flight journey in the Indian Ocean, according to the 7\textsuperscript{th} Media Statement and Press Release by the Malaysia Airlines, the Malaysian Government and Malaysia Airlines enlisted the assistance of “Taiwan Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation Malaysia”, to send 94 caregivers and volunteer supporters to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia as well as Beijing, China, the Tzu Chi foundation was also enlisted to maintain the support helpline made available to friends and relatives of those on-board. In the foray into Overseas-Chinese directed religious revival research, and drawing examples from this case, it is evident that transnational religious services can be obtained, and that the providers have the bandwidth necessary to respond to such request, this is a Taiwanese organization that has outreach in Malaysia and through this outreach and branch, the Malaysia authorities have requested them to be of assistance to the affected families largely based in China. We could clearly see from this, the international outreach of religion and its associated services in such a massive magnitude not seen in the past.

Therefore, I conclude that there are not enough existing literature to fully cover and report on the Religious Revival trends, the easiest of which is to pin it directly into the economic and profit-seeking of the citizens – both laity and clergy, who participate to enrich themselves in the religious path. However, as we can see from Chia and Formoso, whose papers are relatively newly published, we could see an upcoming trend in attempting to link Transnational and Overseas-Chinese as a locomotive for Religious Revival in China and it is worthwhile exploring the links between the two, as well as the examination and analysis of empirical data, or the collection of the said data through field research on the incoming funds that the various religious institutions have received from the Transnational and Overseas-Chinese networks to have a more substantive study on this newly angled hypothesis.

\textsuperscript{13} This “Chinese-ness” is desired to add credence to their business stature

\textsuperscript{14} This affinity that Chinese have when they start to interact with another Chinese, to ask where you come from, your ancestry and hometown
REFERENCES


Press Release made on Sunday, March 09, 09:30 AM MYT +0800 Malaysia Airlines MH370 Flight Incident - 7th Media Statement