# Ethnic Identities, Social Spaces and Boundaries: Habitus and Fundamentalist Doxa Among Second-Generation Chinese American Evangelicals

James M. Smith

*Towson University, Department of Geography and Environmental Planning,
USA*

## 1. Introduction

Identities provide a crucial reference point for patterns of cooperation and conflict between communities. The recent resurgence of ethnicity has surprised social theorists who expected culturally-articulated group association to diminish with the rise of modernization and its gesellschaft society. Castells (1997), in his seminal three volume work on globalizations and social change, asserts that identities are our source of meaning and lens for interpreting experience. With this in mind, social research that conceptualizes identities as a dynamic motivating force for actors can shed a positive light on the contemporary issues and challenges of multi-ethnic societies.

Within the social sciences, studies of ethnicity tend to emphasize empiricist ontologies with rather eclectic methodologies. For example, ethnic and social geographies are often either broad scale analyses of spatial patterns (e.g. segregation, ethnic economies) or studies of identity patterns (often in particular types of institutions and networks) using mixed methods or qualitative approaches. As noted below, these are useful and necessary to explain dynamics of migration and behavior or to gain in-depth understandings of ethnic identities. However, both types of studies have important limitations, mainly due to a lack of clear theoretical frameworks to analyze the significance of broader scale patterns or ethnographic accounts of identity genesis, boundaries and persistence.

In this chapter, I deploy a synthesis of Barth's (1998a) social constructionist, boundary-oriented approach to ethnic persistence and Bourdieu's (1990) concepts of *habitus*, *capital* and *doxa* to deepen our understanding of how actors' ethnic identities are constantly (re)defined in changing social contexts, demarcated through boundary-oriented discourses and expressed through practices. Barth's perspective is that identities are not unchanging and immutable, but find expression through agency within a nexus of opportunities and constraints. To interpret the meaning of social space solidarities and difference, Bourdieu's work provides a way to conceptualize the interplay of structure and agency through social space positions and internalized value systems based on actors' amounts and relative weights of economic and cultural capital. Integrating concepts from Barth and Bourdieu into

an analytical framework enables analysis that sheds light on strongly cohesive social identities. In this research, I explore ethnic identities, social spaces and boundaries among second generation Chinese Americans in an Evangelical Church in Greater Baltimore Maryland, USA

To interpret fundamentalist perspectives, and the intensity of faith and religious literalism that emerged from interview and participant observation data, I adopt Stump's (2008) analytical framework from human geography. I deploy the synthesis of Barth and Bourdieu to analyze ethnicity and social space, combined with Stump's understanding of fundamentalism, to assess the intense dispositional and behavioral cohesion within the ethno-spiritual community, while placing the significance of these communities and practices at wider socio-spatial scales.

My research explores three areas: 1) identity discourses revealed by second generation Chinese Americans in the research site; 2) the social space characteristics of the informant group; 3) which dispositions and practices emerge from ethno-spiritual identity discourses, the practices required for effective ethnic performance, and how social space similarities frame the content and style of practices. Specific interview questions explored intensity of religious faith, the relationship between ethnicity and faith, dating, marriage, friendships and role of religion in politics.

Intensive research deepens our understanding of the genesis, persistence and trajectory of new identities in societies characterized by immigration and ethno-cultural diversity. By exploring these questions, we engage with two of the most powerful forces in social life: identities and religious faith. Evangelicalism is a rapidly growing and dynamic force creating or reshaping identities and cultural perceptions in different regions of the world. In this chapter, I use the Barth-Bourdieu theoretical synthesis to explore a dynamic network of ethnic identities and faith in what I have described in previous work as ethno-spiritual communities (Smith, 2008).

## 2. Ethnic identities and religious fundamentalism

### 2.1 Ethnicity, boundaries and social geographies

Ethnicity is a discursive term, often seen as difficult to define and complex to work through in social research. Most studies have grappled with ethnicity as a matter of cultural content, and treated ethnic groups as separate, autonomous and isolated by discrete boundaries. Kinship, shared ancestry, language and endogamous marriage- backed by sanctions for violators- all created webs of meaning (Geertz 1973) that ensured group cohesion and continuity. Broadly labeled primordialist, scholars who shared these assumptions about ethnic identities and persistence dominated research until the late 1960s.

Three fundamental problems emerged from the rather static understandings of ethnicity characteristic of the primordialist approach. First, scholars could not agree on a common set of traits to define ethnicity. This led to confusion and lack of social scientific coherence. Second, ethnographers and other researchers often noted that the cultural content enclosed by ethnic labels changed over time, particularly with the imposition of colonial regimes in 'non-western' settings and the consequent diffusion of practices associated with the world system of capitalist economy. The considerable literature on 'cargo-cults' in Melanesia

societies and other Pacific Basin settings provided cases in point. Finally, what of new identities in immigrant-settler societies such as the United States, Canada and Australia? Some immigrants strove to preserve origin-society socio-cultural systems, but these were inevitably weakened in vastly different socio-spatial circumstances. Likewise, second generation ethnic groupings and subsequent generations understood their identities differently from the immigrant generation, and created multiple identities within any particular ethnic label.

To address these, and other vexing issues, more critical scholars created approaches that centered on ethnic identity genesis and persistence as contextually dependent sets of processes, rather than sets of cultural traits. Identities were no longer seen as dependent on a certain level of group isolation, but were actually strengthened and more sharply defined and demarcated by exogamous interactions. Viewed from this more dynamic perspective, group identity was understood as mutable, shifting and socially constructed.

Perhaps the central figure in this epistemological shift was the work of Fredrik Barth, who stressed that ethnic identities are centered on socio-cultural practices that serve as important boundary markers, differentiating an ethnic group from all out-groups. For Barth (1998a, 1998b) ethnicity is a form of social organization that deploys cultural markers and practices to organize difference. Interaction with exogamous groups is based upon transactions and negotiations over territory, resources and relative social status. A ethnic label is quite discursive, as in-group members play the same game of daily life by reproducing practices central to the identity. Standards of performance provide set benchmarks for status rewards, while sanctions follow for failure to perform adequately, or for defiant practices. The status benefits of membership, and the costs of ethnic failure or 'betrayal', enable the persistence and defense of these boundaries, and thus preserve ethnic identity. Considered from this perspective, ethnic identities are (re)produced on the individual and collective levels through these daily social transactions. Individuals self-ascribe as members of in-group A, and therefore differentiate themselves in perception and daily performance from out groups B, C etc. By identifying as members of group A, they agree to the rewards of maintaining boundaries, and to the sanctions for violating those boundaries. Thus, ethnic identity demarcation entails a type of daily presentation (Goffman, 1959) to those in the group and outside of it.

Barth's perspective also allows for shifts in the cultural content of ethnic identity membership. For example, under changing economic circumstances, the group might embrace occupations (e.g. small business ownership) that were previously avoided under different status circumstances in the home country. This is frequently in evidence for specific demographics within immigrant groups in the United States, such as Korean men, who experience loss of status in the migration process (Ley, 2008). Likewise, ethnic boundaries can be permeable, at least to certain degrees under specific conditions. For example, outmarriage from group A might mean leaving the formal ethnic identity of one's childhood and early family life. Conversely, persons from group A who are deemed 'assimilable' might be accepted by group B by marrying into it. However, the standards enabling movement across boundaries can change if the broader socio-cultural, political and spatial contexts are transformed. Thus identities, and interethnic relations, are not fixed or immutable.

Crucially, ethnic identities are also rooted in place context, because different social compositions lead to varied expressions of group identities. For example, Chinese Americans in San Francisco will occupy a very different social position relative to their coethnics in urban regions where Asians are a smaller percentage of the overall population. In the Greater Baltimore region, Asian Americans (broadly defined in US Census terminology as East, Southeast and South Asians) comprise only about five percent of the total. Because group identities are expressed on landscapes of urban, exurban and rural areas, immigration streams dynamically alter local social geographies. Berry and Henderson (2002) view ethnic group expressions as geographical identities, as groups mark their presence on the landscape in a manner similar to etchings on a vase. In turn, the changed landscape becomes an emotive symbolic space that is intertwined with the ethnic consciousness of the people who created it. Examples of research within the social geography of ethnicity includes Airress' (2002) qualitative studies of Vietnamese American landscapes in New Orleans, and Wood's (1997) work on such transformations in Northern Virginia. Migration streams create new settlement patterns such as ethnoburbs in Los Angeles (Li ,1998) and dispersed ethnic patterns or 'invisiburbs' associated by Skop and Altman (2006) with Asian Indians. Ethnic economies in urban spaces as different as Berlin and St. Paul Minnesota create clusters and recreate business arteries on the landscapes of central cities (Kaplan, 1997). In the case of Asian Americans in the Greater Baltimore region, settlement clusters do exist, but do not follow an obvious enclave pattern. Likewise, social patterns are generally heterolocal, with shopping centers, churches, temples and university clubs as central nodes of ethnic expression and interaction with coethnics.

## 2.2 Ethnic religion

In the US context, the intensity and persistence of religious loyalties and impacts seems closely tied to large scale immigration (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006) and the process of adjustment that faces individuals and communities in an alienating environment. This fact has direct relevance for ethnic persistence beyond the immigrant generation (Min 2002).

Research focused specifically on ethnic churches has centered upon the roles, attitudes of, and differences between, the immigrant and second generations. Exploring the different perceptions and benefits for the two groups, and the roles of the institution in the lives of the congregants, Ley (2008) has analyzed immigrant churches in Canada as nodes of services, deploying the concept of bonding social capital-the vital lifeline of relationships and obligations that enable immigrants to function in an alienating environment. Cao (2005) examines immigrant churches as sites for class-based segmented assimilation. Similarly, Yang (2002) emphasizes the role of churches as sites for emotional and spiritual stability for immigrants overwhelmed by the alienating realities of the migration experience. In particular, Yang emphasizes the importance of absolute values found in evangelical Protestantism as the crucial factor motivating conversions to Christianity among Chinese migrants. Though a marginal faith for most Chinese in Asia, evangelical Protestantism strikes a spiritual cord in the North American context. Scholars have found a similar dynamic at work among immigrants and the second generation in Korean American churches (Chong, 1998; Chai, 1998).

Within ethnic communities, religious persons manifest a strong attachment to traditional definitions of family and moral conduct, and usually gravitate towards evangelical churches

and organizations that are fundamentalist in character. This cultural and social conservatism is particularly strong in Chinese and Korean settings (Chong, 1998; Lum, 2007). Kim's (2006) study of Christian evangelizing on university campuses is instructive. Although Asian Americans are about forty percent of the student body at the University of California at Berkeley, they constitute about eighty percent of the membership of fifty Christian groups on campus. Universities in other regions of the US show similar trends. Such groups are typically comprised of second or one and a half generation students, who often find themselves in a social space between their immigrant parents and the "native born" in the US.

The concept of boundaries highlights the role of faith and strict practice as a bulwark for believers living in the world, but not of it. Likewise, secularizing forces, often associated with a postmodern attitude of cultural relativism, and fundamentalist religious groups engage in intense political conflicts over the legal definition and uses of public spaces, and the means of cultural reproduction. The conflicts tend to strengthen traditional and fundamentalist approaches in religious institutions, or give rise to new movements, all at the expense of modernizing, liberal opinion (Stump ,2000). While traits may be identified by in-group members as necessary and constitutive of the collective identity, Barth (1998a, 1998b) asserts the primacy of the group's interactions with the wider society as the key to understanding group persistence

## 3. Bourdieu and social space practices: Habitus, doxa and capital

Bourdieu's (1984, 1990) work provides a way to conceptualize the interplay of structure and agency through social space positions and internalized value systems based on actors' amounts and relative weights of economic and cultural capital. For Bourdieu, social theory is mainly concerned with the specific ways in which differences are reproduced through the embodiment of actors' cultural distinctions. All actors occupy specific points in *social fields*, the arenas of competition for status and material resources that are based on family, educational institution, occupation, etc. The relative position of an actor in the fields in which s/he is engaged will depend upon her/his endowment of *capital*, the knowledge, attitudes and material resources that the actor has been given through specific parental upbringing, level and type of education, acquisition of dispositions and manner of consumption. Thus, what the postal worker eats and the way he eats it, what the banker wears and the way she wears it, are specific examples of the dispositions and bodily manifestations upon which actors are judged, and differentiated. These practices and attitudes conspire to shape the opportunities, constraints and life chances of individuals. However, for Bourdieu, a central point of analysis was the fact that actors internalize the dispositions that generate specific practices, and in the process engage in the reproduction and legitimation of existing social space differences (as I discuss below, these differences can be applied to arenas such as ethnicity and well as a more capital-oriented understanding of social spaces).

'Feel for the game', with the habitus being the feel and the social field being the game-is determinative of relative effectiveness of attitudes and practices acquired in a specific social space, largely unspoken because the actors know beforehand-and have internalized to the point of automatic response- what is acceptable behavior in a social space faction. Through habitus, social distinctions and socio-spatial differences are reproduced and maintained

(Bourdieu, 1990; 1998). Contra Marx, economic capital, though important, is not determinative. Rather, one's real fate is shaped by levels of, and practices associated with, symbolic capital, acquired through social origin and upbringing, and manifested at the level of the body through habitus. Like Weber, Bourdieu emphasized the fundamental importance of status-manifested through bodily performance and speech, for example-as the central motif of social distinction.

At the deepest level, Bourdieu postulates the formation of a doxic relationship between the objective conditions of a social space position, and the subjective attitudes and preferences associated with that position. Doxa-as naturalized beliefs and assumptions so deep and profound that they are taken as common sense- emerge to shape the internalized dispositions associated with an actor's social origin and consequent social space position. In previous work, I have applied Bourdieu's concepts to the study of ethnicity, specifically within contrasting religious traditions (Smith, 2008). Particularly intensive and cohesive identities are formed when actors' ethnicity, class and religious positions are united in specific institutions and networks. Likewise, social capital is augmented through ethnic institutions that provide institutional completeness for the group (Breton 1964). The doxic relationships in these social networks-centered on ethnically expressed spirituality among actors who shared similar social space positions-are particularly deep and persistent.

## 4. Current patterns of religious fundamentalism

Stump (2000) has developed a framework for understanding how fundamentalism is shaped by contexts and how fundamentalists use territoriality as a spatial strategy. Fundamentalist groups are not identified by specific theological criteria, but by their manner of discourse and attitudes toward those outside of their group. Fundamentalists support traditional religious faith, practice and authority against current social and cultural trends (Stump 2000). Furthermore, fundamentalist groups consist of self-identified true believers who draw a distinct and absolutist boundary to protect themselves from an enemy other. Because the group is the only legitimate moral community, and represents true faith and proper practice, it brooks no compromise on ideology and beliefs. This strident sense of opposition is a defining characteristic of fundamentalist groups.

Fundamentalism, with its total commitment to traditional spiritual authority, faces three main contemporary threats, which offer alternative models of society. The *modernist society* is receptive to innovation, science and individualism, preferring these elements to communal life and tradition. During the twentieth century, this model partially replaced tradition as the main source of authority in urbanized-industrialized countries. The *secular society* takes modernism to another level, and does not accept any role for religion in the public institutions and spaces. Secularism excludes faith as a legitimate source of authority. If religion has a diminished role in modernist society, it has no legitimate role in a secular one. *Cultural pluralism* does allow for religious faith and practice, but eliminates any preference for a single tradition by denying the certitude and truth claims of any particular faith. These three models refuse to base legitimate authority on faith, and are anathema to fundamentalists.

The fundamentalist response to these threats can be peaceful or violent, largely apolitical or radically political. Three key tactical patterns are in evidence. First, fundamentalists take an

oppositionalist stance toward existing political arrangements. This entails clearly defining the "Other" in political life at all scales. For example, Christian groups in the US see as implacable enemies groups advocating abortion rights and gay marriage, because such groups are seen as a threat to the fundamentalist definition of the family and its role. Consequently, much preaching and political mobilization emphasized the need to vigorously fight organizations advocating un-Christian lifestyles and policy positions. A second tactical pattern involves separatism, and the desire to remain distinct from unclean and sinful elements. This strategy ties in to the need to draw boundaries that are aggressively defended against the enemy Other. Thirdly, fundamentalist groups engage in activism to gain or recapture control over the uses and meanings of space. This is necessary to achieve the purist vision of an ideal society, in which the values of the group shape public landscapes and private behaviors. Without such control, the enemies of the faith will be able to pollute the minds of vulnerable persons in society, and subvert efforts to provide spiritual safety for the community of believers, which ideally includes everyone. Indeed, specific fundamentalist groups from universalizing faiths seek converts and include aggressive proselytizing as part of their program.

## 5. Field methodology and informant group profile

### 5.1 Methods

In ethnic identity studies, religious institutions provide rich opportunities for qualitative research. Informants are often willing to share their views on the overlap of ethnic identities with their faith tradition. Ethnic religious institutions are time structured and spatially well-organized nodes of cultural practices and sites for the production of meaning and identity reinforcement. At the research site, I explored second generation ethnicity and its persistence, working with Chinese American informants in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. The case study engaged with a seventy-five person group that forms a tightly bound evangelical social network.

I conducted the research during three summer/early autumn seasons in 2006-2008 and 2010. In July 2006, I began to attend English language services at the site, to engage in participant observations. Through note taking and informal discussions, I gained insights into specific aspects of worship and belief among the congregants. I chose this church based on the size of the congregation, which is the largest specifically Chinese American church in the Baltimore area, and its welcoming atmosphere toward outsiders. The service typically includes about fifty congregants on any particular Sunday morning. Some actors are proficient in Mandarin Chinese or Cantonese, but feel more comfortable in an English language service. I centered the research process on the identities and social spaces of this study group, but also observed interaction between the second generation congregants and the much larger Chinese-speaking congregation, which held weekly services at 11am. The different services, followed by a combined service lunch every Sunday, highlighted profound differences between the two congregations.

After a series of observations, I began to invite individuals to answer specific questions presented in an ordered format during semi-structured interviews. The questions revealed patterns of attitudes and beliefs toward ethnic identity and faith. After the initial questions, the informants often elaborated on specific aspects of their experiences as Chinese

Americans practicing evangelical Christianity, and attitudes toward issues such as politics, dating and dispositions and tastes related to food and personal style. Several informants expressed a preference to convey answers in an emailed questionnaire format, and I agreed to this as an option. I interviewed a total of twenty informants, out of an estimated seventy-five persons in the English congregation.

I pursued contacts through the classic snowball sampling method. I was made aware of new informants by word of mouth and email. Likewise, a flyer inviting participation was placed on church bulletin boards, and copies were left on a table with other church literature. Due to the qualitative nature of the project, I had no desire, need or intention of seeking a representative sample. The interview schedule was designed to elicit information exploring informant expression of ethnic and religious identities. I was also able to engage with a larger number of congregants in informal conversations before or after services, during church picnics and in other settings such as Bible studies. These relaxed encounters tended to yield fruitful and insightful observations and perceptions in a comfortable, unstructured framework. The questions explored reasons for worship at an ethnic church, followed by a series of Likert questions on how Faith Chinese Church differs from a non-Chinese worship environment. The informants were asked to offer opinions on the degree of congregational segregation by language, and tensions between Chinese and Christian identities. Finally, the last four questions explored political orientation, theological conservatism and a request to identify key values that the informant perceived as both Chinese and Christian.

Qualitative methods enable deep explorations of the impact of structures on individuals and engage with persons as agents in social spaces (Winchester, 2000). Nevertheless, there are limitations inherent in micro-scale qualitative projects. Ethnic outsiders engaged in these research settings perceive discourses through specific subjectivities, and my perceptions framed how I interpreted answers to questions. In addition, the questions asked-and those not asked- the researchers theoretical lenses and biases (Harraway, 1988; Rose, 1997) However, despite my status as an ethnic outsider, I occupied an insider position by background, as I was raised with a similar religious worldview as the informants, though I do not presently share their belief system. Nevertheless, this fact provided some measure of common ground during the research process. Overall, the interviews provided depth of detail on the informants' central beliefs, values and social practices. This would have been virtually impossible through a pure survey or questionnaire format.

## 5.2 Faith Chinese Church

Within the social space of Faith Chinese Church, crucial differences between English and Chinese language congregants are based on generational structure and levels of cultural capital. The English-speaking group is generally younger, with much higher levels of cultural capital associated with more advanced acculturation. This relates to linguistic skills and recognition of behaviors and communicative patterns beneficial in the larger socio-cultural milieu (Portes and Rumbaut 2006). Studies of immigrant churches (Cao 2005) also emphasize the role of the institutions as resources for gaining skills necessary in the larger society. Second generation Chinese Americans are already competent in language and communication, thus church membership and participation tends to be perceived differently, due to the different challenges faced by these actors.

The English-speaking group shares similar class and lifestyle dispositions, as indicated by information provided during interviews on occupation and attitudes. Informant occupations include software engineer, loan officer, financial analyst, systems administrator, resource manager for a major financial firm, programmer, clinical data manager, occupational therapist, operations manager, and legislative aid (in Maryland state legislature for Republican delegate). Interviews reveal that most congregants have acquired or are in the process of acquiring higher education. Major fields include both the sciences and humanities, thus defying a common stereotypical assumption of preference for natural sciences and engineering often associated with younger Asian Americans. These facts situate the informants into the creative class identified by Florida (2005) as a key element in the urban regional economies of the early twenty-first century. This is manifested by the numbers who are secondary migrants from other regions of the United States who have moved to the Baltimore-Washington region due to superior opportunities in health sciences, financial services, education and public administration. The group also typifies Sassen's (2006) analysis of skilled labor in world cities.

Moreover, according to several informants, Faith Chinese Church operates as a network space for potential dating and marriage. Congregants include those who joined after marrying church members, and then accepted the group's Protestant fundamentalist cosmology. During fieldwork, even with this rather small group of about seventy-five adults, one marriage did take place. Thus, the social space provides opportunities for the combination of cultural and social capital and its inter-generational transmission vital to the reproduction of ethnic identities. Figure 2 provides a schema to conceptualize the social space of the second generation congregants.

## 6. Discussion: Ethnic identities, habitus and fundamentalist doxa in faith Chinese Church

### 6.1 The social space: Informant habitus dispositions and practices

Most of the informants are American-born Chinese or 'One and a Half' generation Chinese who immigrated with their families and were raised in the United States. The informants have different regional origins (Hong Kong, Taiwan, various regions in China, and overseas Chinese communities in Southeast Asia), and were raised speaking different Chinese languages (Mandarin, Cantonese) or in English. Given the predominance of non-mainland China origin among the second generation, the informant attitudes toward China tend to differ sharply from congregants in the Chinese language service, which consists mostly of mainland Chinese. The Chinese regional origins are Taiwan, Mainland China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia. One individual was born in Taiwan, but spent part of her childhood in South Africa. For the interviews, the gender composition was evenly divided at ten informants each.

The second-generation congregation informants share a middle class, conservative habitus found in those with similar class backgrounds in the U.S., irrespective of ethnicity. Informants self-identify as somewhat or very conservative in attitudes toward family life and the role of religious practices in public spaces. Some members are active in groups such as the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family, two of the most important evangelical political organizations in the United States. While differences of region of origin (i.e. China,

Hong Kong, Taiwan or Southeast Asia) are vital for the first generation, the second generation congregation prioritizes Christian identity over any regional ancestral attachments. This finding is in accord with Jeung's (2005) study of the timeframe of family immigration in shaping attitudes to issues such as assimilation, intermarriage, politics and more banal matters such as food preferences.

Barth (1998a, 1998b) identifies boundary-maintaining behaviors as the most relevant social practices in the daily production of ethnic identities. For the informants, standards of group performance are simultaneously ethnic and religious. Specifically, certain attitudes toward time and food are ethnic. For example, an informant discussed the idea of having events start on "Chinese time", as opposed to a rigid commitment to cold punctuality.

"There are a lot of unique things that are commonly associated with the Chinese-American identity. We have "aunties" and "uncles." When we have potluck dinners, we have foods that our parents used to cook at home. Sometimes we also joke about starting this on "Chinese-time." This means, for example, that a particular activity that wasn't scheduled to start until 6:30PM actually ended up starting at 7:30PM. To everyone in a Chinese church, this might even be considered normal."

Informant 1-Jonathan, 30 years old. Software engineer

Initially asked why they worship at an ethnic church, informants emphasize the comfort level of common cultural background and a conviction that God wants them to serve there. On the need for co-ethnic companionship in a new alien social environment, this response was typical:

"I was born and raised in NYC. I grew up in a Chinese home. My friends were mainly Chinese. In college, I attended a Chinese fellowship. After graduation, I moved to Maryland for my job. I guess I missed being with Chinese people…I felt "at home" being in a Chinese church, which is reminiscent of my upbringing in NYC."

Informant 10-Jim, 27 years old, Programmer

On the combination of spiritual and material benefits at Faith Chinese Church:

"I want to reaffirm my faith in God and find direction in today's world of confusing messages…The Chinese Church helps me set my priorities straight. It also provides me a social group to socialize with and "network" with."

Informant 5-Tom, 31 years old, Operations Manager

On the issue of whether value and behavioral conflicts exist between Chinese practices and Christianity, the informants confirmed some conflicts and prioritized their faith:

"Absolutely. I was raised with those cultural expectations. Priorities like making money, putting family and education first (instead of faith), and doing things to please others (instead of God) were conditioned into me (prior to rediscovering God). I do see some similarities though: things like Honoring your mother and father and doing good things to others (Confucian philosophy) do have similar themes with Biblical morals/themes. All I can do is (during times of conflict between expectations) is try reconciling them and do what is best…"

Informant 5-Tom, 31 years old, Operations Manager

Others assert that Chinese identity strengthens their Christian identity. A 55 year old Taiwan-born informant, Kim took exception to the idea of conflict between Christianity and Chinese cultural values, stating that,

"My culture and family actually encouraged my faith."

Importantly, the persistence of ethnic identity in the US setting has not precluded the emergence of new, broader-scale identities. For example, ethnic studies literature has explored panethnic identity formation (e.g. Asian American, Latino) among second and successive generation ethnics (Espiritu 1994). Discourses from this congregation somewhat affirm this trend, as two strongly agree and four somewhat agree with the statement, "I primarily think of myself as an Asian American, and a Chinese American second."

"Actually, I do identify myself more as an Asian American first, since I communicate more in English rather than Chinese today. I also do get along well with other Asian Nationalities, so I think of myself as more Asian, than Chinese."

Informant 8-Matthew, 36 years old, Systems Administrator (born in Malaysia)

"Recently, I am more aware that I am Asian as well as I am Chinese."

Informant 3-Kim, 55 years old, Loan Officer (born in Taiwan)

"I'm not a big fan of labels but both categories do fit me and I have no qualms being affiliated with both of them. To me, "Asian American" is a more ethnically diverse term than Chinese American. To me, Chinese American implies a more cultural affiliation with being Chinese. Being born and raised in the US, I lost a lot of that Chinese cultural heritage and language (although I'm now in the process of rediscovering it). To me "Asian American" is a more generic and broader term so I have no issues with that."

Informant 5-Tom, 31 years old, Operations Manager (US born)

In many conversations I have had with informants, their attitudes reflect an openness toward a broader Asian American identity, while holding to specific Chinese American social and cultural practices.

## 6.2 Attitudes toward family life and society

Chinese attitudes toward family life are projected into the social arena of the congregation. Informants tie traditional Chinese attitudes toward family life to their own view of the church as an extended family with similar expectations of filial respect and harmony toward authority figures.

Group members follow patriarchal attitudes and practices, especially towards fundamentalist scriptural readings toward female authority in mixed settings. Expected moral standards are starkly Protestant, particularly in the realm of marriage and sexuality. Likewise, selective cultural practices identified as 'Chinese' constitute part of the formal and informal rule-sets framing proper in-group behaviors. However, it is important to note that behaviors deemed by second generation actors as 'Chinese' might differ from attitudes and behaviors of first generation Chinese immigrants.

In the interviews with informants, questions explored attitudes toward the authority of the Bible, politics and political participation. Of the twenty informants, sixteen affirmed that they strongly agreed with the statement "I believe that the entire Bible is the inerrant Word of God." Four somewhat agree, and none disagreed. Similarly, when asked to self-identify politically, in accord with a four choice Likert-type structure ranging from very conservative to very liberal, four informants chose very conservative, six somewhat conservative, and one somewhat liberal. Nine informants chose the option, "rather neutral on political questions." Likewise, in reaction to the statement, "It is necessary for Christians to engage in the political process, and influence public policy in an ethical, moral direction," eight strongly agreed and ten somewhat agreed. None of the informants disagreed.

Castells (1997) has extensively researched the rise of fundamentalisms, conceptualizing religious social movements as part of a phenomenon of 'resistance identities' as a response to the alienating aspects of globalization processes. Within the US context, strong support for social conservatism and evangelical politics is found in newer middle class suburban communities, particularly among the self-employed and business professionals. Regionally, the trend is strongest in the southern and southwestern regions of the 'Sunbelt'. But deeply conservative spiritual communities, including evangelical ethnic churches, are also found in regions generally not associated with conservative social attitudes.

In analyzing the interviews, informants perceive a decline in the spiritual health of US society, and consequently see movement toward a secular society, which they see as a rejection of God, and thus inherently evil. These sentiments apply to the current cultural pluralist framework, which informants see as dominant in society. From their perspective, pluralism erroneously views all faiths as valid and refuses to allow legal preference for the 'Judeo-Christian' value system that evangelicals believe emanates from divine authority. One informant, a youth pastor in the church, told me in an interview that he believed a period of intense persecution was coming and this trial would strengthen the faith of believers. He perceived persecution as a purifying element that will prepare believers for Christ's return to earth.

The informants' absolute distinction between saved and unsaved leads to a binary understanding of human society, and a need to avoid activities, institutions and groups that could compromise one's salvation and commitment to faith. The informants also apply a profoundly spatial evangelical worldview. The struggle between good and evil is played out at multiple scales. Within each individual, the gospel of Christ competes with the temptations of sin. At the local regional scale, the church has a mission goal of increasing the number of Christians among the Chinese community in Greater Baltimore. In national politics, church bulletins urge congregants to pray for the defeat of legislative measures supporting abortion access or gay marriage.

Globally, mission work is focused on the 10/40 window. A key concept in evangelical geopolitics (Stump 2000; 2008), the window deploys the cartographic grid system to create a box that represents the 'unchurched' (and thus unsaved) populations living between 10 and 40 degrees north latitude in the Eastern Hemisphere. This spatial container of the unsaved includes China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and (symbolically if not mathematically by the grid) many in the overseas Chinese communities of Southeast Asia). Among the English language

congregation, mission work is highly esteemed, particularly if the mission work is overseas. The evangelical nature of the institution provides considerable status rewards to those who engage in mission work, whether on college campuses in the US or abroad in the unsaved spaces of the 10/40 window. For example, during a sermon in September 2006, a visiting (white Euro-American) pastor described the difficulties of evangelizing to Muslims in Indonesia. Within that context, he then affirmed the notion that the 26 December 2004 earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia would help evangelism in the staunchly Muslim society of Sumatra, because the shock of the catastrophe was God's way of creating softer hearts and receptive minds to the gospel of Christ in the formerly obstinate Sumatran Muslims.

Although Chinese Americans in Faith Chinese Church do engage in ethnic persistence, the fundamentalism and political conservatism of Chinese American evangelicals is also beneficial to a certain ideological assimilation: identities are reaffirmed through an ethno-spiritual association that encourages assimilation into the larger evangelical sector of US society. Given the continued importance of religion in US life and politics, the practice of evangelical Christianity, in ethnic or non-ethnically specific institutions, can bear fruit with improved access to educational and employment networks, and the cultural and economic advantages that can accrue from such associations.

Importantly, Chinese American evangelicals have also maintained an identity boundary between themselves and co-ethnics who are not Christian. Of the roughly 30,000 Chinese in the Greater Baltimore Region, less than ten percent are Christian (church letter, 2007). Most immigrants from the mainland grow up in a society that actively discourages religious faith and practice, and completely forbade its open expression until the commencement of Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s. Non-Christian Chinese have often tied the religion and its missionaries to imperialism and the depradations committed by Western armies during the late Qing period, such as the Boxer Crisis in 1900. Not surprisingly, the sharply different attitudes toward this faith reinforce a significant identity boundary between Christian and non-Christian mainland immigrants. This boundary then persists to successive generations.

The predominant attitudes and practices in the study group are doxic (Bourdieu, 1984; 1990), in the sense that the motivations and justifications for social action are often unstated and implicitly understood; ethnicity can be expressed spiritually and vice versa, in a setting where this form of mutual constitution is normal and expected. The actors place their ethnic lives into ultimate contexts, and this transference makes ethnospirituality so powerful in both directions. Geertz (1973) stated that religion does not just describe the social order, but shapes it. This shaping role for evangelical Christianity cuts across varied spheres of social life in the USA, from ethnicity to electoral politics.

Finally, evangelical cosmic beliefs lead to practices anathema to outsiders. Thus, one informant was surprised when, upon visiting her home, some did not wish to enter a room to pray with a pastor who had a reputation for faith healing. This particular gathering combined religious preaching with a presentation on the virtues of joining a network marketing business, a form of economic activity often found in church settings, and presented at home gatherings. This mix of religious fervor with business networking is not unknown in tightly knit religious communities (Smith, 2008).

## 7. Conclusion

In Faith Chinese Church ethnic boundaries and religious fundamentalism are fused to create and reinforce identities. This does not preclude broader associations, such as the Asian American label noted above, but identity discourses tend to focus on Chinese practices. Likewise, the actors cite benefits to worship in an ethnic church, that range from status reinforcement and emotional support to specific business interactions. Group members secure status in settings where there is no danger of ethnic ridicule or rejection, and in which comfort levels of common experiences and perceptions enable easier social transactions.

As an ethno-spiritual community, Faith Chinese Church is a site of shared habitus dispositions and doxic emotional patterns, in which actors reproduce cultural practices as a crucial unifier. In analyzing these sites, Bourdieu's social theory is useful because it emphasizes the habitus of social spaces as generative of unifying practices. In the institution, Barth's concept of boundaries apply, leading to performance evaluation based upon ethnically appropriate attitudes, the beliefs and practices of strict evangelical Christianity.

Ethno-spiritual identities in Faith Chinese Church are '*resistance identities*' to the perceived movement of the broader society toward secularism, especially in the realms of marriage, family life and popular culture. Fundamentalist discourses within the group are acted upon through political opposition to alternative forms of marriage, religious multiculturalism, and immorality broadly defined. Mission work, inside the USA or in Chinese communities in Asia, provides a central motif of in-group status enhancement.

Min (2010) maintains that second-generation Korean evangelicals prioritize their Christian identity and thus tend to lose their ethnic identity. He focuses mainly on such traits such as Confucian ancestor worship, folkways and the like. This patterns seems to hold for informants at this site. However, as Barth states, the label matters more than the content that it encloses. Thus, the informants maintain an ethnic identity, but it is recreated and reconstituted to accord with their Christian beliefs.

Existential anxieties have intensified with the dislocating impacts of globalization processes. As a response to these pressures, the congregants of Faith Chinese Church hold fast to ethnic and faith solidarity. More specifically, the second generation congregants have created a new ethnic identity, a fusion of evangelical Christianity with those Chinese cultural attitudes that they deploy as identity performance markers in a non-Chinese society. Thus, meanings and experiences are framed through ethno-spirituality, an intensifying trend in the face of the alienating effects of globalization processes in immigrant-settler societies.

## 8. References

Airress, C. (2002). Creating Vietnamese Landscapes and Place in New Orleans, In: *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space, and Place*, Kate A. Berry & Martha L. Henderson, pp. 228-254, University of Nevada Press, Reno NV

Barth, F. (1998a). Introduction, In: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, F. Barth, pp. 9-38. Waveland Press, Prospect Heights Illinois

Barth, F. (1998b). Pathan Identity and Its Maintenance, In: *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Fredrik Barth, pp. 117-134. Waveland Press, Prospect Heights Illinois

Berry, K. & Henderson, M. (2002). Introduction. *Geographical Identities of Ethnic America: Race, Space and Place*. Kate Berry and Martha Henderson, pp. 1-14. University of Nevada Press, Reno NV

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA

Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA

Cao, N. L. (2005). The Church as a Surrogate Family for Working Class Immigrant Chinese Youth: An Ethnography of Segmented Assimilation. *Sociology of Religion,* Vol. 66, No. 2, pp. 183-200.

Castells, M. (1997). *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Volume II*. Blackwell, Oxford

Chai, K. (1998). Competing for the Second Generation: English-language Ministry at a Korean Protestant Church, In: *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. R.S. Warner and J.G. Wittner, pp. 295-332 Temple University Press, Philadelphia PA

Chong, K. H. (1998). What It Means to Be Christian: the Role of Religion in the Construction of Ethnic Identity and Boundary Among Second-Generation Korean Americans. *Sociology of Religion,* Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 259-286.

Espiritu, Y. (1994). *Asian American Pan-Ethnicity: Bridging Institutions and Identities*. Temple University Press, Philadelphia PA

Florida, R. (2005). *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It's Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*. Basic Books, New York.

Geertz, Clifford. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York

Goffman, Erving. (1959). The *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Doubleday, New York

Harraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies,* Vol. 14, No. 3, pp. 575-599.

Jeung, Russell. (2005). *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches*. NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Kaplan, David H. (1997). The creation of an ethnic economy: Indochinese business expansion in Saint Paul. *Economic Geography,* Vol. 73, No. 2, pp. 214-233.

Kim, Rebecca. (2006). *God's New Whiz Kids?: Korean American Evangelicals on Campus*. NYU Press, New York

Ley, D. (2008).The Immigrant Church as an Urban Service Hub. *Urban Studies,* Vol. 45, No. 10, pp. 2057-2074.

Li, W. (1998). The Anatomy of a New Ethnic Settlement: The Chinese Ethnoburb in Los Angeles. *Urban Studies*, Vol. 35, No.3, pp. 479-501.

Lum, L. (2007). The Asianization of Campus Fellowships. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, October 4. Vol. 24, Issue 17.

Min, P. G. (2002). Introduction in: *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, P. G. Min and J. H. Kim, pp. 1–14. AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek CA

Min, P. G. (2010). *Preserving Ethnicity Through Religion in America: Korean Protestants and Indian Hindus Across Generations*. New York University Press, New York NY

Portes, A. & Rumbaut, R. (2006). *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Third Ed), University of California Press, Berkeley CA

Rose, G. (1997). Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivity and Other Tactics. *Progress in Human Geography,* Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 305-320.

Sassen, S. (2006). *Cities in a World Economy*. Third Edition. Pine Forge Press, London.

Seagrave, S. (1986). *The Soong Dynasty*. Harper Perennial, New York.

Skop, E. & Altman, C. (2006). The Invisible Immigrants: Asian Indian Settlement Patterns and Racial/Ethnic Identities. In: *Race, Ethnicity, and Place in a Changing America*, John W. Frazier and Eugene Tettey-Fio, pp. 309-316, Academic Publishing, Binghamton NY

Smith, J. M. (2008). Identities and Urban Social Spaces in Little Tokyo, Los Angeles: Japanese Americans in Two Ethno-Spiritual Communities. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography,* Vol. 90, No. 4, pp. 389-408.

Stump, R. W. (2008). *Geography of Religion: Faith, Place and Space*. Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham MD

Stump, R. W. (2000). *Boundaries of Faith: Geographical Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalism*. Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham MD

Weightman, B. A. (1993). Changing Religious Landscapes in Los Angeles. *Journal of Cultural Geography,* Vol. 14, No.1, pp. 1-20.

Winchester, H. (2000). Qualitative Research and Its Place in Human Geography. In: *Qualitative Research Methods in Human Geography*, Iain Hay, pp. 1-22, Oxford University Press, Melbourne

Wood, Joseph. 1997. Vietnamese Place Making in Northern Virginia. *The Geographical Review* 87 (1): 58-72.

Yang, F. 2002. Religious Diversity Among the Chinese in America. In *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities*, ed. Pyong Gap Min and J.H. Kim. 71-98. Walnut Creek CA: Altamira.
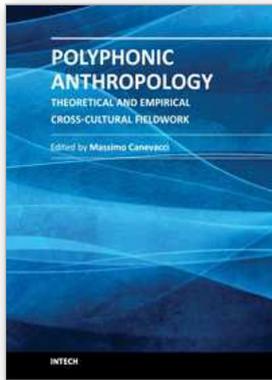
**Polyphonic Anthropology - Theoretical and Empirical Cross-Cultural Fieldwork**

Edited by Prof. Massimo Canevacci

This book connects anthropology and polyphony: a composition that multiplies the researcher's glance, the style of representation, the narrative presence of subjectivities. Polyphonic anthropology is presenting a complex of bio-physical and psycho-cultural case studies. Digital culture and communication has been transforming traditional way of life, styles of writing, forms of knowledge, the way of working and connecting. Ubiquities, identities, syncretisms are key-words if a researcher wish to interpret and transform a cultural contexts. It is urgent favoring trans-disciplinarity for students, scholars, researchers, professors; any reader of this polyphonic book has to cross philosophy, anatomy, psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, architecture, archeology, biology. I believe in an anthropological mutation inside any discipline. And I hope this book may face such a challenge.

**How to reference**

In order to correctly reference this scholarly work, feel free to copy and paste the following:

# INTECH
open science | open minds