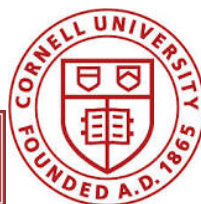


Workshop on “Religious Minorities in Asia”

2015 June 12-13

City University of Hong Kong



Center
for
Southeast
Asian
Studies



Friday, June 12

9:00 am	Registration, Tea and Introduction
10:00-11:15 am	Keynote - John Sidel
11:15 am-12:15 pm	Paper 1 - Chiara Formichi [discussant: Meera Ashar]
12:30 pm	MoU signings between City University of Hong Kong and Cornell and Northern Illinois universities
1:00 pm	Lunch at City Chinese Restaurant
2:30-3:30 pm	Paper 2 - Matthew Nelson [discussant: Kikue Hamayotsu]
3:30-4:30 pm	Paper 3 - Dian Shah [discussant: Matthew Nelson]
4:30-4:45 pm	Tea
4:45-5:45 pm	Paper 4 - Kikue Hamayotsu [discussant: Dian Shah]
5:45-6:30 pm	Discussion
7:30 pm	Dinner

Saturday, June 13

10-11 am	Paper 5 - Tom Patton [discussant: Emiko Stock]
11 am-12:00 nn	Paper 6 - Mark Mullins [discussant: Chiara Formichi]
12:00 nn-1:00 pm	Paper 7 - Meera Ashar [discussant: Mark Mullins]
1:00 pm	Lunch (Sandwiches)
2:15-3:15 pm	paper 8 - Yongjia Liang [discussant: Wai-chi Chee]
3:15-4:15 pm	paper 9 - Emiko Stock [discussant: Yongjia Liang]
4:15-5:15 pm	paper 10 - Wai-chi Chee [discussant: Tom Patton]
5:15-6:00 pm	Concluding discussion and plans ahead
7:30 pm	Dinner

Keynote

John Sidel is the Sir Patrick Gillam Professor of International and Comparative Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science. He is the author of *Capital, Coercion, and Crime: Bossism in the Philippines* (Stanford University Press, 1999), (with Eva-Lotta Hedman) *Philippine Politics and Society in the Twentieth Century: Colonial Legacies Postcolonial Trajectories* (Routledge, 2000), *Riots, Pogroms, Jihad: Religious Violence in Indonesia* (Cornell University Press, 2006), and *The Islamist Threat in Southeast Asia: A Reassessment* (East-West Center, 2007). After far too many years, he is still working on a book-length study on *Republicanism, Communism, Islam: Cosmopolitan Origins of Revolution in Southeast Asia*.

“Burma, Through an Indonesian Glass, Darkly: Comparisons in the Study of Religious Minorities and Violence in Asia”

This paper uses explores the analytical insights and implications of a comparison between Indonesia and Burma for understanding patterns of violence against religious minorities in the two countries. The paper focuses on the recent attacks on minority Muslim communities in Burma over the past several years and analogous episodes of communal violence during the period of rapid political change in Indonesia at the turn of the 21st century. But the paper situates the similarities and differences in the patterns of violence observed against the broader backdrop of a comparative historical analysis of identity formation and political change in the two countries. Here the key question to address is the specificity of ‘religious’ minorities as opposed to ‘ethnic’ minorities, and the special logics at work in the construction and defence of religious identities, boundaries, and structures of authority. Thus the comparisons to be made concern not only Indonesia and Burma, but also similarities and differences between ‘religious’ and ‘ethnic’ minorities in terms of the patterns of conflict and violence observed.

Paper 1

Chiara Formichi is Assistant Professor of Southeast Asian Studies in the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University. Chiara's academic interests cover the contested role of Islam in politics during the Dutch Indies/Indonesia's late colonial era, current problems related to sectarianism and orthodoxy in Muslim Southeast Asia, and more broadly the question of religious diversity and pluralism in Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. A recurrent thread in her research are transnational flows of ideas (secular and religious like), the intersection between foreign and localized religious practices and understandings, and the impact that the politicization and institutionalization of religion has on Asia's societies.

Her publications include the monograph *Islam and the making of the nation: Kartosuwiryo and political Islam in 20th century Indonesia* (2012, KITLV), the edited volumes *Religious Pluralism, State and Society in Asia* (2013, Routledge) and *Shi'ism in Southeast Asia* (2014, Hurst&Co., with R. Michael Feener), a contribution to *The Encyclopaedia of Islam Three*, a number of journal articles (*Indonesia Journal*, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, *Die Welt des Islams*) and several book chapters.

Researching ‘Religious Minorities in Asia’: methodological reflections from an on-going project

Taking stock of Asia's diversity, this paper emerges from a larger project comparing the status of religious minorities in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Focusing on the interaction of government policies, social attitudes, and colonial legacies, this research delves into the question of how legislations and policies designed to “manage” ethnic and religious groups affect the ways societies interface with diversity.

For a narrower focus, this paper analyses how colonial and post-colonial governments shaped “racial” and “religious” identities through laws and educational policies, and how this process affects the formation of national societies, most notably “creating” ethno-religious minorities, as well as majorities. Grounded in archival and ethnographic fieldwork, the paper uses a tripartite theoretical framework: Peletz's definition of “pluralism” provides a qualitative understanding of diversity (*Transgenderism and Gender Pluralism*, 2006); Brubaker's criticism of fixed and created ethnic “groups” contributes to reconstructing belonging as an evolving process (*Ethnicity without Groups*, 2004); and Emerson's work on multiracial congregations in America offers a comparative analysis of what could be achieved if religious congregations were “de-racialized” (*Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 2008).

Paper 2

Matthew Nelson (PhD Columbia) is a Reader in Politics at SOAS (London). His research focuses on the politics of South Asia, with a special emphasis on the politics of Islamic institutions and democracy. Before coming to SOAS Dr Nelson taught at UC Santa Cruz, Bates College, and Yale University. In 2009-10 he was the Wolfensohn Family Member at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton; in 2011 he was a Fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington; and in 2014 he was a Fellow at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research (ZiF) in Germany. Dr Nelson has served as an elected board member for the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS), the South Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies (AAS), and the Religion and Politics Section of the American Political Science Association (APSA).

Religious Freedom and Public Order: Tracing a Familiar Constitutional Tension in Two Islamic States

This paper examines the tension between religious freedom and public order in Pakistan and Malaysia. With reference to cases of conversion (apostasy) and public heresy, I discuss some of the ways in which certain manifestations of religious belief are 'securitised' as a source of public disorder--and, following on from this challenge to public order, a source of vulnerability to specific external threats--leading, ultimately, to the (legal) derogation of 'fundamental' religious rights. I argue that legal protections for religious freedom in Islamic states rarely pivot on the terms of Islamic law. As in other states, they generally pivot on the constitutionally prior role that concerns about public order play in the construction of ostensibly 'existential' threats.

Paper 3

Dian Abdul Hamed Shah recently completed her doctoral study at Duke University School of Law and now serves as a Senior Lecturer at the University of Malaya Law Faculty. She graduated with an LL.B (Warwick University) and an LL.M (Duke University) in 2008 and 2009, respectively. Her research interests, broadly speaking, span the fields of constitutional history, comparative constitutional law, and human rights. Dian’s recent work focuses on the interaction of law, religion, and politics in plural societies and in the past few years, she has spent time conducting field research in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. She is currently working on a book project in which she analyzes how different constitutional arrangements and institutional and political conditions may shape the protection and enforcement of religious rights in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka.

The Constitutional foundations for religious freedom and (in)tolerance in Malaysia and Sri Lanka

In the past decade or so, Malaysia and Sri Lanka have witnessed various incidents that pose a serious threat to inter- and/or intra-religious relations in these countries. State-enforced restrictions on religious freedom, affecting majority and minority religious groups alike, as well as attacks on religious minorities (be they verbal or physical), have been on the rise. With respect to conflicts and tensions at the societal level, there is a growing sense and evidence that the state has been unwilling or unable to protect the minorities and vulnerable religious groups. These trends have sparked fresh debates on the role of the state, not just in regulating religious affairs, but also in upholding the rule of law and constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, especially for the minorities.

This paper shall examine how the constitutions of Malaysia and Sri Lanka cement the protection of religious freedom and how religious freedom violations and intolerance may find their bases, rightly or wrongly, in the constitutional provisions of the two countries. To that end, the paper proceeds in three parts. Part I compares the constitutional framework for religious freedom in Malaysia and Sri Lanka and briefly reviews the history and origins of particular provisions implicating religion and religious freedom. Part II discusses several important cases concerning religious freedom that have emerged in the two countries. The analysis focuses on the similarities and nuances in the way they are dealt with by the government and the highest levels of the judiciary, as well as the competing visions of religious freedom by different parties involved. At its core, this paper demonstrates that there are indications of a shift in the way in which the provisions have been conceptualized and applied over time. It argues that one way to formulate these events is by understanding them as a ‘constitutional perversion,’ chiefly because the provisions appear to have been applied, counter-intuitively, to restrict, instead of protect, the right to religious freedom. Finally, part III provides some observations on the reasons why things have unfolded as they have, illuminating an understanding of the conditions that may facilitate or undermine the protection of religious freedom and religious tolerance in Malaysia and Sri Lanka.

Paper 4

Kikue Hamayotsu is Associate Professor at Department of Political Science and Faculty Associate at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University. Her primary research interest and publications center on state-religion relations in Muslim-majority states in Southeast Asia, especially Indonesia and Malaysia. Her current research projects include religious freedom and democracy, religious movements and electoral politics, religious conflict and *Shari‘a* politics. Previously she held research positions at Yale Macmillan Center for International and Area Studies, Columbia University and the Asia Research Institute (ARI), National University of Singapore.

For more information: <http://www.niu.edu/polisci/faculty/profiles/hamayotsu.shtml>.

Democratization, Regime Formation and Religious Minorities in Indonesia and Malaysia

The rising trend of ultra-conservative Islamism and anti-minority violence since the mid-2000s in two Muslim-majority nations in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia, raises theoretically important questions about the political and social status of religious minorities and relations between various religious communities in an emerging Muslim-majority democracy. This paper adopts comparative and historical institutional approaches to search for an explanation for this phenomenon. Paired comparison of these Southeast Asian cases suggests that the political imperatives of regime formation and survival at a critical historical juncture, either under an autocratic and democratic rule, conditions the way in which largely secular Muslim ruling elites relate to religious (primarily Islamic) elites and civil society, resulting in particular state policies and attitudes towards religious minorities. Based on comparative case studies, original empirical data, and historical accounts in both countries, I argue that anti-minority mass mobilization is primarily the result of political and religious elites’ quest for power in order to secure and reinforce their regime in the face of perceived threat to their support base and authority. I also test the theoretical and conceptual validity of alternative explanations, namely electoral incentives, radical Islamism, and nation-building.

Paper 5

Thomas Patton completed his Ph.D. in Asian Literature, Religion, and Culture from the Department of Asian Studies at Cornell University and is now Assistant Professor of Asian Studies at City University of Hong Kong. His teaching and research is attentive to religion in Southeast Asia, particularly focusing on historical and ethnographic interests engaging Buddhist phenomena in relation to Burmese cultural contexts, issues of gender and class, and politics. His current research, which has been published in *The Journal of Asian Studies* and *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, is on lived religion in Myanmar, specifically examining local cults of saints and peoples’ relationships with them, shrines, miracles, and other manifestations of religious devotion.

The Ethnographer and the Charlatan: Researching the Infamous Buddhist Wizards of Myanmar

This paper addresses the marginality of particular Buddhist sorcery practices (*weizzā*) in contemporary Myanmar. Examining the reasons for expressed hostility and mistrust towards the *weizzā* phenomenon from segments of Myanmar’s governmental and ecclesiastical authorities, as well as from large segments of the lay Buddhist population, I will do four things in this paper: First, I will look at the longstanding, and at times, bitter discourses involving practices of *samatha* (concentration) meditation (favored by *weizzā* path practitioners and devotees) and *vipassanā* (insight) meditation to show how there is a fear on the part of governmental and ecclesiastical authorities over the power of *samatha* meditation as a threat to their power, as well as widespread suspicion of organizations dedicated to the practice and propagation of *weizzā* beliefs and activities and *samatha* meditation for engaging in nefarious activities. Secondly, I will address the claim that many of the practices that *weizzā* practitioners engage in, such as alchemy and the manipulation of sacred diagrams, do not constitute Theravāda Buddhism. Third, I will discuss why large segments of the Burmese population consider most leaders of *weizzā* organizations, as well as independent *weizzā* healers, mediums, and practitioners to be charlatans. I will finish by offering some methods for how an ethnographer, such as myself, can navigate these (and personal) dilemmas using a “lived religions” perspective.

Paper 6

Mark R. Mullins is Professor of Japanese Studies in the School of Cultures, Languages and Linguistics, and Director of the Japan Studies Centre, New Zealand Asia Institute, The University of Auckland. Prior to this appointment, he was engaged in academic work in Japan for twenty-seven years. He completed his postgraduate studies in the sociology of religion and East Asian traditions at McMaster University (PhD 1985). He is the author and co-editor of a number of works, including *Religion and Society in Modern Japan* (1993), *Christianity Made in Japan* (1998), and *Religion and Social Crisis in Japan* (2001), and *Critical Readings on Christianity in Japan* (2015).

The Politics of Religious Freedom and the Predicament of Religious Minorities in Contemporary Japanese Society

The situation of religious minorities in Japan changed dramatically with the defeat and Occupation by the Allied Powers in 1945. State Shinto was quickly disestablished and the wartime laws regulating religious minorities were abolished. Under the guidance and firm hand of the occupiers, a new Constitution was drawn up and passed by the Diet in November 1946, which came into effect the following year. It included two articles (20 and 89) that clearly redefined the relationship between the state and religion (i.e., separation) and the rights of individuals to freely practice (or not) a religion of their choice. Religious minorities welcomed these changes and began to flourish in the free-market religious economy of the early postwar decades. A number of other religious and political groups, however, opposed these reforms and throughout the postwar period have maintained that the new Constitution was based on “victor’s justice” and unfairly reduced the social and public role of Shinto in Japanese life. In their view, the separation of religion and state had been too strictly enforced in the Japanese context and it was important to reinstate a “proper” relationship between the state and religion following the departure of the Occupation forces.

The movement to “revive” or “recover” what had been destroyed during the Occupation can be traced back to the early 1950s. The Association of Shinto Shrines (Jinja Honchō) began to work actively on numerous fronts to restore Shinto influence in public life and revise the Constitution “imposed” during the Occupation. Over the course of several decades, Jinja Honchō nurtured the development of a number of affiliated groups, including the League Promoting Ties between Politics and Shinto (*Shintō Seiji Renmei*, 1969), which is known today as the “Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership” (*Shinseiren*). These groups have worked closely with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for decades to bring their concerns and various initiatives to the Diet for action, but with limited success until fairly recently.

These “restoration” efforts have been reinvigorated in connection with the resurgence of neo-nationalism in the wake of the social crisis precipitated by the 1995 Kobe earthquake and sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system by members of Aum Shinrikyō, and the more recent 2011 threefold disaster of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant. In post-disaster Japan, the close relationship between the LDP and Shinto Association of Spiritual Leadership has been strengthened and more focused efforts are now being directed toward the revision of the Constitution.

The Liberal Democratic Party first made public its proposed revisions to the postwar Constitution in 2005 and issued a slightly revised version in 2012. The proposed revisions to Articles 20 and 89 are a cause of serious concern to leaders from a wide-range of religious groups since they would clearly weaken the clear separation of religion and state and would also allow for some ritual activity in public institutions redefined as a "social custom" (*shakaiteki girei, shūzokuteki kōi*), which some observers claim approximates the strategy used by the government in relation to State Shinto until 1945. Both secular critics and religious minorities are raising concerns about these initiatives and the potential loss of freedom if the revisions of these Articles are passed by the Diet.

Paper 7

Meera Ashar is a Lecturer in the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University. She is also the Deputy Director of the South Asia Research Institute (SARI) and the Secretary of the South Asian Studies Association of Australia (SASAA). She has previously worked as an Assistant Professor at the City University of Hong Kong and has been an LM Singhvi Fellow at the Centre of South Asian Studies at the University of Cambridge. Meera’s research interests lie at the intersection of history, political theory and literary studies.

Ecumenical Claims, Parochial Conceptions: Secularism in India

In India, secularism has long been proposed as the solution for violence against minorities, religious intolerance, communal tension and ethnic prejudice. Furthermore, secularism has also been put forward as a principal tenet of the modern nation-state. Scholars of India, however, acknowledge that the concept of ‘secularism’ operates rather uniquely in India. First, it seems to share more with the idea of ‘toleration’ or a mutual respect for all religions—it is commonly translated as *dharmanirapekshita* and *sarva dharma sambhava*—than with the idea of the separation of state and religion. Second, in situations when the term is used to indicate a separation, it is conceptualized as the opposite of ‘communalism’—it is not only religion that is to be kept away from the state but also caste and ethnicity. This paper attempts to understand the multiple meanings the term takes on in its journey from Europe to India, and in its lively career in Indian political debates. Through a discussion of debates on cow slaughter from 1947 to the present, the paper problematizes the concept of secularism and its cognates. It asks whether or not the polysemy attending these concepts can generate discourses that enable an understanding of interactions between the state and various communities in India.

Paper 8

Yongjia Liang is Professor of Anthropology at China Agricultural University. He’s interested in religion and secularism, ethnicity, nationalism, and kingship. He specialises in the ethnographic study of southwest China and its connection with upland Southeast Asia. Author of over 50 papers, he publishes on journals such as *the Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, *China: an International Journal*, and *Shehuixue Yanjiu* (Sociological Studies). His monographs were published by Social Science Academic Press (2005), Minzu Press (2008) and Routledge (2016).

(Dis)Locating Religious Minority in China

The paper explores “religious minority” in the religious landscape of mainland China, where “religious minority” is not socially recognised, culturally legitimised, or discursively institutionalised. On the one hand, state co-option of religious groups are achieved through particular definition of “religion” without the conceptualisation of minority rights, leaving undefined religious activities to cultural policy or national security measures. On the other hand, the population that might be identified as religious minorities elsewhere does not usually self-identified as such, not to say seek for right of religious freedom. To explain the absence of articulated/institutionalised “religious minority” in China, the paper provides three case studies. The first is a textual analysis of a human right lawyer’s plea for religious freedom in a criminal trial, which demonstrates the lack of legislative incentive towards defining and regulating “religious minority”. The second case analyses the revival of “the Society of Disciples” (*mentuhui*), which demonstrates how a cracked-down “cult” survived not by organising into a religious minority group, but by split into disconnected family-based units. The third case is the life history of a ritual service provider, whose decades-long practice continues because of its non-organisational nature. The paper argues that locating “religious minority” in mainland China dislocates the conventional understanding of “religious minority”. It exists not by a conscious reference to religious majority, but by being non-organisational, being disinterested in religious freedom, and, most important of all, being below the state’s radar.

Paper 9

Emiko Stock is currently a PhD candidate in Anthropology at Cornell University. She was previously an interpreter-fixer in Cambodia. After studying at the Royal University of Fine Arts, her masters in Khmer language and civilization (INALCO, Paris) and in anthropology (Nanterre, Paris X) led her to her dissertation project, at the crossroad of visual anthropology and anthropo-history. Her research follows the trajectories of a few Cham Muslims in Cambodia, from Sunni to Shia, and their relation to Iran and Persia set in the image of a return. Using popular photography and camerawork, this project looks at the surplus of visuals as a response to history’s vanishing, absences and silences.

“For Ali is Our Ancestor”’: Cham Sayyids Going (Back) to Shi’a from Cambodia to Iran

A small village. A couple of families. A few leaders. Just a couple of years. It didn’t take much for a handful of Cham Muslims in Cambodia to “leave” traditionally assigned Sunni to Shi’a. From the journeys undertaken by a few students to Qom in Iran, from the hopes of young gents learning Farsi, from the elders’ readings of newly imported Shia texts, we could conclude to something barely emergent, brand new, a move, a trend. We could. And yet. Yet there is this road long taken by merchants from Persia to Champa, back and forth. Yet there are those touches of Shia in one too many ritual, one too many legend. Yet there is the gigantic line: the one that has always linked the small village, the couple of families, the few leaders: to Ali. The line that is made of Sayyid generations who always claimed their ascendance to Ali, who always remembered the battles in his name – maybe the one in Kerbala, surely the ones in Cambodia – and who just had to come back to the womb of Shia: them, the Cham Sayyid, born from the womb of the Cham wife of Ali it is said, it is told, it is known. A long story, a piece of *longue durée* history, using preliminary fieldwork materials from Iran and Cambodia, showing that the affiliation to Shia by a few, denied by the Sunni majority, and considered as new, is nothing but...

This paper aims at showing the vestige and modern trends of shia practice among the Cham of Cambodia. Traditionally Sunni, a recent turn to shia practices by just a few families should not be interpreted as a new trend, and Iran as its forum, but more as a resurgence of the ancient ties between Persians and Chams.

Paper 10

Wai-Chi Chee is a Research Assistant Professor at the School of Modern Languages and Cultures in the University of Hong Kong. She received her PhD in Anthropology from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Her research interests include migration, education, youth, globalization, religion, and culture and identity. She has published in several international journals including *Asian Anthropology*, *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology*, *Ethnography and Education*, and *Multicultural Education Review*. She is also a contributor to *Refugees, Immigrants, and Education in Global South* (Routledge; Winner of 2014 Jackie Kirk Outstanding Book Award) and *Religious Pluralism, State and Society in Asia* (Routledge).

Navigating Islamic Enclosure and Cosmopolitan Space: Young Chinese Female Muslim Converts in Hong Kong

Among Hong Kong’s population of 7 million, about 270,000 are Muslims, predominantly Indonesian domestic workers, and South Asian and African migrants. Only about 10 percent are ethnic Chinese – most have a root that can be traced to the Hui minority in Mainland China. Thus, in Hong Kong, Islam largely evokes imaginaries of ethnic minorities and “otherness.” In this context, Chinese Muslim converts often find themselves shifting from the ethnic majority of Hong Kong to an ethnic minority within a religious minority in the city. To most Hong Kong people, it is particularly unimaginable that local Chinese females born and raised in this modern city should convert to Islam because Muslim-majority societies are stereotypically perceived to be at odds with gender equality and modernities.

This research explores the interplay between Islamic regulatory regime and cosmopolitan space through the experiences of a group of well-educated young Chinese female Muslim converts who find themselves challenged by everyday realities that constantly require creative adaptation. Focusing on issues related to gender and ethnicity, this paper argues that these women embody and represent regulatory enclosure and cosmopolitan identities simultaneously, entailing continuous negotiations and contestations.

These women identify themselves as members of the local and global Islamic communities, and also as modern independent females in a cosmopolitan city. By exploring how they create Islamic practices strategically in reaction to different situations, this paper sheds light on how Muslims negotiate regulatory enclosure and cosmopolitanism, and how Islam is dynamically constituted and re-constituted locally in response to constantly evolving challenges.

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