



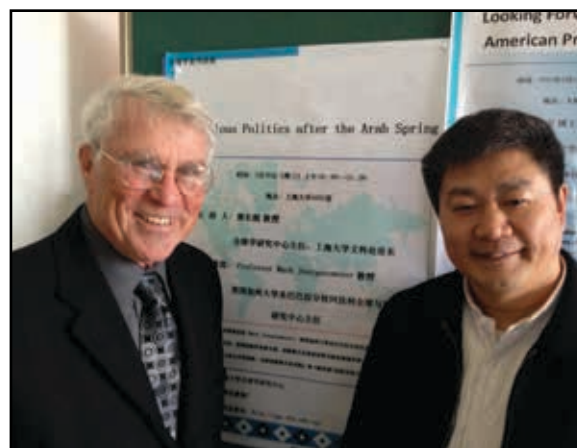
**THE ROLE OF RELIGION
IN GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY:
THE SHANGHAI WORKSHOP**

Shanghai University
Shanghai, China
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Sponsored by the
Henry R. Luce Initiative on
Religion and International Affairs

The Shanghai Workshop

The Shanghai workshop assembled a group of scholars and practitioners from countries including Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and the United States to discuss the role of religion in global civil society as it pertains to China and the region. While held in Shanghai, the day's events covered religious dynamics in and between the represented countries. Co-convener Mark Juergensmeyer, Director of the Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, opened the proceedings with a summary of the goals of the Luce project on Religion in Global Civil Society, and the key questions to be discussed at the Shanghai gathering. These questions included the role of religion in the social and economic transformation of China in recent decades, cultural pluralism in China and how it is affected by the changes, and the relation between religious groups and social services.



Mark Juergensmeyer and Guo Changgang, workshop co-convener.

Co-convener Guo Changgang, Director of the Center for Global Studies at Shanghai University, shared his enthusiasm for the day's discussion with these opening remarks:

When Professor Mark Juergensmeyer talked to me about the plan of organizing a workshop on the role of religion in the global civil society during the AAR annual meeting in Chicago in 2012, I accepted the idea without hesitation as this is what I have been working on these recent years. In the evolution process of human history, religion comes much earlier than kingship or so-called "government" to play the role as organizer of society. Later on, religion and the state became two competitive forces, struggling with each other to control society even though, in some cases, they were able to integrate into one. Each side thought it could bring order and morality, or better order and better morality, to the society. In the case of Western history, religion became the dominant power after the collapse of the Roman Empire, while the secular state has since the 18th century successfully taken over power from religion. But competition has continued. Nowadays, whenever the secular state is seen as failing to organize the society or is faced with some moral difficulties, religion rises to challenge the state. In the case of contemporary China, since the tremendous social transition begun in the 1980s, religion has witnessed very rapid growth. Some scholars and media outlets even use the term "religious revolution" to describe the situation in China. This not only raises the issue of religious pluralism, of how to view the new religions or "newcomer" religions; it also inevitably leads to tensions between religion and the state.

So, returning to our workshop topic: in the age of globalization, when the state or government is no longer the sole "governor" of social affairs, and with the growth of the sense of civil society, religion will definitely play a more important role. I hope that during this workshop, we can exchange ideas, share knowledge, and shed light on some of these issues.

Photo, right: Mark Juergensmeyer with workshop participants.



Soldiers from the terracotta army unearthed from the mausoleum of Qin Shi Huang, the first emperor of China.

“Believing China” – Hidden Faithful Becoming Visible in the Rise of Various Religions

While in the early decades of its rule the Communist Party of China drove religious groups and individuals underground, the recent increase in religious attendance and identification in China has struck many as a new stage in China’s history. Sheng Kai, Executive Director of the Buddhist Association of China whose monastery had only one building in 1980, pointed out that, “in 1990 our temple had just twelve monks, but now our temple has three hundred.” Scholar Xu Yihua of Fudan University recognized the challenges and opportunities in what he has dubbed ‘believing China.’ “China should face and follow the historical trend of global religious resurgence on the international scene and proactively espouse religious factors in its diplomacy instead of being constantly and passively dragged into religious issues... [China could] transform religion from a liability into a source of self-empowerment as an asset in its diplomatic policy, enabling China to play an active rather than a passive role in the international religious arena. Posed as a strategic choice, it demands immediate government attention.”

‘National’ Religions: Buddhism, Islam and China

Imam Jin Hongwei argued that “modernization and globalization have aroused a great opportunity for... Islamic culture.” Asserting that the Chinese government is “attaching great importance to the development of Islam in Shanghai,” the Imam stated that religion could and should play “a positive role in guiding religious people to be patriotic, to be virtuous, and be loyal to the constitution, to stabilize society and contribute to international exchange and to the spiritual and material construction of China.”

Regarding Buddhism, Sheng Kai offered optimistic comments on the People’s Republic of China’s hosting of the first International Buddhist Forum in several decades. “I think it indicated not only a great start for the development of Buddhism in PRC, but also... a positive attitude and a big step towards the globalization of Buddhism.” Less optimistic was Li Xiangping, who warned that “the five major religions don’t share some basic common values, so I don’t think they will play a very constructive role in this global civil society. I think that it’s very important for us to establish a common ground for the five major religions.”



I think that, as a field of Islamic culture, the mosques have a unique discourse system. There are forms of organization and service to mobilize and use some particular social resources. Meanwhile, the mosques also provide some public goods like value orientation and codes of conduct. So I think as globalization has resulted in a growing polarization between the haves and the have-nots, it will produce a large number of vulnerable groups, especially those Muslims who are living in the center of conflicts, and those who are suffering from the marginalization of the global economy in the Middle East. So they need more support of Islamic values and brotherhood, like the emotional shelter provided by mosques, and should be paid increasing attention to the problems of Muslim community governance and other important challenges facing global governance.

— Ma Lirong

The Effect of Globalization on Asia's Religions

In describing "old-comers vs. new-comers," Taadatsu Tajima argued that "religion provides old and new immigrants a place to recognize their own identity; therefore they can survive in the host country." At the same time, as Dominador Bombangan noted, "the religious self becomes reflexive in a globalized world," indicating that countries and religious communities 'globalize' particular issues while adopting and adapting global values. Bombangan believes that "the Catholic Church in the Philippines should be cognizant of the inevitable destiny of tradition in the globalized context so that she [the Catholic Church] can critically engage modern cosmopolitan Filipinos with ideas and values they advocate." David Palmer added that, "as China becomes one of the most important players in global society, fully integrating into global society means that actually all of China's religious issues and questions become questions and issues for the whole world."

Indigenous or Foreign Religion

The challenges posed to and by "imported" religions in the countries of the region were repeatedly brought up during the discussion.

China: "Christianity, up to right now, in the eyes of most Chinese people is still a foreign religion. So that's a problem; what can they do?" asked one participant. Feiya Tao traced the original problem to the proselytizing activity of 16th century Jesuits in China, led by Matteo Ricci: "At first they wore the costume of monks; later they found out that Chinese people respected intellectuals and elites. So they changed their costume to that worn by the elite." However, Tao continued, "the missionaries preached the Gospel, but actually they also made cannons for the empire."

Korea: Heup Young Kim presented a stark contrast. "Korean Christianity is quite different from other countries, historically speaking. In other Asian countries Christianity was generally used by western colonial powers. Koreans imported Christianity to defend their homeland and their national identities. Actually it was not foreign missionaries but creative groups of Korean Christian minorities who invited the missionaries to introduce Christianity."

Philippines: Dominador Bombangan provided yet another viewpoint. He noted that "another way to understand Filipino religiosity is through folk Catholicism, an expression of spirituality which is syncretic in nature because it mixes animistic beliefs with formal Catholicism... I think this folk Catholicism should be understood very well by the Catholic Church and led or distilled from its magical and fanatical trimmings. Once that is done I think it can be a cultural resource for identity, and for building up mobilization toward a common goal."



Goddess bestowing blessings on pilgrims along the path to the sacred temple atop Qingchen Mountain.

Challenging Identity

In the processes of globalization, new configurations of personhood confront traditional notions. Multiculturalism's effects were noted by several commentators, such as Heup Young Kim, who said of Korea that "we have the rapidly increasing pressure of immigrant workers and multicultural marriages and luxuries. So it is now becoming a radically multicultural society... We are facing the challenges of crossing the boundaries of nationalism and national identities, since, now that we have become a developed country, we have a new flow of people that forces us to open up our exclusive national identity." As for the Philippines, Dominador Bombangan spoke of how religion could provide a basis for identity that would serve the people, but also of how this would require an understanding of the changing place of religion in the hearts of the youth. "Filipino youth... prefer more personal, more experiential and practical guidance as an institutional force. While some people would see this as a privatization of religion, a loss of belief, I would see it as an increasing process of reflexivity among the youth."

Post-Traditional Society

A sense of inevitability regarding certain forces of secularization was evident in some presentations. One participant referred to the claim of the secularization thesis that "all religions will die or disappear soon" and the related concept of "something like a religious market or market theory" as a useful paradigm to understand the place of religion in China. Then, Dominador Bombangan discussed the Reproductive Health Act of 2012 in the Philippines to illustrate the position of the Catholic Church in relation to society. "Never before has there been a more open questioning of the hierarchy's rigid position on reproductive health by the faithful than in this debate. For some, this has caused the demystification of the Church and represents the waning of its influence in society. But for me, I think the RH bill debate demonstrates perfectly the fate of religious tradition in a post-traditional society, which is a by-product of the globalization process. According to Anthony Giddens, in a post-traditional order tradition does not disappear; rather, it has to change its status. Traditions have to explain themselves, to become open to interrogation or discourse."



Portrait of Chairman Mao greets visitors at the entrance to the Forbidden City.

“Because there is a lot more freedom in Indonesia for people to express themselves, this means that the radicals, even when they are a small minority, appear to be much more numerous than they are and can get away with doing things for which in the Suharto era they would just be arrested, put in prison, or shipped off to Malaysia or somewhere else like Pakistan, the Southern Philippines, or anywhere that wanted them. So there is a paradox in this freedom of expression—that radicals can express themselves very freely now in Indonesia as well.”

— Bernard Adeney-Risakotta

“In terms of folk Catholicism what we discovered is that instead of fading away, [local tradition and custom] becomes more vibrant at this time. Perhaps it is because, in terms of their spirituality, people can express themselves better than within the standards that are given by global Catholicism... And now this is better organized because of the new communication systems. You can see how colorful Filipinos are when you see these festive kinds of devotion. So I think globalization and standardization perhaps sort of destroys the identity, the colorfulness, of a particular culture. That is why [religion] is coming back.”

— *Dominador Bombongan*

Changing Relationship with Tradition in a Global World

The kind of religion appearing in a global society has been a concern of co-convener Mark Juergensmeyer, who noted: “We think that, in the era of globalization, religions become more open and more liberal. But sometimes the opposite happens... There is this kind of global standardization of religion, which actually has, in some ways, a destructive role in relation to the more traditional folk religions of the past.” Bernard Adeney-Risakotta reminded the group that “globalization leads both to homogenization and diversification at the same time.” He went on to discuss the movement in Indonesia towards the “purification of Islam from folk religious elements, from belief in spirits and worship at tombs and this sort of thing. But, at the same time there has been a proliferation of very diverse kinds of Islamic groups in Indonesia, and also, incidentally, of other religious groups. There is a diversification of Buddhism, of Hinduism, of Christianity both Catholic and Protestant... But the pressure from the more conservative Salafis or those who want to purify Islam from the so-called pagan elements, that’s also much more vigorous. This is what leads to the repression of a minority group like the Muhammadiyah.”

Gender and Education, Islam and Indonesia

Siti Syamsiyatun and Bernard Adeney-Risakotta discussed Indonesian transformations regarding women and education in Islamic contexts. Syamsiyatun noted that Indonesian women are gaining the right to speak in multiple settings, from “the public sphere to legal reform, to politics and social movements. So women scholars have their own right to speak in religious organizations.” Moreover, the increase in Muslim women scholars has brought about a shift in women’s roles. But even in this changing climate, women as well as men need to use religious language to have any impact on issues of gender. Syamsiyatun underscored this point: “We use religious language. We do not use gender language a lot in Islamic circles because there is a lot of resistance from male scholars who sometimes say, ‘Why are you following the Western ideas?’” Bernard Adeney-Risakotta pointed out practical Indonesian examples, including: “a female president of the country, and now, partly through the effort of lobbying groups, a law that every political party in Indonesia is required to fill at least 30% of its vacancies with women candidates—even the very radical Islamic parties.” He could not think of an example of “any other country in the world where there is this kind of emphasis on trying to get women into leadership positions in the country. This partly results from the kind of discourse about women and the new ways to interpret the sacred text that are more in keeping with the context of our society today.” But Syamsiyatun tempered this enthusiasm for change by pointing out that, “in public life, no one is questioning women leadership in national politics; but within the family mothers want for example to be the witness of their daughters’ marriages, which does not happen a lot. So it is much more difficult to reform on the familial side, but it is happening in Indonesia, in my opinion.”



Chinese praying at a monastery in Zhouzhuang, China.

NGOs and Religion

When discussing the role and operation of NGOs, She Hongyu estimated that in China “the average number of civil society organizations in the country is three per ten thousand people,” noting that “one problem is that there are no figures to be found about how many church-related or religion-related civil society or non-governmental organizations there are in the country.” David Palmer ventured to say that “perhaps more than half or even two-thirds of all the social service agencies in Hong Kong are faith-based.”

Religious affiliation alters community perceptions of NGOs. Dominador Bombangan referenced the 2012 Philippine Trust Study Index, which reports that “the church was perceived to be the most trustworthy institution in the Philippines, while non-governmental organizations, businesses, and the government were perceived to be the least trustworthy.” Gregory Auberry of Catholic Relief Services emphasized the importance of that trust and argued for making human dignity the pre-eminent standard when providing service, noting that his organization challenges everyone “to take this stock of Catholic social teaching and then reflect it upon their own tradition and their own belief system.” But respecting that dignity is difficult when, according to Palmer, a “project-based framework” means that “social services really become a project carried out by one population for the benefit of another. So how can the development process, including the one which is spiritually oriented, be one which is truly empowering?”

Somboon Chungprampree offered hope for collaboration in a Burmese example of monks and villagers rejecting new copper mining and dam construction. They were “protesting the exploitation of the natural resources that sustain their community and their society. Religion cannot accept this kind of exploitation... Now they are accepting working with a faith-based organization for the first time. Before that they were just focused on the scientific and technological level and not working with FBOs. I think that this is a good sign, on the practical level, of how we can collaborate.”

“After the reformation [following the resignation of President Suharto in 1998] ... there are more apparent Salafi influences in Indonesia, where they publicly promote polygamy and having more children... In the organization where I’m a member we make it a condition of membership that a woman not become a second or third wife. We don’t challenge the law directly [but we] also boycott Ulama who are taking other wives. There have been a few Ulama who were very popular and took another wife, and suddenly no one is interested in listening to them anymore. So this is the kind of resistance that we do among women. Some of them just don’t express themselves publicly, but try to use other means to convey the message that they are against this.”

— Siti Syamsiyatun



Participants at the Shanghai workshop on The Role of Religion in Global Civil Society.

Religion should be playing the role to harmonize and also to build up relations in three main areas.

One is between human and human: How can we build up justice between human and human, from the personal level to the structural level in society? The second one is to build up the relationship between humans and nature. We have to be able to sustain nature as well as human society... The third one is to build up the relation of human to God, whether it is one god or many gods, [and] at the same time, build up the relation between human and inner spiritual power to create well-being and happiness in society.

— Somboon Chungprampree



Somboon Chungprampree.

Religion? Civil Society?

“It is kind of like touching the elephant and everyone describes something different about what it is,” said Gregory Auberry when considering the notion of civil society during one of the panel discussions. Li Xiangping pushed further, suggesting: “I think this forum has actually contained three paradoxes. One is religion, the other is globalization, and another is civil society.” While some wrestled with the terms themselves, Tao Feiya pressed for the specificity of the Chinese context. “When we talk about the role of religion in global society, not only should we focus on religion; we must talk about the Chinese society... Religion has always been on the margin of society, [it] never had a strong voice in the court or in the daily life of Chinese people.”

Religion as a Problem or a Resource

“We want to move beyond normative approaches and look at how religion actually promotes civil society, rather than how it ought to,” said Bernard Adeney-Risakotta. In Indonesia he sees a great deal of “plurality and diversity,” in part because of the ease and regularity with which individuals switch between religions. That diversity serves “as a major kind of social capital for helping religions or religious communities work towards a global civil society.”

Such diversity does not appear everywhere, especially as people face challenges when confronted with a religion other than their own. As one participant wondered: “To work together in this global time, which is more important: to say something very beautiful, to talk about your scripture or doctrine or something like that, or to do something, really do something? That is the challenge.” Adeney-Risakotta thought the solution would come from “a mutual respect and recognition that in the world we live in, in this globalizing world, we need each other.” David Palmer advocated for “the practice of compassion, and the kinds of relationships that can be created through the application of spiritual values and principles which are not hierarchical relationships, which are based on spiritual motivations and oneness. That generates a collective power, a capacity to act collectively which is not based on domination.”

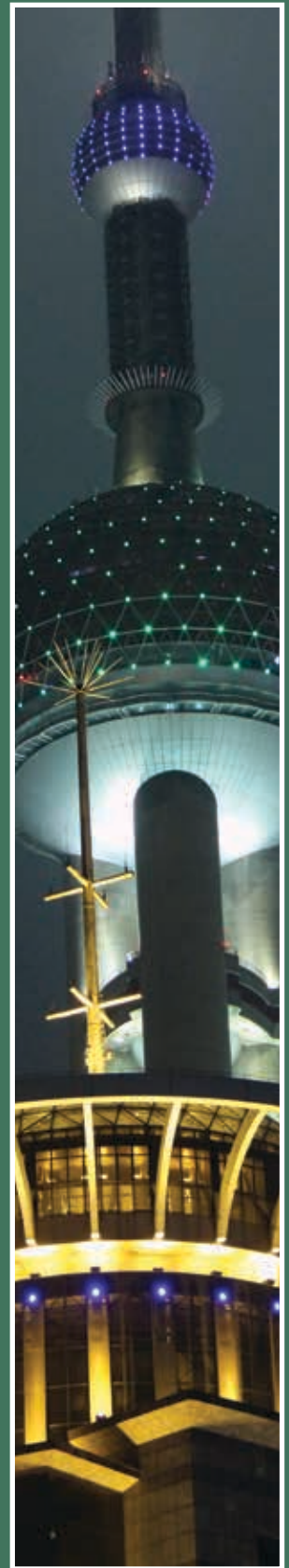
Photo, right: Pudong district view of the Shanghai skyline.

Times of Crisis

Religious organizations take on particular roles in times of crisis. Liu Yi described how the Chinese government, during earthquake relief efforts in 2008 and 2010, issued “a proposal to encourage regulations on religious philanthropy.” The proposal was deemed necessary “to implement the basic principles of the CPC’s religious policies, and to lead the adaptation of a socialist society.” Liu finds that, before these crisis-born regulations, religious leaders’ focus was “not social service—there is a lack of money and manpower to do that. The most important vision was to build huge buildings, either for Buddhists or Protestants. So we can see few practices of religious philanthropy on the grassroots level. Rather, they focus more on the huge buildings.” She Hongyu believes capacity building can change this focus by addressing issues of money and manpower, and noted that “HKU is helping NGOs improve their capacity, which is the same thing we [the Amity Foundation] are doing in China. We established the first NGO incubation center by public fund raising. And today we have established four centers since the first one... We have established a social service network with churches and social service centers. With this platform, more capacity building is provided through the network.” Thanks to such programs as well as government policies encouraging religious groups to focus on providing social services, She and others “are expecting even greater changes to bring the civil society organizations alongside the country’s development efforts” before future crises necessitate them.

More and Louder Voices

Addressing the power of advocacy, Siti Syamsiyatun claimed that scholarship and activism create new togetherness in social movements. In one Indonesian case this led to the enactment of suffrage laws and other new women-friendly laws: “So... their activities are no longer failures from the legal and social perspectives but they are also part of the cultural revolution. These also include the issues of minor marriage and family planning, and the issue of abortion.” Liu Yi argued that, “we should go beyond charity or philanthropy to have more engagement in development. That means religion should be a necessary and very important part of the economic and social development of China. It is not a by-product; it is the responsibility, it is the task that we should do.” She Hongyu linked advocacy to fundraising, noting that “people would say, ‘You’re doing such good work, why don’t you do more publicity—not just providing the correct services, but for people to know more about it?’” But She went on to stress that publicity starts from “solid, good work.” In every case, the panelists urged NGOs and religious groups to raise their voices to influence public policy and the provision of social services, as well as the broader development of their respective countries.



The Shanghai Oriental Pearl Tower, located at the tip of Lujiazui in the Pudong district.

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The Dynamism of Religion

At the close of the event, Guo Changgang and Mark Juergensmeyer both looked to metaphors to describe the effect religion can have on civil society. Guo spoke of a meeting with a high official that, as he recalled, “made me think a lot.” The official had likened religion to a ball. “If you leave it still, it will stay there very quietly. If you move it, it will become very active.” The energy inherent in religion had led people in the west to want to see religion as “what people do in their solitude,” according to Juergensmeyer. Religion is “safe if it stays in this little private box. When it climbs out of the box it becomes more of a problem.” Juergensmeyer recognized, however, that “religion has never been in the box, in part because of its affinity with nationalism... but there is a strengthening of religion through nationalism and vice versa. We have to discuss this in terms of a transnational dimension.”

Religion’s engagement with civil society will not be an easy one, as the discussions of the conference highlighted, but the dynamism of religion offers a great source of strength that could benefit the world at large. As Guo assessed it, “in the global world we should think about the ways we can harness religion,” for he and many of the participants believed that if “religion can play an increasing role in civil society, maybe there will be a smaller role for violence. The whole world could then become more peaceful.”



Participants and staff of the Shanghai workshop on The Role of Religion in Global Civil Society.

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ABOUT THE ORFALEA CENTER PROJECT ON THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

This workshop summary is one in a series that is part of a Luce Foundation Sponsored initiative on the role of religion and international relations.

The Orfalea Center project will host regional workshops to:

- bring scholars and practitioners together to identify and discuss issues relating to religion that are important in the field;
- develop curriculum and resource materials that will be available as a teaching tool for programs training international NGO leaders;
- infuse the study of religion in the curriculum of UCSB's own graduate program in global and international studies.



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The Luce Foundation's Henry R. Luce Initiative on Religion and International Affairs, seeks to deepen American understanding of religion as a critical but often neglected factor in international policy issues.



The Orfalea Center for Global & International Studies at UCSB, inaugurated in the 2005-06 academic year, provides an intellectual and programmatic focus for the University's activities in global, international, and area studies. The Center provides financial support and arrangement facilities to sponsor public programs, seminars, publications, and research planning for units across the campus.