In the context of global flows of money, resources, people, practices and discourses, religion scholars have increasingly developed a networked understanding that religion is not confined in a territory but extends across national borders (Ebaugh and Chafetz, 2002; Valentine et al., 2013). In understanding transnational religious networks, existing scholarship has explored transnational migrants’ identity reconstruction, place-making and community building with respect to religion in receiving countries (e.g. Habarakada and Shin, 2019; Mazumdar and Mazumdar, 2009), their maintenance of religious connections with home places (Vásquez and Knott, 2014; Levitt, 2001), and diasporic congregations through which religious exchanges among members are produced (e.g. Levitt, 2004). Overall, the discussion of transnational religious networks has been mostly grounded in the context of migration; therefore, it tends to suggest that transnational religious networks are forged by specific migrant groups and are primarily migratory outcomes.

This workshop builds on a growing body of literature that moves beyond the dominant focus on migrants and migration towards alternative articulations of transnational religious networks. Within a transnational field, there are many other networks, which are independent from migration networks, that also prompt the (re)production of religious beliefs, practices and identities across national borders. For instance, Schüler (2008) argues that transnational religious networks are also embedded in imagined spaces by illustrating that transnationalism is located in the Pentecostal imaginary rather than in de facto processes of migration. Such alternative formation of transnational religious networks needs to be given greater attention.

We are also interested in those alternative religious networks which are not necessarily dependent from but built on migration networks to formulate new ways of production within a transnational field. We seek papers on the formation of transnational religious networks based on institutional alliances between religious organizations in different places at different scales, through which cross-border organizational arrangements are worked out and the boundaries of belonging are redefined. Also, we delve into the question of how religious discourses and practices in a transnational field are initiated, translated and shaped by other social actors who are ‘not themselves trans-migrants or involved in transnational familial networks’ (Valentine et al., 2013, p.51). Papers emphasize the role of non-human actants in influencing cross-border ties and networks are also welcome. Finally, this workshop seeks papers on how religious beliefs and practices travel across borders not just through institutions and formal networks but also through informal networks and everyday life of religious adherents (Sheringham, 2010).

In addition, this workshop invites speakers which adopt new methodological approaches to researching transnational religious networks. These include new methodologies for tracing transnational networks through digital means, new directions in ethnography that explore the role of ethics in everyday life, and alternative approaches emphasizing empathy, cognition, and community building under conditions of ontological shift.

This workshop engages with transnational networks of different kinds of religion, including formal, institutional religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as well as popular beliefs and rites such as the cult of ancestors and local deities. We invite papers offering an Asian perspective to articulate alternative religious networks across national boundaries, which cover but are not limited to the following topics:

- Religious/cultural economy
- Ritual transformation
- Pilgrimage
- Belt and Road Initiative
- Digital religion
- Religious movement
- Migrant integration
- New methodological approaches
### 3 MARCH 2021 • WEDNESDAY

#### 10:30 – 10:40
**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY REMARKS**

*Kenneth Dean, Ningning Chen & Fabian Graham*

*Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore*

#### 10:40 – 12:30
**PANEL 1 – INSTITUTIONAL ROLES & SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS**

**Moderator:** Justin K. Tse | *Singapore Management University*

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10:40</td>
<td>Marcus Bingenheimer</td>
<td>Temple University, USA</td>
<td>Buddhist 'Influencers' in the Ming-Qing Transition</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Jack Meng-Tat Chia</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
<td>Translocalizing a Local Deity: The Patriarch of Sanping’s Cult in Contemporary China</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:20</td>
<td>Temily Tavangar</td>
<td>Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, USA</td>
<td>From Cosmopolitan Convergences to Situated Religious Cosmopolitanism: The Early Spread of the Bahá’í Faith in Singapore and Malaya</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:40</td>
<td>Eva Nisa</td>
<td>The Australian National University</td>
<td>Cross-Border <em>Halalisation</em> Hype: INHART and Islamic Cultural Economy in Malaysia and Beyond</td>
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<td>12:00</td>
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#### 14:00 – 15:30
**PANEL 2 – SUMMER CAMPS, COSMOPOLITAN DISCOURSES AND PLACE STORIES**

**Moderator:** Fabian Graham | *National University of Singapore*

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<th>Time</th>
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<tr>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>Indira Arumugam</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
<td>Place Stories and Poiesis: Travelling Rural Goddess and Transnational Temple-Making</td>
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<td>14:20</td>
<td>Steve Wai Lung, Cheung</td>
<td>The University of Hong Kong, Khun Eng Kuah-Pearce</td>
<td>Jinan University, China</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:40</td>
<td>Ningning Chen</td>
<td>National University of Singapore</td>
<td>The State and the Transnational Networking of the Cult of Guangze Zunwang</td>
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<td>16:00</td>
<td>PANEL 3 – ONLINE NETWORKS</td>
<td>Alvin Eng Hui Lim, National University of Singapore</td>
<td>Archipelagic Pilgrimages, Digital Voyages and Effigy Vessels</td>
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<td>16:20</td>
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<td>Shashini Gamage, La Trobe University, Australia, Raelene Wilding, Loretta Baldassar, University of Western Australia</td>
<td>Digital Media, Ageing and Faith: Transnational Flows of Religion and Older Sri Lankan Migrants in Australia</td>
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<td>16:40</td>
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<td>Jasbeer Musthafa Mamalipurath, Western Sydney University, Australia</td>
<td>Towards a Postsecular Shi’ism: The Discursive Strategies of Transnational Online Network of Shi’a Muslims in India</td>
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### 4 MARCH 2021 • THURSDAY

**10:30 – 12:20**

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<tr>
<th>Moderator</th>
<th>PANEL 4 – NETWORK EFFECTS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Moderator</strong></td>
<td>Junxi Qian</td>
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<td>10:30</td>
<td><strong>Nanlai Cao</strong>&lt;br&gt;Renmin University of China</td>
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<td>10:50</td>
<td><strong>Kirin A. Shinde</strong>&lt;br&gt;La Trobe University, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:10</td>
<td><strong>Orlando Woods</strong>&lt;br&gt;Singapore Management University</td>
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<td>11:30</td>
<td><strong>Bernardo E. Brown</strong>&lt;br&gt;International Christian University, Japan</td>
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<td><strong>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</strong></td>
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**14:00 – 15:30**

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<th>Moderator</th>
<th>PANEL 5 – NETWORK BUILDING AND BRI</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Moderator</strong></td>
<td>Yi’En Cheng</td>
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<td>14:00</td>
<td><strong>Kenneth Dean</strong>&lt;br&gt;National University of Singapore</td>
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<td>14:20</td>
<td><strong>Emily Hertzman</strong>&lt;br&gt;National University of Singapore</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:40</td>
<td><strong>Yujie Zhu</strong>&lt;br&gt;The Australian National University&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Yang Yang</strong>&lt;br&gt;National University of Singapore</td>
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### 16:00 – 17:30 | PANEL 6 – SOUTH-TO-NORTH EXPANSION

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Michel Chambon</td>
<td>Catholic News Agencies and 21st Century Asia: Visible and Invisible Networks of Asian Catholicism</td>
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<td><em>Independent Scholar, France</em></td>
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<td>16:20</td>
<td>Alexander Horstmann</td>
<td>Evangelical Activism in the Karen Hills: The Free Burma Rangers and Mobilization of Karen Villagers in the War against Evil</td>
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<td><em>Tallinn University, Estonia</em></td>
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<td>16:40</td>
<td>Yanwar Pribadi</td>
<td>Indonesia’s Islamic Networks in Europe: The Nahdlatul Ulama in Campaigning Indonesian Islam and Enacting Religious Agency</td>
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<td><em>UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, Indonesia</em></td>
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## 5 MARCH 2021 • FRIDAY

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<tr>
<th>16:00 – 17:30</th>
<th>PANEL 7 – ALTERITY &amp; METHODOLOGY</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Moderator</strong></td>
<td>Kenneth Dean</td>
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<td><strong>16:00</strong></td>
<td>Fabian Graham</td>
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<td>Paradox and Religious Ontologies in the Chinese Underworld Tradition</td>
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<td><strong>16:20</strong></td>
<td>Patrice Ladwig</td>
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<td>The Limits and Rules of Inclusion: Social Inequality and Educational Opportunities in a Multi-Ethnic Monastery in Northern Laos</td>
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<td><strong>16:40</strong></td>
<td>Fiona Bowie</td>
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<td>Transnational Religious Communities: Methodological Challenges in the Study of a Modern Ecclesial Community, The Focolare Movement</td>
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<td><strong>17:00</strong></td>
<td>QUESTIONS &amp; ANSWERS</td>
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Panel 1

Buddhist 'Influencers' in the Ming-Qing transition

Marcus BINGENHEIMER
College of Liberal Arts, Temple University, USA
bingenheimer@temple.edu

Histories of Ming Buddhism usually point to a constellation of "four eminent monks" that are said to have exerted great influence over the late Ming revival of Buddhism. We will look at the relative importance of Yunqi Zhuhong 雲棲株宏 (1535–1615), Zibo Zhenke 紫柏真可 (1543-1603), Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清 (1546-1623), Ouyi Zhixu 蕅益智旭 (1599–1655) from a social network perspective and how it played out in the Ming-Qing tradition. It will be seen that from an institutional perspective not the lineages of these famous four masters dominated early Qing Buddhism, but rather those of Miyun Yuanwu 密雲圓悟 (1566-1642), who, through his training and placement of capable students, became the central node for 17th century Chinese Buddhism.

The analysis is based on the ‘Historical Social Network of Chinese Buddhism’ available at https://github.com/mbingenheimer/ChineseBuddhism_SNA under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license.

Marcus Bingenheimer obtained an MA (Sinology) and Dr.phil (History of Religions) from Würzburg University and an MA (Communication Studies) from Nagoya University. He currently works as Associate Professor in the Department of Religion at Temple University (TU) in Philadelphia. At TU he is also Academic Director of the Loretta C. Duckworth Scholars Studio where he helps to coordinate support for emerging digital scholarship technologies, such as Digital Humanities & Arts methods, 3D printing, or the use of VR-environments. He taught Buddhism and Digital Humanities in Taiwan at Dharma Drum, and held visiting positions at Dongguk University (Seoul), Nagoya University, Chulalongkorn University (Bangkok), and the National University of Singapore. His main research interests are Buddhist history and historiography, early sūtra literature, and how to apply computational approaches to research in the Humanities. Over the years he has published more than five books and more than fifty articles on these topics.
Panel 1

Translocalizing a Local Deity: 
The Patriarch of Sanping’s Cult in Contemporary China

Jack Meng-Tat Chia
Department of History, National University of Singapore
jackchia@nus.edu.sg

This paper explores how the Chinese authorities utilized various marketing strategies to promote the Patriarch of Sanping’s cult in contemporary China. It argues that the cult of the Patriarch of Sanping became an “invented tradition” marketed and translocalized to expand religious tourism in Pinghe, creating the opportunity for resources to be channeled from other parts of China, Taiwan, as well as from the overseas Chinese to develop the Pinghe county in Zhangzhou. The local authorities employed various marketing strategies to endorse the deity’s efficacy and promote the Sanping Monastery as a translocal religious space. On the one hand, translocal miracle tales were told to entice devotees to visit and make donations to the ancestral monastery. On the other hand, academics, journalists, and tour guides were courted to generate attention and interest in the cult. This study demonstrates how the local government’s investment and marketing strategies contributed to the transformation of a Chan master from a local deity to a translocal saint.

Jack Meng-Tat Chia is Assistant Professor of History and Religious Studies at the National University of Singapore. His research focuses on Buddhism and Chinese popular religion in maritime Southeast Asia, transnationalism Buddhism, and Sino-Southeast Asian interactions. His first book, Monks in Motion: Buddhism and Modernity across the South China Sea (Oxford, 2020), explores the connected history of Buddhist communities in China and Southeast Asia in the twentieth century. He is co-editor of Living with Myths in Singapore (Ethos, 2017) and has published articles in journals such as Archipel, Asian Ethnology, China Quarterly, Contemporary Buddhism, History of Religions, and Journal of Chinese Religions.
Panel 1

**From Cosmopolitan Convergences to Situated Religious Cosmopolitanism: The early spread of the Bahá’í Faith in Singapore and Malaya**

Temily TAVANGAR  
Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, USA  
temily.tavangar@gmail.com

The literature on transnational religious networks has rarely considered the normative cosmopolitan discourses embedded in religious beliefs and practices. This paper seeks to clarify the relationship between transnational expansion and religious cosmopolitanism by examining the spread of the Baha’i Faith in Singapore and Malaya (1950-1975). The Baha’i Faith emerged in Persia the mid-19th century, and in just 150 years since its inception, its followers came to span over 200 countries. In a religion with no clergy, its rapid spread relied on individuals inspired by teachings of “world citizenship” foundational to the religion.

This paper will examine the relationship between the transnational spread of the Baha’i Faith and its religious cosmopolitanism in three parts. First, I outline the emergence of the religion and the inseparability of “world citizenship” from its millenarian teachings. Second, I trace the spread of the religion in Singapore and Malaya, a process that initially relied on serendipitous encounters between cosmopolitan travelers, whose metropolitan subjectivities later evolved into a Baha’i religious cosmopolitanism. Through a series of what I call “cosmopolitan convergences”, these travelers later took the religion to communities strongly rooted in place and culture. Here, the cosmopolitan ideals of the religion became delinked from transnational travel. In the third part of this paper, I examine this process among Malaysia’s Semai tribe and highlight features of Baha’i practices that facilitated a new phase of what I call situated religious cosmopolitanism, where the boundaries of belonging became expanded to encompass a global community through consultative processes.

Temily Tavangar is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity, where she is currently exploring Southeast Asian discourses on social injustice. She recently obtained her PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of Hong Kong. Her doctoral research on Malaysia’s Semai tribe lies at the intersection of cosmopolitanism, religion, and social change. Her other research interests include collaborative and de-colonizing methodologies, alternative epistemologies, and community development. Temily was a recipient of the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship (HKPF) as well as the Templeton Foundation Faith and Science Collaborative Research Grant. She has held fellowships at the University of Oxford, New York University (Shanghai), and the National University of Singapore. Her interests and perspectives draw on the strengths of her multi-cultural background and her previous career as an international broadcast journalist. Temily is actively involved in collaborative community development initiatives and has over a decade of experience facilitating youth empowerment programs across Southeast and East Asia.
Panel 1

Cross-Border *Halalisation* Hype: INHART and Islamic Cultural Economy in Malaysia and Beyond

Eva NISA
The Australian National University
eva.nisa@anu.edu.au

The concerns of contemporary middle-class Muslims regarding piety have increasingly led to efforts to establish a *halal* (lawful according to Islamic law) economy. This can be seen from the thriving Islamic cultural economy in Malaysia. The country tops the Global Islamic Economy indicator, which serves as the dominant framework for evaluating and measuring the global *halal* economy. Malaysia has become a global leader in this field through the establishment of *halal* research centres, of which the International Institute for Halal Research and Training, or INHART, is one of the most prominent. This paper focuses on the ethnography and digital ethnography of INHART initiatives for the *halal* economy and digital Islamic economy in Malaysia and beyond. Many countries have benefitted from INHART *halal* innovations and professional services, especially Indonesia, Thailand, Korea, and Taiwan. The key research questions are: How does the chain of parties involved in the development of the transnational *halal* economy—religious educational institutions, the state, religious authorities and business enterprises—function in Malaysia? INHART’s critical position as the government-appointed leader of the Consortium of Higher Learning Halal Institutes invites us to question, how does the consortium support *halal* outreach policies and practices in Malaysia and beyond? Little has been documented on the role of the innovative Malaysian higher education institutions, like INHART, and academics whose products and novel approaches have benefitted practitioners in the global *halal* industry. This paper, therefore, aims to explore how *halal* interpretations and practices travel across borders and expand through digital media.

Eva Nisa is a senior lecturer of anthropology in the College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University. She is also Adjunct Research Fellow in Religious Studies at the School of Social and Cultural Studies, and Honorary Research Associate, the Faculty of Graduate Research, Victoria University of Wellington. She is a scholar of anthropology, Islamic studies, religion and gender, researching how global currents of Islam reshape the lives of Muslims in Southeast Asia. Her research interests include Islam and Muslim societies, Islamic cultural economy, gender relations, religion and media (social media), Islamic thought, and Muslim refugees and migration. She has published her work in a number of peer-reviewed journals. Nisa is serving on the editorial board for *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology (TAPJA)* and is working with Prof Lyn Parker on the *Encyclopedia of Women and Islamic Cultures* for Southeast Asia and East Asia.
At the heart of this paper are two place stories of the same goddess, Veeramakali Amman. One recounts the origins of the deity from the violent death of an innocent girl in a village in Tamil Nadu around 750 CE. The other traces the establishment of this hitherto rural goddess’s ritual cult in Singapore in 1855 and subsequent temple in 1881. Through narrating the exploits of deities and sacred persons, place stories (sthala purana), a robust genre in Hindu story-telling, remember and vivify the past of a place. Simultaneously, they serve as theogonies that describe the origins of specific deities in particular localities. Comparing the two chronicles of genesis, I grapple with how stories generate, fuel and sustain divine charisma and propel them across time and especially space. Place stories situate wider narratives within specific localities and thereby delineate and develop a vernacular ethos. As topographies shift however, these stories also absorb different places, other peoples and new events, adapting, expanding and multiplying into palimpsests of symbolic geography. How do deities, religious beliefs and ritual practices move across borders through the telling, retelling and transformations of stories? I engage with how place stories do not just emplace and localise but also travel and embody a transnational ethos. Taking story-telling as a way of worshipping and of mapping, this paper describes how gods (and their peoples) come to inhabit a place. Encapsulating and animating the affinities between peoples and places, stories, I argue, are mobile actants that also drive and nourish religious identities and social networks in diasporic spaces.

Indira Arumugam is an Assistant Professor in the National University of Singapore. She is an anthropologist working primarily in Tamil Nadu and amidst the Tamil diaspora in Southeast Asia. Her primary research interests are rituals, lived kinship, popular politics, everyday ethics and grassroots Hinduism. Her articles on pleasurable kinship, resurgent animal sacrifice, coercive gift and electoral politics and festival ethics have been published in Social Anthropology, Modern Asian Studies, Contributions to Indian Sociology and Material Religion. Her monograph entitled, Visceral Politics: Intimate Imaginaries of Power in South India is forthcoming. She is currently working on two projects: the contemporary resonance of animal sacrifice and the ritual cult of an autochthonous village goddess in urban Singapore.
Panel 2

Religious Knowledge Transfer through Summer Camps: Hong Kong and China Church Connections

Steve Wai Lung CHEUNG
Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong
stevecwl@hku.hk

Khun Eng KUAH-PEARCE
School of International Studies and Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, Jinan University, China
kuahkhuneng@jnu.edu.cn

In this globalized era, religion is increasingly not bounded by a given locality. We increasingly observed religion cross borders. Religious transnationalism enables connection and cooperation between religious organizations in a regional context. In religious transnationalism, a religious organization that goes beyond its local border and establishes partnership with a regional group needs to take into consideration its own strength, capacity and organizational objectives. At the same time, it also needs to consider the appropriateness and ability to cater for the needs of the other party. In addition, the religious organization needs to strategically execute the partnership to fit into the socio-political setting of the country that the receiving religious organization is in.

This paper will focus on the execution of bilateral collaboration efforts of a small Hong Kong Protestant church (sending church) and its outreach to a Guangdong-based church in China. Given the restrictive religious environment towards Christian groups in Guangdong, the sending church avoided overt evangelical activities and proselytization. The Hong Kong and Guangdong churches cooperated strategically and organized summer camps for Mainland Chinese children in the neighborhood community of the receiving church. Organizing summer camps that included social and cultural activities incorporating religious elements and material provisions benefitted these children (and their families) who attended the camps. At the same time, it also provided an avenue for knowledge transfer whereby the serving members of the receiving church were equipped with knowledge and techniques of organizing church activities.

Steve Wai Lung Cheung is a full-time teaching assistant at the Department of Sociology, The University of Hong Kong (HKU). He received his PhD in Sociology from HKU in 2019. His thesis examined the interplay between church organization, individual believers and (their interpretation of) God in the construction and reproduction of the meanings and practices of Christian giving. Before obtaining the doctoral degree, he did his MPhil study on the topic of Chinese ancestor worship. His general research interest is on the Sociology and Anthropology of religion.

Khun Eng Kuah is presently Distinguished Professor of Anthropology and Chinese Diaspora Studies at the School of International Studies and Academy of Overseas Chinese Studies, Jinan University (Guangzhou, China). She was Professor of Anthropology and Head of the School of Arts and Social Sciences, Monash University Malaysia, Associate Professor at the University of Hong Kong and lecturer at University of Melbourne. She also held visiting positions at Harvard-Yenching Institute, Harvard University, University of Paris Oxford University and Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. Her key areas of research specialization include (i) Chinese Diaspora-China Connections migration and identity, Chinese entrepreneurship, Chinese women, Chinese heritage and traditional Chinese medicine and herbal tea in modernity (ii) Religious modernization, politics and society (Reformist Buddhism) and Religious Philanthropy in East and Southeast and Asia. She has published extensively widely in these areas and her publication includes books, book chapters and journal articles.
Panel 2

The State and the Transnational Networking of the Cult of Guangze Zunwang

Ningning CHEN
Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore
aricn@nus.edu.sg

In recent years, the Chinese government plays an increasingly active role in enhancing Chinese overseas’ attachment to ancestral places. This is evident in a wide range of religious and pilgrimage events initiated and sponsored by Chinese authorities. This paper focuses on Guangze Zunwang (a Daoist deity) pilgrimage tours organized by the state and (quasi-)state agents in the city of Nan’an, Fujian Province, which attract different groups of religious believers from Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and other countries and regions across the world. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, it explores how the state discourses and ideologies are implicated in the pilgrimage tour to cultivate patriotic spirits, commercial ties and ancestral identities among Chinese overseas. In addition, it attends to how Chinese overseas perceive of, re-interpret and resist the pilgrimage trips prompted by Chinese (quasi-)state agents. Attention is also paid to how they mobilize trans-national pilgrimage tours as alternative kinship search platforms through which they reconnect with their family members and relatives in mainland China. Through these aspects of examination, this paper revels the important role of religion in binding/dividing devotees on both sides of mainland China and overseas countries, offering insights into the cultural geopolitics of transnational religious networks.

Ningning Chen is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Religion and Globalization Cluster, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (NUS). She obtained her PhD from the Department of Geography, NUS. Her research interests include the fields of religion and sacred space, rurality and rural landscapes, and Chinese lineage culture. She has publications in China Quarterly, Journal of Rural Studies, Population, Space and Place, Social and Cultural Geography, and Mobilities. While at ARI, she will be developing her doctoral dissertation for publication, and also start a new project on Chinese clan associations (Huiguan) and their trans-national networks between China and Southeast Asia.
Panel 3

Archipelagic Pilgrimages, Digital Voyages and Effigy Vessels

Alvin Eng Hui Lim
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This paper will be about digital voyages and pilgrimages on islands. By looking at “islands” as a theoretical trope, along with its derivatives: arrivals, derivations and modes of transport, I will explore the nature of an assemblage and network of performances, spirits, technologies, vessels, and Sinophone communities across an archipelagic region. I will begin with a case study on the Donggang Ying Wang (東港迎王平安祭) religious festival in Taiwan that is held every three years. The most recent 2018 festival can still be viewed on YouTube. After the procession moved through Donggang, culminating in Wang Ye’s sending off at the seaside and the burning of the NT$7 million Wangye’s Boat, the image of the burning vessel remains archived on YouTube. Similarly in Malaysia, Hokkien migrants brought their Ong Yah deities over to Melaka in the 19th Century and the Yong Chuan Tian Temple (勇全殿) will perform the “Wangkang Ceremony” in October 2020 (eighth month of the lunar calendar), which also features an elaborate construction of a vessel and its eventual burning. In Singapore, the burning of vessels is mostly performed by Nine Emperor Gods temples, evoking a similar imagery of vessels embarking and disembarking spirits on the shores. Streamed and recorded for the internet, online viewers can now witness the revelation of spirits through the conversion of material vessels into ash, smoke, and digital video. This allows followers to virtually participate in an online pilgrimage, aided by a real-time chat function and a flying drone that offers a bird’s-eye view of the procession.

Alvin Eng Hui Lim is a performance, religion and theatre researcher. He is Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at the National University of Singapore. His research focusses on the intersections of theatre and religion, popular religious practices, spirit mediums and rituals, with emphasis on digital media. He holds a PhD in Theatre Studies jointly awarded by the National University of Singapore and King’s College London. He is also Deputy Director and Technology and Online Editor (Mandarin) of the Asian Shakespeare Intercultural Archive (A|S|I|A, http://a-s-i-a-web.org/). His first monograph, Digital Spirits in Religion and Media: Possession and Performance, is published by Routledge in 2018. He has also published on Singapore theatre, translation, digital archiving, and religious performance in Singapore. He is a member of the “After Performance” working group, which explores experimental modes of writing and co-authorship.
Panel 3

Digital Media, Ageing and Faith:
Transnational Flows of Religion and Older Sri Lankan Migrants in Australia

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The role of transnational religious networks in migrant contexts has recently been receiving greater attention. This includes a growing body of research that highlights the role of transnational religious networks as a valued source of support and identity for migrants, as well as the role of mobile devices, new media, and communication platforms in sustaining those transnational religious networks. Interestingly, to date, older adults have received little attention in the newly emerging technological narratives of transnational religion. This is surprising, given the strong association of later life with spiritual and religious engagement, but it likely reflects the ongoing assumption that older adults are technophobic or technologically incompetent. In contrast, this paper explores the alternative articulations of transnational religious networks that arise from the engagement of older migrants in new technologies and digital media in order to achieve the spiritual and religious goals relevant to their stage in the life course. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with Sinhalese Buddhists from Sri Lanka who are living in Melbourne, we focus on how older adults use digital media to respond to an urgent need to accumulate merit in later life. In some cases, merit can be accumulated by contributing to the transnational migrant support networks of family, community and religion, for example, through regular prayer, organising community events, and enhancing the lives of people less fortunate. However, many are also seeking to move beyond those migrant networks, instead using digital media to identify and engage in new opportunities for meritorious actions. In the process, they are engaging in new articulations of transnational religion, transforming both the religious imaginary and religious practices of later life. We conclude with reflections on how the past migrant and new digital later life articulations of transnational religion intersect and reinforce each other, transforming what it means to validate and legitimize a life well lived.

Shashini Gamage is a researcher, journalist and documentary filmmaker. Her research interests include how transnational social fields are shaped by diasporic media, gender, and popular culture. Her ethnographic work with Sri Lankan migrants has been published in a PhD thesis and journal articles.

Raelene Wilding is Associate Professor, Sociology at La Trobe University. Her research on intimacy, belonging and new technologies includes work with older adults from migrant and non-migrant backgrounds and younger and older people from refugee backgrounds. Her most recent book is Families, Intimacy and Globalization (2018, Palgrave).

Loretta Baldassar is a leading international scholar on transnational migration, family, ageing, aged care and ICTs. Her scholarship focuses on different immigrant groups in Australia including Italians, English, Chinese, and Vietnamese. Particularly, in recent years, Loretta is well-known for her initiatives on ageing and ICTs.
Panel 3

Towards a Postsecular Shi’ism:
The Discursive Strategies of Transnational Online Network of Shi’a Muslims in India

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Transnational online Islamic networks play an important role in transforming religious knowledge production – that once was conventionally bound to traditional institutions – by encouraging alternative narratives and active alliances with the secular public sphere. Much of the discussions on transnational Muslim networks have depicted a rather homogeneous image of ‘translational Islam’ by overlooking the heterogeneity and changing nature of Islamic discourse. Exploring the discursive features of a transnational online network of the Shi’a Muslims of India, this paper demonstrates how changing contexts of India have been shaping the identities, activities, and relations of the everyday Shi’ism of Indian youth. It conducts a discourse analysis of the Facebook content of a popular online Shi’a network – ‘Who is Hussain – India’. The analysis focuses on exploring new interpretations and representations of Shi’i messages online. This paper argues that ‘Who is Hussain? – India’ – is a prime example of a transnational Shi’a collective that rejects centuries-old dogmatism and seeks instead to engage critically with the secular and non-Islamic public sphere through translation and innovative alliance-building rhetoric. These new narratives develop a ‘postsecular Shi’ism’ with a potential to travel beyond the confines of national boundaries, animating new debates internationally.

Jasbeer Musthafa Mamalipurath is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Society and Culture (ICS), Western Sydney University, Australia. Jasbeer’s current research project is on ‘Conceptualisation of Discourse about Islam on a Secular Platform’ – a study aimed at yielding insight into the emerging discourses about Islam and its identities and characteristics. He has a post-graduate degree in Communication Studies from Bangalore University, India, and over ten years of experience working in communications and research sector. Jasbeer’s research interests are on: exploring media and religion, religion and communication, discourse analysis, sociology of religion, popular culture and religion, religious communities and culture.
Panel 4

Chinese Evangelical Networks and the Transnational Sacralization of Urban Space

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As China is being increasingly integrated into global capitalist political economy, more and more Chinese are expected to live transnational lives and conduct business on a global scale. The mass participation of Chinese merchants and traders in migrant churches in Europe is one good example. Drawing on multisited ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Wenzhou, Rome and Paris, the paper analyzes this migrant Christianity in terms of its transnational production of evangelical networks and sacred space. For many rural-originated Chinese migrants who embrace a global hierarchy of places, the radical separation between the mundane and the transcendent spheres in evangelical Christianity finds expression in their perceived opposition between the peripheral local and the modern global center in the global market economy. This moral-spatial imagination serves to justify their transnational movement and offers a meaningful way of constructing life in diaspora. As China’s official restrictions on religion increasingly motivate the Chinese house church to channel its resources to a “reverse mission” overseas, a group of transnational Chinese Christians have actively engaged in producing religious activities and events that link China and Europe and in resacralizing secular real estate and attaching evangelistic meanings to Europe’s urban space. This paper probes the transnational geography of an indigenous Chinese Christianity.

Nanlai Cao is professor of religious studies in the school of philosophy and Institute of Buddhism and religious theory at Renmin University of China. His research projects have centered on transnational religious and trading networks, church-state relations, state-business relations, and the religious-economic dynamics of Chinese urban life, with the Wenzhou Chinese diaspora as a major nexus. He received a PhD in anthropology from The Australian National University in 2008. His first book Constructing China’s Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou (Stanford University Press 2010) provides an ethnographic account of the rise of Protestant Christianity in prosperous coastal China. Before joining Renmin University, he was research assistant professor at Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Hong Kong.
Panel 4

International Monasteries and Transnational Religious Networks:
New Religious Tourism Attractions in the Land of Buddha

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This paper, based on a study of two Buddhist sites, Lumbini in Nepal (where Buddha was born) and Bodhgaya in India (the place of his enlightenment), argues that transnational religious networks are significant actors in promoting, maintaining and managing Buddhist pilgrimages. Findings from fieldwork show that the historic spread of Buddhism gave rise to many transnational religious networks which maintain the flow of pilgrims to these sites from Asian countries. New types of transnational religious organizations have also proliferated because of resurging interest in Buddhism. These organizations build monasteries that include temples, shrines, and accommodation facilities for monks and pilgrims. The unique architectural styles and following of rituals and cultural practices traditional to the patronizing native country make these international monasteries into ‘attractions’ for foreign and domestic tourists. However, the influence of networks and monasteries in the two sites differs significantly. In Lumbini, UNESCO’s Master Plan has a highly regulated “monastic zone” for construction of 39 international monasteries of which 13 are built. The Thai, Japanese, Burmese, Sri Lankan, Chinese, Bhutanese, Korean, European monasteries are main attractions which locals believe represent “imported Buddhism” in Nepal. In contrast, Bodhgaya has 150 plus international monasteries developed by monks from Asian countries (Thailand, China, Vietnam, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and others) in organic fashion and “free-market” situation encouraged formation of many enclaves of Buddhist pilgrimage activities. Transnational organizations thrive on international cultural diplomacy but significantly impact residents by weakening the social fabric and constraining opportunities for participation of local businesses in religious tourism economy.

Kiran A. Shinde teaches in the planning program at La Trobe University, Australia. He has research interest in the field of religious tourism, religious and cultural heritage, cultural landscape, planning and destination management in Asia. He has recently edited a book titled Religious Tourism and the Environment and completed a project on Buddhist Tourism in Asia for UNWTO. His current project is examination of sustainability issues around the Buddhist circuit tourism in India and Nepal. He has published over 50 research articles in high-ranking journals including International Journal of Hindu Studies, Urban Studies, Cities, Planning Practice and Research, Journal of Heritage Tourism, etc and book chapters in books published by highly reputed publishers such as Elsevier, Routledge, CABI. He has presented research at conferences in Canada, Turkey, Australia, Portugal, Singapore, UK, and USA. His qualifications include a Ph.D. (Monash University, Australia); M. Sc. (Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand); M.Tech. (CEPT University, India).
This paper explores how the transnational Islamic missionary movement – Tablighi Jamaat – provides an effective, yet controversial, channel for migrant integration in Singapore. Originating in South Asia in the 1920s, Tablighi Jamaat has become known for its worldwide expansion, its informal organisational structure, and its orthodox practices. Its members form small, tight-knit groups that subordinate secular markers of difference to the integrative potential of the Islamic belief and practice. In Singapore, Tablighi Jamaat is viewed with suspicion by the Islamic Religious Council (MUIS) – and, by extension, the majority Malay-Muslim population – for its unwillingness to reconcile the secular and the religious, the public and the private. Singapore’s Tablighi Jamaat community is dominated by Bangladeshi migrants employed as foreign workers; Malay (and Indian) Singaporeans are discouraged from joining the movement due to its orthodox associations. Whilst Bangladeshi migrants are generally understood to be “model Muslims”, their socio-economic positions in Singapore often preclude them from forging relationships with the majority Malay-Muslim community, or with Singaporeans more generally. Thus, whilst Tablighi Jamaat provides a channel through which ethno-national differences are overcome, and integration is achieved, it also reproduces a politics of otherness that both Bangladeshi migrants and Singaporean Tablighi’s must navigate throughout their daily lives.

Orlando Woods is an Assistant Professor of Humanities at Singapore Management University. His work explores the socio-spatial transformations occurring throughout contemporary South and Southeast Asia. Orlando holds BA and PhD degrees in Geography from University College London and the National University of Singapore respectively.
Panel 4

Training for an Asian Mission:
Catholic Networks of Seminary Formation

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This paper examines the efforts of a religious order in Asia to rethink the meaning of mission in the Catholic context. Although missionary by definition, this Spanish congregation is well aware that the European model of mission has been exhausted and actively works to put Asia at the center of its plans for growth. A key aspect of its new strategy is to train young seminarians in Asian countries as multilingual and multicultural missionaries. To achieve this, international mobility is implemented from the earliest possible stages of priestly formation, investing large sums of money in the circulation of students mainly between India, Sri Lanka and the Philippines. Many of them will also conduct part of their training in European universities and spend long months doing missionary immersion in remote villages in Northeast India. All of this before being ordained as Catholic clergy. The solid networks that this congregation has developed enable the fluid circulation of seminarians and formators across Asia, however some still doubt this approach because of its ‘groundlessness’ and its questionable results amongst non-mobile communities. I use this example to reflect on the concept of religious networks and its possibilities. Are religious networks enabling cross border connections? Or do they have value only to those who participate in them?

Bernardo E. Brown is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the International Christian University in Tokyo. He is currently working on an ethnographic monograph about Catholic seminary training in Sri Lanka. His work has been recently published in SOJOURN (2020), Religion (2020) and Anthropological Quarterly (2018). With Brenda S.A. Yeho, he edited Asian Migrants and Religious Experience. From Missionary Journeys to Labor Migration (AUP, 2018). He received a MA from the New School for Social Research and a PhD in Cultural Anthropology from Cornell University. Before joining ICU, he was Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute and held a post-doctoral fellowship at the International Institute for Asian Studies in Leiden.
A Zhang-Quan coalition of merchants had arrived in Sibu by 1846 (first tombstone) and had set up the Yonganting Chinese temple by the 1880s (Chua 2004), dedicated to the God of the Earth/Territory, Tua Pek Kong. The Sibu Eng Ang Teng Tua Peh Kong Temple (Yonganting) played a major role in establishing the town of Sibu, as can be seen from inscriptions dating to the Guangxu period in the temple entranceway. This temple went on to help found the Federation of Sarawak Tua Peh Kong Temple Association in 2008, which currently has more than 80 temple members. Riding on the wave of rapidly increasing wealth and global trade, along with secondary migration patterns, the Yonganting came up with a slogan that uncannily responds to Xi Jinping’s One Belt, One Road. The slogan is “One Sea One Temple”. The sea is the South China Sea, the “one temple” is the temple in each port to the local Earth God. Tua Peh Kong (the tutelary Earth God elsewhere known as Tudigong, or Fude Zhengshen) is found in Chinese temples in port cities all along the South China Sea. In recent years, the Association has held conference gatherings in major port cities around the South China Sea. Emissaries from the Sibu temple have visited scores of Earth God Temples in Malaysia, Thailand, China, Vietnam, Myanmar and Singapore.

This network builds on older historical roots, linking back to the Minnan trading networks that first made contact with Sibu and Kuching and many coastal towns in the South China Sea already in the 17th and 18th and 19th centuries. By contrast to the nationalistic, top-down nature of the One Belt, One Road network, the One Sea One Temple network is resolutely horizontal and egalitarian.

As a civilizational technology, network building is a specialty of Chinese society. Here we see it in a transnational modality, where it sharply contrasts to the “soft power” models of “One Belt, One Road”. The emphasis in these temple networks is on the individuality of each of the nodes of the network – each Earth God presides over and protects a specific city (or a diaspora community living in a specific section of that port city). The remarkable density of networks underlying the Chinese diaspora, and the ability of any node within the network to develop new links and connections, brings out the centrality of modes of exchange and alliance building within Chinese societies.

Panel 5

An International Turn:
The Reestablishment of Chinese Temple Networks from Singkawang, Indonesia
20 Years after the End of the New Order

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This paper describes the reactivation of international temple networks amongst local Chinese temples in Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. It is now twenty years after the fall of Suharto’s new order regime and the concomitant dismantling of the assimilationist policy which severely restricted the religious and cultural life of the Chinese ethnic minority in Indonesian. After two decades of temple building, rebuilding, renovating and expanding, including community development and resurrection of formerly prohibited rituals and celebrations, temples throughout Indonesian are now also reactivating or initiating for the first-time transnational religious networks. I argue that the building of these international linkages constitutes a new stage in the process of cultural and religious revival. Using the example of the Central Tridharma Temple’s membership into the Tua Pek Kong Federation in Malaysia, Vihara Tri Ratna’s membership in the international True Buddha School, and Vihara Ci Kung’s relationship with communities in Taiwan and Singapore, this paper will show how the ability to rekindle these transnational networks is both a source of, and an expression of, a new-found pride in Chinese Folk Religion (CFR) and regional Chinese Indonesian cultural identity. Recognition of CFR as a valid and legally-sanctioned religion by the state provided the first form of new legitimacy in the post-Suharto era; This expansion into transnational networks, and connections with other temples in ‘greater China’ provides a second powerful form of legitimacy that links Chinese Indonesian identities (based on CFR practices), with forms of global citizenship and transnational Chinese sensibilities.

Emily Hertzman is a sociocultural anthropologist whose research focuses on Chinese Indonesian mobilities and identities. From 2017-2019 she served as the Richard Charles Lee Postdoctoral Scholar at the Asian Institute in the University of Toronto’s Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy. She managed the Richard Charles Lee Asian Pathways Research Lab and was the coordinator of the Department of Anthropology’s Ethnography Lab. Emily Hertzman received a B.A and M.A. from the University of British Columbia and a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto (2016). Since 2011, she has been conducting multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Asia, primarily in Indonesia (Singkawang, West Kalimantan, Jakarta and Bandung), as well as in Malaysia, Taiwan and Hong Kong. She has a theoretic commitment to understanding how concepts of home and belonging are transformed under broader shifting social conditions, including processes of migration, democratization and transnationalism, as well as new religious encounters. Her current research focuses on varieties of Chinese Popular Religion in Indonesia and Chinese Indonesian encounters with transnational Pentecostal Christian churches overseas.
Panel 5

The Politics of Transnational Religious Networks: The Dungans, The Hui, and Shared Identity

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This paper examines the social and political factors in shaping transnational religious networks. Specifically, how do both the state and non-state actors from Kazakhstan and China contribute to the establishment of transnational Dungan-Hui Muslim networks for social, religious and political agendas? Since 2000, after over 140 years of displacement from their homeland, a group of Muslims known as the Dungs from Kazakhstan have re-established their connection with Hui Muslims in Shaanxi and Gansu provinces. The local official narratives of the Dungan-Hui transnational network and its associated practices focus on religious and ethnic ties, notably shared religious beliefs, customs, and spoken dialects, while effacing other possible histories. By reframing the unsettled past into an instrumental resource for identity building, such transnational networks have facilitated China’s national interests in developing economic and cultural connections with its Central Asian neighbours in the context of the Belt and Road initiative. However, this paper further contends that the sustainability of transnational religious networks is not only crucial to institutional alliances and religious communities’ motivations. Indeed, these networks are also entangled in the shifting ethnic-religious policies of related nation states. This is particularly prevalent in authoritarian states like China, where religious policies are closely associated with wider political priorities on security and national sovereignty.

Yujie Zhu is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies, the Australian National University. His research focuses on cultural heritage, particularly in relation to social memory, cultural tourism and religious practices. He is the author of Heritage and Romantic Consumption in China (Amsterdam University Press 2018), Heritage Politics in China (Routledge 2020; co-authored), and the co-editor of Politics of Scale (Berghahn Books 2018). He is currently co-editing Heritage and Religion in East Asia (Routledge 2021).

Yang Yang is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Asia Research Institute in the National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on transnational religious networks and the politics of ethno-religious identity in Northwestern China. Her current project examines how the Hui diaspora in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia contributes to grass-roots connections between China and Malaysia, and how Malaysia becomes Hui’s new Muslim role model through serving as their preferred destination for halal tourism and their style references for Muslim fashion. She is the co-editor of the volume “Making Cultural Cities in Asia” (Routledge 2015) and the special issue “China’s Belt and Road Initiative: Views from the Ground” in Political Geography (2020).
Since the early 1980s, worldwide Catholicism established three Catholic news agencies that focus specifically on the Church in Asia. This paper argues that those new platforms of communication participate in the creation of an Asian Catholicism that is neither limited to its national manifestations nor its vertical conversations with its Roman center. Although the Post-Vatican II period witnessed the emergence of many Catholic media outlets across the Asia-Pacific region, the three news agencies – Église d’Asie based in Paris, UCANews based in Bangkok, and AsiaNews based in Rome – are distinct in their nature and scope. This paper presents the ways they were created and have evolved since the early 1980s. On the one hand, they all aim at covering religious information from all of Asia and reporting on significant Catholic and non-Catholic events. They work at bringing issues surrounding Asian Catholics as well as their accomplishments into worldwide conversations. On the other hand, these agencies assert specific agendas and maintain intricate relationships with each other. Thus, this paper highlights how they dynamically position themselves within the broader ecosystem of worldwide Catholicism as well as world media. More importantly, it points out the religious networks, theological concerns, and national identities that stand behind each agency and shape 21st century Asian Catholicism.

Michel Chambon is a French Catholic theologian and a cultural anthropologist interested in Christianity in Asia. He has completed a Master’s Degree in theology at the Catholic University of Paris exploring through an ethnographic approach the ways Taiwanese Catholics and Presbyterians respond to widespread beliefs in ghosts. Furthermore, he was awarded a Ph.D. in anthropology from Boston University. His dissertation examined the five Christian denominations of Nanping (Fujian) to question the ways social science theorizes the unity and diversity of Christianity. Since then, he has held a position as Visiting Assistant Professor in Anthropology at Hanover College (USA). In addition to various publications on the agency of Christian buildings, Chinese Pentecostalism, and Chinese Catholic nuns, he recently published his book: ‘Making Christ Present in China, Actor-Network Theory and the Anthropology of Christianity’ (Palgrave Macmillan).
Panel 6

Evangelical Activism in the Karen Hills: The Free Burma Rangers and Mobilization of Karen Villagers in the War against Evil

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The paper will look at the globalization of the religious ethos and material religion of the Karen in Karen state (Myanmar) and extending to the new Diaspora. The Karen met yearly in Chiang Mai, St. Paul and Sheffield to read the bible (and the world) “through Karen eyes”.

The paper’s ambition is twofold: will highlight the ethnographic study of a religious network and movement and it’s place- and worldmaking. It will focus on the agency of Karen missionaries that breaks with the dominant paradigm in two ways: Karen ordinary people are shown as agents, not as victims, and second, Karen are shown as moving from the South to the North, as part of an imagined community that is moving in the context of a transnational American front. The paper shows how the Karen succeed to bring their religious ethos to many corners of the world, also reversing much of the literature concentrating on the presence of missionaries in the Global South.

After heavy fighting in Karen state, Myanmar from the 1980’s, hundreds of thousands of Karen people got displaced, tried to hide in the hills, in the forest, in the monasteries, and in the mobile IDP (internally displaced) camps. The schools were run by the Kawthoolei (Land of the Free) Baptist church and the Seventh Day Adventist church, competing churches in the camps with a high church presence. 100,000 Karen were resettled to and welcomed by the US (70,000), Canada, Australia, UK, Norway, Netherlands and formed a new Diaspora. This Diaspora experienced an intensification of religion and nationalism, based on the memory of suffering.

The Karen New Year, celebrated with the Presbyterian and Methodist church in Sheffield, shifted its meaning from a symbol of village cohesion to one of religious nationalism, suffering and martyrdom. Karen communities all over the globe and in the camps celebrated the Karen New Year and posted videos about it online. The symbol of national sacrifice and martyrdom was taken up by the Free Burma Rangers, a missionary cum humanitarian organization originating from Texas but partnering with the Karen and the KNU, bringing senior Karen Rangers to the battlefields of Syria and to Iraq. The paper is thus interested in the global dynamics of the Karen religious ethos and their willingness to sacrifice for a larger cause.

Alexander Horstmann, a former fellow at Max-Planck-Institute for the Study of Ethnic and Religious Diversity and a student of Peter van der Veer, Dr Horstmann is Adjunct Associate Professor at Tallinn University in the Anthropology of Asia, and Lecturer in the International Master Programme in Peace, Conflict and Development Studies at University Jaume in Castellon, Spain. He has taught in Mandalay, Chiang Mai and in Kunming. He is generally interested in the anthropology of religion, politics and globalization and has carried out extensive fieldwork in South-east-Asia and Southwest-China, and most recently, in Japan. He has published 7 books and 50 articles, and his latest book: Sameness and Difference as Modes of Integration, Berghahn, 2019, has been fully translated into Chinese.
This paper discusses Indonesia’s largest Islamic organization, the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), in campaigning Indonesian Islam (known as Islam Nusantara, the NU’s version of religiously tolerant and moderate Islam) and enacting religious agency in Europe, particularly in Germany and the Netherlands. The NU has expanded its networks by establishing special branches across the globe. In Germany, the special branch was established in 2011, while in the Netherlands it was established in 2014. Both special branches have been founded and organized by students, although in a later phase many overseas Indonesians who have long resided in both countries also joined and influenced the organization. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Germany and the Netherlands, this paper investigates the organizational projects and religious practices of the NU in Europe through which cross-border networks are managed. It observes the organization’s everyday religious activities; the campaign of Indonesian Islam; and its encounters with liberal views, such as secularism and freedom of religion, that influence the reconstruction of the NU people’s divergent dual identities as Indonesian Muslims and European residents. My analysis of the results of in-depth interviews, casual chats, and hang-outs in the organization’s religious meetings, social gatherings, and everyday life of the NU administrators and followers shows that the NU in Europe is extending its transnational networks, claiming its religious agency, and fostering its version of Islam overseas in an effort to make its voices heard within the Islamic communities and broader public in the host countries and maintain socio-religious connections with the home country.
Panel 7

Paradox and Religious Ontologies in the Chinese Underworld Tradition

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As discarnate entities are fundamental to Chinese vernacular religion, while commonalities exist, no two perceived ontologies are characterized by an absolute equivalence. However, contradictory perceptions do not detract from the professed reality of any given ontology (the paradox). Based on research into the worship of Underworld deities, associated temple-based ritual practices, and the afterlife beliefs of practitioners in Singapore and Malaysia, the ‘paradox of religious ontologies’ explores how conflicting ontological realities have contributed to the evolution of contrasting religious hierarchies and contradictory cosmologies. Ethnographically, these paradigms are primarily explored on a micro level through festive communal temple events in Selangor, Malaysia, and then briefly, on a macro level, through comparisons within the wider Underworld tradition.

Fabian Graham has been a Research Fellow in the Religion and Globalisation cluster since December 2018. He holds a PhD in Social Anthropology from SOAS in London, and two master’s degrees, one in ‘Taiwan Studies’ from National Chengchi University in Taipei and the second in ‘Social Anthropological Analysis’ from the University of Cambridge. He was previously a research fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Germany.
Panel 7

The Limits and Rules of Inclusion:
Social Inequality and Educational Opportunities
in a Multi-Ethnic Monastery in Northern Laos

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This paper discusses notions of social (in)equality and cultural alterity with reference to a large Buddhist boarding school in northern Laos. The 500 pupils who attend this monastic school are overwhelmingly from very poor rural areas and come to the school in search of further education and opportunities. Their studies and livelihoods are entirely financed by donations given to the temple by rich urban Buddhists, who thereby participate in a ritual economy rewarding the donor with status and hopes for a better rebirth. The temple in this sense acts as a node of redistribution and migration, offering avenues for upward social mobility. However, many of the boys and young men ordaining as novices and attending the school are originally from culturally and economically marginalized animist ethnic minorities, who have to ‘convert’ to Buddhism in order to attend the school. Therefore, the paper will from a theoretical point of view also discuss the limits of this integration, and explore how the balancing out of ethnic and social inequality is bound to dominant ideas that cement Buddhism’s status as a civilizing force.

Patrice Ladwig studied Social Anthropology and Sociology, and obtained his PhD from the University of Cambridge. His work focuses on the anthropology of Buddhism (Laos and Thailand), death and funeral cultures, colonialism, the link of religion to communist movements, and general social theory. He currently works at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity (Göttingen, Germany) and carries out research on economic modernization, religion and ethics in the context of the Max Planck-Cambridge Centre for the Study of Ethics, Human Economy and Social Change.
Panel 7

Transnational Religious Communities: Methodological Challenges in the Study of a Modern Ecclesial Community, The Focolare Movement

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The second half of the Twentieth Century saw the rise of what are known as ‘New Ecclesial Movements’ within the Roman Catholic Church. Although very different from one another many share an extra-diocesan structure and transnational networks that have made them both attractive to and potentially destructive of existing church hierarchies. We can see parallels here with the rise of the Medieval mendicant and missionary orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans and Jesuits. I focus on one particular ecclesial movement, the Focolare Movement, officially known as the Opera di Maria or ‘Work of Mary’, founded by Chiara Lubich (1920-2008), in Trent in Northern Italy during the Second World War. The Focolare has become a transnational religious community that is also ecumenical and interfaith, with numerous diverse activities and a complex structure. An emphasis on lived religion and lack of any clear boundary between members and non-members makes the Focolare particularly challenging to study or describe. The Movement is also changing rapidly and any description will be partial and contextual to a specific time and place. Rather than attempt a global study I focus on two particular examples of transnational activity – the relationship between the Focolare Movement and the Bangwa people of South West Cameroon, both in Africa and the diaspora, and the relationship between the Focolare Movement and Islam. The rapidly increasing use of the Internet in times of Covid19 introduces a new dimension to the notion of transnationalism. The study is based on auto- and multi-sited ethnography, starting from the perspective that there is no single version of the truth or definitive description of such complex a complex, living phenomenon. A description that is necessarily personal, situated and partial is nevertheless a starting point in developing a new understanding transnational religious networks and as a basis for further comparative studies.

Fiona Bowie graduated in Anthropology from Durham University, UK, and the Institute of Social Anthropology in Oxford (1978-1985), with a DPhil on the relationship between the Focolare Movement and Bangwa people of South West Cameroon. She has been tracing this relationship and its development from the 1960s to the present. She taught at the Universities of Wales and Bristol, UK, with visiting and honorary positions at the Universities of Bristol, Cambridge and King’s College London in the UK, and in the USA (University of Virginia) and Sweden (Linköping University). Fiona Bowie is currently a research affiliate in the School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, Oxford University, and a member of Wolfson College Oxford. In 2010, Fiona Bowie founded the Afterlife Research Centre (ARC), together with some colleagues and graduate students. ARC is a network for scholars and practitioners interested in ethnographic approaches to the afterlife, spirit possession, shamanism, transpersonal anthropology, alternative healing, and related topics: http://www.afterliferesearch.co.uk. Fiona Bowie is currently serving as Honorary Treasurer of the Royal Anthropological Institute. She has published widely in the fields of religion, spirituality, identity and ethnicity, kinship (adoption) and ethnographic methods. Her best-selling text book on the Anthropology of Religion has been translated into some dozen languages including Chinese.
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