



THE RELIGION AND DIVERSITY PROJECT/RELIGION ET DIVERSITÉ



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Brief Research Statement

All of my research now is focused on looking at religion from the perspective of comparative politics. I am interested in the state's response to religious pluralism in Asian societies, where states have sought to simultaneously delineate the limits of 'acceptable religions' and promote a self-image of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. I believe that the varieties of policies adopted by East Asian polities deserve careful study as they may emerge as sources of norms for the management of religion in many societies in other regions of the world.

Religion in the moral economy of late capitalist societies in Asia. The results of my fieldwork in Taiwan and China on Buddhist charities have led me to explore the ways in which philanthropic associations contribute to the disciplining of the labour force by supporting an ethos that emphasizes compassion and selflessness. I am currently preparing a volume co-edited with Bruce Berman on the moral economy of cultural claims where I will develop the background to this approach, and I am going on research leave next winter to work on a manuscript on the role of Buddhism in the moral economy of contemporary China. I am forming a research team looking at the moral economy of other Asian societies from a comparative perspective.

The secular state and religious diversity. In relation to the above, I examine more specifically how the state seeks to manage the moral economy by its regulation of religion. This investigation does not limit itself to the legal framework of religious affairs, but also looks into the role of the epistemic communities of scholars, people

in the media, and lay associations and the ways in which they try to shape the views of governments on religion. The focus of my research has been comparative within the context of societies shaped by the Chinese cultural heritage, primarily China and Taiwan, and I am looking forward in the next few years to expand the comparative scope of this investigation by looking at other polities with my research team.

Religion and imagined communities in Asia. Finally, and in relation to the previous two projects, I am interested by the ways in which religious identity serves to consolidate or blur the frontiers between ethnic and national identities, especially in parts of the world, such as East Asia, where states have deployed considerable energy to reify the boundaries of imagined communities. The definition of religion by state or dominant ethnic group can be used to assert differences and claims of cultural superiority over others within and outside states. I am interested by both the state strategies and the response of religious actors to these attempts to create boundaries. This project would also be comparative and rely on team work.