



**BICC**  
British Inter-University China Centre



## **Religious Authority in Asia: Problems and Strategies of Recognition**

### **A Workshop**

Funded by the British Inter-University China Centre (BICC) and the White Rose East Asia Centre (BICC)

**Friday 31 October – Saturday 1 November 2014**

**Samuel Alexander Building, Room S1.2  
School of Arts, Languages and Cultures, University of Manchester**

This workshop is part of the BICC/WREAC ‘Sacred Models: Authority in Asian Religions Project’. The aim is to explore problems and strategies of recognition of religious authority in contemporary Asian religions in a comparative context. It brings together scholars who are working on both ‘traditional’ and new modes of authority, on both institutionalised religions and individual religious specialists, and on different religious traditions and movements in Japan, Korea, the PRC and Taiwan. Workshop participants will examine these issues from three main perspectives: scholarly discourse on religions; relationships between religious specialists and their supporting communities; and the state-religion interface.

### **Programme (with abstracts)**

**Friday, 31 October 2014**

**10:00 Welcome refreshments (in the Classics Foyer)**

**10:20 Welcoming remarks from the organisers Erica Baffelli and Jane Caple**

**10:30-11:30 Aike P. Rots (University College Cork)**

***Whose Shinto? Authority and legitimacy in a ‘religion without doctrine’.***

In popular introductions and mass media texts, Shinto is often said to be different from other religious traditions worldwide as it has ‘no historical founder, no sacred scriptures, and no fixed doctrine’. Although such claims are historically problematic, the

notion that Shinto is an ancient tradition without an overarching doctrine or fixed dogmas – and, correspondingly, that there is no central authority à la the Holy See which has the power to impose these – is widespread in Shinto circles, and is often asserted by shrine priests.

Arguably, however, by claiming that Shinto has no central authority, the power of umbrella organisation Jinja Honchō (which, among other things, is in charge of priestly education) is downplayed. Today, the exact influence of this organisation remains somewhat unclear, as does its political agenda: although some scholars have drawn attention to Jinja Honchō's association with ultra-conservative ideology and politics, others have pointed to the international interfaith and nature conservation activities with which it has been involved.

For this project, I wish to further explore the question of how far-reaching the power of Jinja Honchō is, doctrinally as well as institutionally, and how this reality relates to popular conceptualisations of Shinto as a nature religion without dogmas or central authority. How much space do local shrine priests and communities have for developing alternative interpretations and practices? Who decides what does and does not count as 'Shinto', if there is no single authoritative definition to which all members must adhere? And when does a shrine cease to be 'Shinto', and becomes a 'new religion'?

**11:30-12:30 Maria Jaschok (University of Oxford)**

***Sound and silence in Chinese Hui Muslim women's mosques: identity, faith and equality in Kaifeng.***

To privilege voice over silence and secrecy as evidence of empowered agency ignores the transformative potential of a complex mix of choices. Indeed, Gal argues that the relationship among silence, speech, gender and power must be taken into account. (Jane Parpart)

This presentation forms part of an on-going study, as yet at an early stage, which seeks to problematize the coming-to-voice of Chinese believing women within the interlinking frameworks of aural ethnography and cross cultural feminist theory. The focus of the presentation is the traditional soundscape of Chinese Hui Muslim women's *nüsi*, women's mosques – resonating throughout history with issuances of authoritative instructions and the sound of lively debates, with collective memorizing of scriptural texts and sermons delivered by the resident *nü ahong* (female Imam) on *zhuma*, and with the collective voices of women *nian jingge* (chanting Islamic chants). But sound without sight, appearance, smell, movement, architecture and material life is wanting in

important respects; it calls for the ethnographic lens, a close-up on how social life reproduces itself in the daily rhythm of ritual, renewal and mundaneness. The gendered observer moreover seeks to construct meaningful interpretations in what Jane Parpart identifies as a crucial and fluid 'relationship among silence, speech, gender and power.' Expanding this 'complex mix of choices' in relation to the feminist core concept of 'voice' (or agency), serves to raise I would argue, interesting issues. If the sound of a female voice, according to an influential Kaifeng-born *ahong* is *xiuti* (shameful, and thus allowed only if off-stage), how do we evaluate the rich oral tradition of *jingge*, transmitted and cherished by generations of Hui Muslim women in central China's women's mosques? If 'safe space' is a necessary pre-condition of voice (Parpart), what does the history of its aural architecture, of *nüsi*, tell us about the nature of collective agency, transformation and the impact of piety on gendered choices?

### **12:30-1:30 Lunch**

### **1:30-2:30 Ioannis Gaitanidis (Chiba University)**

#### ***Authority in the discourse on spirituality in contemporary Japan.***

In *Possession, Power and the New Age* (2007, Ashgate), probably the best sociological study to have appeared to date on the so-called New Age practitioners, the author dismisses the entire academic field of New Age studies on the premise that most of the arguments in favour of a distinct holistic/alternative spirituality phenomenon spreading throughout the contemporary post-industrial world, lack social contextualization. In this paper I will claim that the same criticism can be advanced against the appearance, approximately 20 years ago, of a field of *supirichuariti* (=romanization of 'spirituality') studies in Japan. Although not merely an extension of the Euro-American research on the New Age, *supirichuariti* studies have yet to convincingly contextualize the necessity of their existence, beyond their constant reminder that, in post-Aum Japan, the term *supirichuaru* (spiritual) seems to have replaced the term *shūkyō* (religion) in local discourses about religious behaviour and beliefs. Inspired by a theoretical model that was originally developed by philosopher of science Ian Hacking (in his monograph *Mad Travelers: Reflections on the Reality of Transient Mental Illnesses*, 1998, H.U.P.), my criticism of *supirichuariti* will identify four agents of authority which have contributed to making of this trendy word an object of academic interest today.

**2:30-3:30 Andrea Castiglioni (Columbia University)**

***Beyond life and death: religious and economic strategies of recognition of the authority of Yudono ascetics in the Edo period.***

This paper focuses on the religious practices performed by a special category of ascetics (*issei gyōnin* 一世行人) who were affiliated with Mount Yudono 湯殿 (present day Yamagata 山形 Prefecture) during the Edo period (1603-1867). Analyzing these practices (such as the one-thousand-day retreat [*sennichigyō* 千日行]), I show how wealthy private donors and ordinary members of religious confraternities (*kō* 講) sponsored the *issei gyōnin* and depended on these ascetics to bring their own vows (*gan* 願) to fruition, thereby contributing to, and some sense producing, the charisma of the *issei gyōnin*. This type of *do ut des* relationship and the economic system whereby the authority of the *issei gyōnin* was created and maintained formed the context necessary for the creation of religious authority and charisma. In the case of the *issei gyōnin* of Yudono, whose corpses were transformed into flesh-body icons (*nikushinzō* 肉身像) or buddhas in their real bodies (*sokushinbutsu* 即身仏) after the ascetics' deaths, the authority of the ascetic transcended biological limits. For eminent *issei gyōnin*, the moment of death represented not an end to his social role, but rather an affirmation and expansion of his power beyond the taxonomical boundaries of life and death.

**3:30-4:00 Refreshments**

**4:00-5:00 Erica Baffelli (University of Manchester)**

***Charismatic leaders and shifting patterns of authority in Japanese 'New Religions'.***

*Shinshūkyō* ("new religions") emerged in Japan since the nineteenth century and are normally built around founders who have claimed divine powers or new spiritual insights. This paper discusses changing dynamics of "charismatic" authority in Japanese "new religions". In particular, it will focus on changes in relationship between members and leaders in later stages of religious movements developments, and the role played by media in in answering the difficulties created by the "proximity gap" due to the lack of the direct contact with the leader because of geographical distance (for example, members who live overseas or who are no longer able to attend the live ceremonies), or because of the gradual withdrawal of the leader from the public scene, with the latter issue becoming an increasing problem for a number of new religions whose leaders are now aging and unable to maintain the high levels of public visibility that were central to their movements' success in earlier decades.

**5:00-6:00 Jane Caple (University of Manchester)**

***Religious authorities, patronage and power: problems of recognition in a contemporary Tibetan context.***

This paper is a tentative attempt to unravel the story of a village conflict on the north-eastern edge of the Tibetan plateau involving several refusals of recognition of religious authority (human and non-human). These refusals appear to raise some interesting questions about problems of authentication and authority of Tibetan religious figures in contemporary China. Discussions of the negotiation of religious authority in the P.R.C. have tended to focus on the state-society interface. This is perhaps particularly so in the Tibetan context, within which the state has sought to regulate and control the recognition of reincarnate lamas and more generally to contain, incorporate and domesticate religious authorities - increasingly through processes of commodification. However, as this paper will show, the local religious field is complex. Issues of authentication and authority can be as much related to relationships between religious authorities (e.g. different reincarnation lineages, monks, deity mediums, protector deities) and between religious authorities, local supporting communities and trans-local patronage networks, as they are to state-local interactions. This paper therefore seeks to re-contextualise discussions of contemporary Tibetan religious authority within the dynamics of the local religious field and emic understandings of power and authority.

**7:30 Workshop dinner** at: Salvi's Cucina  
19 John Dalton Street  
Manchester M2 6FW

**Saturday, 1 November 2014**

**10:00-11:00 Mark McLeister (University of Edinburgh)**

***Dreaming different dreams: popular Christianity, authority and the state in contemporary China.***

This paper will explore the ways in which two different visions of Christianity (and religious authority) – that of Protestant churches and that of the local state – interact at the leadership level and how church leaders make sense of them. The paper adopts an ethnographic approach to these interactions and is based on extensive fieldwork in urban “Three-Self-affiliated” churches in China between 2009 and 2014. I will argue that officially-recognised “Three-Self” leaders seek to maintain their state-assigned “religious” authority through compliance with state-defined limits on religious activity whilst at the same time maintaining *ling'en* authority recognised and valued more by the wider Protestant community than state-assigned authority. This *ling'en* authority has its

basis in and is maintained through dreams, faith healing, prophecy, exorcisms and the like. This paper, therefore, furthers our understanding of popular Christianity leadership at the grassroots and how church leaders position themselves in relation to what are essentially different visions of modernity in contemporary China. This paper also contributes to our understanding of how state-sanctioned religious institutions are (carefully) engaging with the wider “signs and wonders” movement in China.

**11:00-12:00 Se-Woong Koo (Independent Scholar)**

***Templestay: revamping tourism, Buddhism, and the nation.***

In 2002, South Korea’s largest Buddhist order — Chogyejong — joined the state project to offer more accommodation to the large number of tourists expected for the World Cup Games, and opened up its temples as lodging. Two years later, Chogyejong officially transformed that program of monastic sojourn into a tourism product, labeled “Templestay” and marketed as an authentic experience of uncorrupted Buddhism. Ten years after its official launch, Templestay has become an important element in the Korean state’s tourism repertoire, promoted as a symbol of Korean culture on par with much vaunted K-Pop. But that precise promotion — done so with funding from state coffers — has led to criticism that the state is putting unwarranted support behind a particular religious community, marginalizing other traditions in the process. In this paper, I will examine the authority of the South Korean state in promotion of a particular contemporary Buddhist community as an ‘authentic,’ ‘authoritative’ version of Buddhism, which in turn serves to confer cultural capital on the nation-state in need of a particular history suited to tourism and national branding.

**12:00-1:00 Lunch**

**1:00-2:00 Scott Pacey (University of Nottingham)**

***Political authority and religious debate in the ROC: Buddhists on Christians and Sanminzhuyi.***

Republican China saw vibrant discussions take place about the place of religion in modern society. After 1949, religious discourse in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) could only occur within a Marxist framework. As the PRC moved towards the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the space for open religious dialogue became increasingly constrained. During this time, it was in the Republic of China (ROC) that pre-1949 discussions continued to develop. However, the ROC also provided a particular political

context that influenced the trajectory of these discourses. This paper will consider how the ROC's dominant political ideology—Sanminzhuyi (the Three Principles of the People)—provided the context for these discussions. The paper's focus will be on the 1950s and 1960s, when Christians and Buddhists debated each other and competed for adherents with reference to the ideals of Sanminzhuyi. In particular, it will consider how Buddhists interpreted the intellectual history of Sanminzhuyi in an attempt to demonstrate its compatibility with Buddhism, thereby gaining intellectual and political support.

**2:00-3:00 Caroline Fielder (University of Leeds)**

***Contesting ideologies: Religiously inspired charitable organisations (RICOs) and their quest for authority and recognition.***

A religious resurgence in China has not only led to a rise in religious adherents and institutional bodies such as temples, churches and mosques (K. Dean 1993; Goldstein & Kapstein 1998; Bays 1999; Hillman 2004; Harry Lai & Lai 2005), but has also led to a flourishing of religiously inspired charitable organisations (RICOs), especially those engaged in social welfare projects (Hamrin 2003; Laliberte 2012; Fielder 2013). Although China has a long history of such organisations (Handlin Smith 2009), their (re)emergence in society is a relatively new phenomenon. This paper considers the changing religious context in China through the lens that such organisations provide. Seeking active roles as 'agents of transformation' RICOs are helping to shape religious discourse in China, through the questioning of appropriate forms of religious activity and through their efforts to re-position religion within the public sphere. Often straddling the secular/religious divide, this paper explores some of the ways in which RICOs identify themselves and position themselves and their work within the wider religious – and secular – community. Who, for example, do RICOs seek to represent, and by what authority do they hold that position? This paper explores four RICO case-studies (taken from Buddhist, Muslim, Catholic and Protestant backgrounds) and examines their appropriation of both sacred and secular forms of authority in their quest to find their voice and to negotiate a space within which to operate.

**3:00-3:15 Refreshments**

**3:15-4:30 Discussion**

Discussant: Ian Reader (Lancaster University)

**4.30 Workshop close**