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Actors, Spaces, and Norms in Chinese Transnational Religious Networks: A Case Study of Wenzhou Migrants in France¹

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Introduction

The Chinese diaspora has a long tradition dating back to the nineteenth century and earlier. After China lifted migration restrictions and reopened its gates at the end of the 1970s, the increased flow of Chinese migrants has considerably changed the social landscapes of both their host countries and China itself, while attracting increasing scholarly attention, both Chinese and Western. Scholars analyze this phenomenon from social, historical, educational and political angles and are constructing a panorama of Chinese migrants in the world (Kuhn 2008; Hsu 2000; Kang Xiaoli 2015; Lau-Clayton 2014; Benton 2007). Most of previous studies focused on Chinese communities in America (Chen Hsiang-Shui 1991; Young 2014; McLain 1996; Zhou Min 2009) and those in Southeast Asia (Freedman 1957; Li Yih-yuan 1970; Zeng Ling and Zhuang Yingzhang 2000; Alip 1974) where have the largest overseas Chinese communities and their history is among the longest in the oversea Chinese societies. Comparatively speaking, the presence of Chinese migrants in Europe is a recent phenomenon². Only a few exploratory researches can be found on this issue (Breton 2011; Pang 2008; Baldassar et al. 2015; Sanfilippo and Weiner 2015).

One key aspect of the Chinese diaspora is their religious practices. The religious groups that they organized play a major role in reorganization of the oversea Chinese community and reassertion of their identity vis-à-vis the host country. In recent years, the relationship between globalization and transnational religious networks has drawn growing attention. Thomas Jansen, Thoralf Klein and Christian Meyer's edited volume analyzes the Chinese-Western encounter and the global dimension in Chinese history from social-political perspectives (Jansen et al., 2014). That book, however, does not deal with overseas Chinese migrants' religion. For Chinese migrants in Southeast Asia, previous research has highlighted the role of ancestor worship in the reconstruction of migrant identity and the creation of relationships with their native places (Pan Hongli 2006; Zeng Ling 2006). As for Chinese migrants in Western countries, most scholarship has centered on Christian communities. Some studies suggest Christianity produces visible and invisible spaces for networks of Chinese Christian migrants in a global-local context (Huang Yuqin and Hsiao I-hsin 2015); others associate network-building with contemporary capitalism and view Chinese transnationalism as a form of modernity (Ong and Nonini 1997). Scholars examine the successful global expansion of Taiwanese

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² Gregor Benton has listed six trends of Chinese migration in Europe from early 19th century to the 1950s (Breton 2011:62-64). However, their number was too small to be noticed by the host societies and they were not really visible as a community in Europe until 1970s.

Buddhist organizations such as Foguangshan 佛光山 and Tzu Chi Foundation (*Ciji gongde hui* 慈濟). Their studies converge on two points: first, the globalization of Chinese religious groups, to a great extent, was driven by the growth of Chinese migrants. Second, those Buddhist organizations resort to a trust system to construct their networks (Chandler 2002; Huang 2013).

Wenzhou natives represent an integral component of the migration patterns described above, and have made their presence felt worldwide since the 1980s. Their religious practices largely contribute to the construction of their transnational network. This paper aims to analyze the mechanisms of Wenzhou migrants' religious networks through three vectors: Where (places of worship on which religious networks anchor), Who (actors who build and use religious networks), and What (religious knowledge and norms which are imported into communities through religious networks). The author suggests Chinese temples and churches represent a public place for Chinese migrants where they continue to practice their usual religion, even if sometimes most like in a substitutional way, and relive their collective memory. Overseas Chinese communities are thereby related to mainland China and other Chinese cultural countries or regions and are constructing a transnational network. In this network, some groups aim at exporting their value system to spread their influence worldwide and some other groups seek to import a value system for a better internal organization and establishing a hierarchy. The "push and pull" effect makes possible the circulation of religious knowledge and norms which help to structure religious organizations founded by Chinese migrants and create an institutionalized authority for the new elites emerging from new communities.

Historical Context

Wenzhou has a long history of migration. Situated at the border between Zhejiang Province and Fujian Province, migrants from north China, north Zhejiang and south Fujian came settle down in Wenzhou and brought cultural diversity which has created different local identities.

People come in and people come out. Short of agricultural land, Wenzhou has been home to countless emigrants, especially during the modern era. Whether driven by the poverty that ravaged Wenzhou during the 1950s and 1960s, or attracted by the profit of the market economy from the 1990s, Wenzhou natives travel extensively to try their luck. Wherever they go, they perpetuate Wenzhou traditions by building their own communities governed by autonomous regulations. Zhejiang Village in the immediate suburbs of Beijing is a prime example (Xiang Biao 2005).

The displacement of Wenzhou natives is hardly limited to the interior of China; they cross borders all over the world. France, alongside Italy (Baldassar et al., 2015), Spain, the Netherlands and the United States, is one of their favorite destinations.

The first generation of Wenzhou migrants arrived in France at the beginning of the 20th century,³ being mainly itinerant merchants from Qingtian.⁴ They are said to have gotten rich by selling objects made of Qingtian stone from throughout the Wenzhou region, especially villages bordering on Qingtian such as Yuhu. Those *Eldorado* rumors and some Qingtian migrants' "coming back home in glory" (*yijin huanxiang* 衣錦還鄉) conspicuous consumption have stimulated their countrymen to follow in their footsteps and go abroad as China opened its doors toward the end of the 1970s (Li Minghuan

³ For more on the history of Chinese immigrants in France, see Yu-Sion Live 1991; Ma Li 2012. For studies on Wenzhou immigrants in France, see Poisson 2004; Guerassimoff 2003.

⁴ Before 1963, when it became a county of Lishui, Qingtian had been for its entire history part of Wenzhou. Many of Qingtian people understand and speak Wenzhou dialect.

1999:85-86). Several hometowns of overseas Chinese such as Yuhu Village in Wencheng County, Li'ao Village in Rui'an County and Chashan Village in Ou Hai District, were created in this way and inhabitants of these villages moved to France in a domino effect. Migrants from Qidu, a village close to Wenzhou harbor, also settled in France. The first generation of Qidu migrants worked as sailors on foreign boats, and this was how they spread around America and Europe.

Due to their frequently being illegal migrants, Wenzhou natives have tended to rely on their families, clans or community networks to get to France *en masse*, especially before Europe was hit by the financial crisis in 2008. Today, France has between 234,000 and 252,000 Wenzhou migrants, probably the biggest Chinese community in France, although this estimate, made on the basis of the INSEE (the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies) data, remains hypothetical (Lucchini 2012:267). The first Wenzhou migrants settled mainly in the 3rd arrondissement⁵ in Paris; as time has passed, they are increasingly residing in the Belleville quarter stretching over the 10th, 11th, 19th and 20th arrondissements and in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis, in particular in the commune of Aubervilliers where the first textile import-export platform is developed with China and other parts of Europe (Ji Zhe 2010).

Wenzhou migrants in France mainly work in catering, import-export commerce, and garment-making. Benefiting from a mutual aid system and hard work, most migrants manage to earn a living and even build wealth. Their good performance in the economic realm directly shapes their religious activities. Believing in the principle of *do ut des*, or “a favor for a favor”, Wenzhou religious practitioners never hesitate when it comes to making donations to their groups and enabling them to enhance their economic dynamics. Thus we can observe that during the 1990s the number of Chinese religious groups grew rapidly thanks to believers' donations, a period corresponding to the rising tide of Wenzhou migrants. The economic dynamics of these groups also allows them to propose different activities to their members and keep their independence vis-à-vis other groups. At the same time, control over the money can become a controversial issue sparking increasing internal conflicts results followed by schisms in religious groups (Pan Junliang 2017: 287).

Apart from Wenzhou people in France, there are also Asian migrants from Indochina, generally referred to as “boat people”. Many are Chinese descendants and speak Cantonese or/and Chaozhou dialect. They arrived in France around the 1970s, just before the Wenzhou migration tide, to flee from communist persecution. Many live in the 13th arrondissement, which is called by some Parisians “China Town”. From the 1990s, a lot of Dongbei people⁶ were driven out by mass unemployment in the region and journeyed to France to try their luck (Li Peilin and Zhang Yi 2004; Lévy 2015). In recent years, the origins of Chinese migrants coming to France have become increasingly varied, encompassing every corner of China. Without developed community networks like migrants from Wenzhou or Indochina, these new arrivals face considerable difficulties in finding a place in the labor markets for Chinese migrants.

Wenzhou Religious Networks

As Xiang Biao described in his book on Zhejiang Village in Beijing, the functioning of the Wenzhou community is based on interpersonal relationships (*guanxi* 關係) and

⁵ Arrondissements is French administrative division that roughly corresponds to a with district.

⁶ The Dongbei region refers to China's northeast which consists of the three provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang. Its industrial sector was once powerful, but suffered huge losses in the liberalization and privatization of China's economy after 1990s.

economic dynamics that have developed on the basis of mutual trust (Xiang Biao 2005:2-12,448-489). Indeed, the Wenzhou community in France was created thanks to such interpersonal relationships. As soon as migrants arrived, they were welcomed by relatives who had already settled. It is also thanks to them that these newcomers could find work in the community without difficulty. In family or clan networks, trust is built on bloods bond, but it is not the same when it comes to community or transcommunity networks, although it is often through a close relative or compatriot that a person joins such networks, which then develop due to frequentation, exchange and conviviality. Religious groups are one such platform on which members can build their interpersonal relationships. However, the case of Chinese religious groups in France barely fall into the category of NGOs that Robert Weller and other scholars have explored (Weller 2005). Their activities are limited to their community and they have little interaction with local society. Thus they do not represent a substitution or a composition to a civil society. Those groups try to adapt themselves to the political frame, both French and Chinese, but show little, at least not in an obvious way, interest in terms of political claims. They should rather be examined inside the migrants' community and be seen as a form of self-regulation based on a structuring value, such as territory or lineage.

Wenzhou religious groups in France can be roughly divided into two categories: Christian groups and non-Christian groups. In the first category, the earliest Chinese Christian church in France, Eglise évangélique des Chinois à Paris (*Jidujiao Bali huaqiao jiaohui* 基督教巴黎華僑教會), was created in 1972 and frequented by believers of different origins: Taiwanese, Hong Kongese, overseas Chinese from Indochina and Wenzhou natives. It also was the mother-church of many Chinese churches in France founded by former members who preferred to worship in their own communities. This was the case for the biggest Wenzhou Protestant church, Eglise protestante chinoise de Paris (*Jidujiao Bali Wenzhou jiaohui* 基督教巴黎溫州教會), which was founded in 1992 and is situated today in the Wenzhou people's most crowded quarter. From then on, the number of Wenzhou Protestant churches has multiplied and now there are nine. These churches are different from each another at certain levels. The Église protestante des Chinois de la Chine du Sud en France (*Jidujiao Bali jubuichu* 基督徒巴黎聚會處) belongs to Watchman Nee's "Little Flock" tradition (Lian Xi 2010:155-178) and has a particular structure, and organization, as well as its own network, with little cooperation with other Chinese churches in France. The leader of Eglise évangélique (*Jidujiao Bali fuyin jiaohui* 基督教巴黎福音教會) comes from a "Little Flock" church, which is why this church keeps some features of this tradition. Another particularity of Eglise évangélique is that almost all its members come from the same church of Qidu village, with common origin making it function like a transplanted church. The Eglise du Renouveau chrétien à Paris (*Jidujiao Bali fuxing jiaohui* 基督教巴黎復興教會) is a Pentecostal-like church and belongs to an international organization based in Hong Kong, the Revival Christian Church. Nevertheless, it remains independent at economic and operational levels. The Eglise protestante évangélique chinoise de France (*Faguo huaren Jidujiao jiuentang* 法國華人基督教救恩堂) was created by a charismatic pastor, Yu Dubing 余督兵, who is famous in Wenzhou. A graduate of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, he had taken over the presidency of the Yueqing Christian Council before moving to France, and his church has closer relationships with some big Protestant organizations in China. In spite of their particular features and even conflicts (Pan Junliang 2017: 292-293), most of them have set up a common network in order to work together by training young believers and evangelization.

The second category mainly encompasses Buddhist and religious groups professing to be related to Buddhism. The first such associations were created by Taiwanese or

Hong Kongese international organizations that were trying to expand their influence among overseas Chinese, such as Foguangshan (Jones 1999:189-198). However, this was not only due to the initiative of these organizations but also that of some overseas believers who needed Buddhist ritual specialists for their daily worship. In the beginning, such believers would contact Buddhist monks from their native regions, but such local temples lacked both international expansion plans and well-organized networks of monks, and could not meet overseas believers' needs. These believers then turned to more institutionalized organizations. On the other hand, Foguangshan's monks move around the world by invitation or conference tours they have organized, which enable them to meet overseas believers and set up plans for creating local temples. Other Taiwanese Buddhist organizations have used similar strategies to try to take root in overseas Chinese communities. For example, Zhongtai Temple (*Zhongtai shan* 中台山) has created a branch in Rome with the help of local Wenzhou believers in 2012. Recently, another well-known Chinese Buddhist organization, Longquan Temple (*Longquan si* 龍泉寺), whose leader, the monk Xuecheng 學誠, is the president of the Buddhist Association of China, has adopted a similar strategy and created its first overseas branch in Utrecht, Holland, in 2015. Drawn by the reputation and organizational activities of Foguangshan, many rich Wenzhou merchants have joined its French branch, and one of them has taken the presidency of its secular twin: the Buddha's Light International Association in France (*Foguanghui* 佛光會).

Redemptive societies and other new religious movements rarely benefit from such large-scale financial support from overseas Chinese, since there is a natural tendency to try and maintain the community from within. Their overseas expansion mainly relies on members' personal migration plans. After the members of these groups move to France, they first set up family altars at the homes of believers with sufficient space for staging regular rituals. As their numbers grow, they present to the central committee a petition for building a temple. Once the petition is approved, the information will be announced in a regular meeting and a fund-raising drive launched. In this way, two Yiguandao 一貫道 branches, namely *Miaofa fotang* 妙法佛堂 from Taiwan and *Lingguang fotang* 霖光佛堂 from Hong Kong, a branch from the *Zhenfo zong* 真佛宗 and a branch from the *Guanyin famen* 觀音法門 were founded. These groups usually present themselves as "Buddhist Halls" (*fotang* 佛堂) and are regarded as such by Wenzhou believers, who would go there to worship Buddha and Bodhisattvas when no Chinese Buddhist temples had been established. However, once believers realize the differences between these groups and Buddhist ones, and more Buddhist temples are built, many end up leaving redemptive societies and new religious movements, or just show up occasionally. Today these groups remain more prevalent among Cantonese or Chaozhounese speaking dominated groups.

Belonging to a religious group does not prevent a believer from joining one or several others. The more networks one joins, the more sources one can draw on, be they economic, social or political. Many Wenzhou believers are not limited to one group, a phenomenon particularly common among non-Christian believers who frequent different places of worship following the principle of accumulation as applied to divine protection and good karma. Thus we often see the same Wenzhou believers circulating among Wenzhou Buddhist temples, a pagoda presided over by Cambodian nuns, a Vietnamese Buddhist temple and other Buddhist-related groups. Through these peregrinations, Wenzhou believers multiply their social networks and increase their potential capacity to mobilize the resources.

Among Christians, the affiliation of a believer to one church is more visible. Even though splitting off is not a singular phenomenon, a believer who leaves his/her original

church to join another one will be considered inappropriate. Following the same logic, the accumulation of religious networks is also realized at the group level rather than at the individual level, for example when a church joins an international Protestant organization or establishes cooperation with another Church, with the decision of the leaders of a church having much more influence on the extension of networks. It would not be surprising to see a hierarchy created and leading authority established more often in an institutionalized group.

The networks created around religious groups provide essential daily life resources to Wenzhou believers, who share information about housing, jobs, current events in France and news from China. The latter information is particularly valuable for migrants, since they have left their native land and are deprived of parts of their interpersonal networks. Undoubtedly, Wenzhou believers have other networks such as family networks to benefit from common resources, and these networks and religious network overlap to some extent. The affiliation of a believer to a religious group is also a reaffirmation or a recreation of his/her identity as a Qidu, a Wenzhou, or a Chinese. However, religious networks allow them to go beyond their clans and communities to reach resources provided by non-Wenzhou Chinese migrants. Considering that Indochinese and Hong Kongese migrants were followed by Wenzhou people, especially in the economic sector, their experience is precious for later migrants. At the same time, the social networks on which religious groups are based do not necessarily coincide with ethnic networks (Nagata 2005), but can represent a complementary component. Such networks enable Wenzhou people to not only renew their bonds with China, but also establish connections with Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Western countries where a Chinese community is present through actions such as training programs, common worship meetings and pilgrimage.

On the other hand, certain religious groups clearly bear their community's marks and tend to be quasi-exclusive. Even some Protestant churches which are supposed to be proselyte show a big difference between their enthusiastic evangelization discourse and their relative lack of action, preferring instead to operate in a relatively closed fashion. The choice of preaching language is a key strategy to define the difference between "us" and "them" and keep the group's solidarity. Another name of Eglise protestante chinoise de Paris, the church of Wenzhou dialect (*Wenzhonyu jiaohui* 溫州語教會), shows that church's position. Identity becomes a more pressing issue when the second and third generations take over the organization of the church and French identity also needs to be taken into consideration. All in all, people, capital, and information circulate in religious networks that help Wenzhou migrants not only rebuild their identity and adapt to new circumstances, but also to maintain continuous vitality of their communities.

Where: Places of Worship as Anchorages

In Wenzhou, as well as abroad, places of worship represent anchorages from which networks can be established or further consolidated. This is in large part because these sites embody community values and stand for a social dimension. It is in these places of worship that collective memories are revitalized and that new elites strive to exert their influence. It is also through them that institutions, whether official or not, approach a community.

1. Communal Temples in Wenzhou

In Wenzhou, as in most of the villages of China, community life was previously structured around the worship of local deities. Today, even if other social forms are introduced and the organization of local communities can vary, the symbolic side of

their cults remains strong. The birthday ceremony of a local deity often takes the form of an economic or cultural holiday, and is a highly dynamic moment. Moreover, it is on such occasions that communal and individual identities are reaffirmed, and the common values of a community emphasized. The most popular deities in Li'ao, the most important hometown of Wenzhou migrants in France, are Lord Yang (*Yang fuyue* 楊府爺) (Lin Yixiu 2009) and *Chen Shisi furen* 陳十四夫人, also known as Lady Linshui (*Linshui furen* 臨水夫人) (Baptander 2008). The former's temple is situated at the top of the Baiyan hill. A procession in his name is carried out on his birthday annually in the hillside. Three temples are dedicated to the latter with regular plays performed on different religious occasions. It is noteworthy that all these temples have been rebuilt or renovated mainly thanks to overseas the donations of Li'ao migrants.

The interaction between deities follows a conventional procedure of vows (*xuyuan* 許願) and thanksgiving in case the wish is granted (*huanyuan* 還願), and can be divided into two stages. In the case of migrants, before departure they go to temples to ask for protection from the gods, since the clandestine road of migration is dangerous and life abroad full of challenges. In order to prevent unpredictable events, they need the advice of a deity. One example is a temple dedicated to Guanyin in Li'ao, reputed to provide effective answers from Guanyin through a dream given to the believer, represents an irreplaceable starting point for future migrants. They spend the night there in the hope of having a dream that gives them a favorable response. There are other temples, including those with divinatory sticks (*qianshi* 籤詩) deemed effective, which also attract the attendance of future migrants. As for those men and women who are attached to a deity via a ritual form of adoption, they go to see that deity's medium⁷. Often believers make a vow concerning their security or their future abroad in the presence of a deity and communicate with the deity via a medium. After the migrant's departure, it is the turn of their families to take care of the remaining rituals; they go to temples to consult the situation of migrants en route. Once believers arrive in France safe and sound, their families will give thanks in return: gifts, big candles, incense sticks or plates of offerings expressing the gratefulness they had promised.

In subsequent years, once the status of migrants has been regularized and they can find time to return to Wenzhou, they are supposed to go to the temples they first worshipped at to present offerings of gratitude in person, thereby completing a series of ritual communications with the gods. The boom of building temples from the 1980s onwards in the migrant centers in Wenzhou would not have been possible without the donations of overseas Wenzhou migrants (Mayfair Yang 2009). Indeed, in some temples, donations from Wenzhou migrants in Europe constitute more than 70% of construction funds. It is also noteworthy that the bonds between overseas Wenzhou migrants and their hometowns fall into the system of gift and counter-gift. That is one reason why, besides real estate (Zhang Zhicheng 1998:415-416), they have mainly invested in the construction of temples plus the bridges and roads that lead to them.

Even if Wenzhou migrants reside in France, they still maintain their links to local deities in Wenzhou. When they have problems, they ask their families to go to consult these deities. If the responses of the gods involve religious talismans or traditional herbal medicines, their friends or relatives will take care to bring them back from China. Family and friends thus become intermediaries between local deities and a migrant in such a way that the individual, the family, the clan and local society are integrated into an over-arching structure and are united around a common value, one that centers on deity worship. The bonds between a migrant and his family, and between a migrant and the

⁷ For studies on Wenzhou mediums, see Mayfair Yang 2015.

gods, are not weakened because of geographical separation. On the contrary, migration reinforces the relationships of gift and counter-gift between migrants and their families, as well as between migrants and local deities. The end result is that migrants are more indebted to them than ever, and therefore obliged to maintain close ties to both family and local society.

2. The Fahua Buddhist Temple

At the same time, however, the religious lives of Wenzhou migrants depend not only on links between Wenzhou and France; they also create new places of worship in France like the Fahua Buddhist Temple, which was founded in 2000 by Wenzhou believers. While other Chinese (or Indochinese) migrants created guild halls (*hui guan* 會館) or set up sacred sites dedicated to their local deities, Wenzhou believers chose to build their main place of worship as a Buddhist temple. One reason may be that, in modern China, Buddhism has served as a protective umbrella for communal cults accused of fraud or “superstition” (*mixin* 迷信), although Buddhism itself has at times also participated in attacks on local cults. Buddhism also provided a means for communal cults to be integrated into the system of official religions and eventually escape repression. In Wenzhou, temples to local deities are often referred to as “Buddhist halls” (*fotang* 佛堂), and their deities called “Buddhas” (*Fo* 佛). Thus these communal cults are nominally identified with Buddhism. At the same time, Buddhism, a religion of Indian origin, has become a state-approved symbol of religion in China today, with Chinese government discourse presenting Buddhism not only as a source of social stability but also a leading example of the sinicization of a foreign religion, at times even trying to export it to the West. Therefore, it hardly seems surprising that the Wenzhou elites who led the effort to build the Fahua Temple were in contact with and received approval of the Chinese authorities (see below).

The Fahua Temple is officially the center of cultural activities belonging to the Association of Chinese Residing in France (*Faguo huaqiao huaren hui* 法國華僑華人會, henceforth ACRF), the largest association created by Wenzhou merchants. Today, a Taiwanese Buddhist nun runs the temple and presides over rituals. Believers come chiefly on the first and fifteenth day of each lunar month, as well as mammoth annual festivals such as for the dead and for the Chinese New Year. On New Year’s Eve, thousands of believers rush to the temple to burn incense, write their names in a protective lamp (literally “lamp of light” or *guangmingdeng* 光明燈), or simply eat a bowl of porridge that is supposed to bring good fortune. Wenzhou migrants represent the great majority of believers, and they seek to practice their tradition in a Buddhist setting.

In Wenzhou, it is not uncommon for popular practices to be housed in a Buddhist temple. This is because local forms of Buddhism present themselves as an alternative, even a competitor, for religious functions normally performed by Daoist priests, spirit mediums, and other ritual specialists. Accordingly, one often sees statues of local deities enshrined in a Buddhist temple.

It is in this tradition that the Fahua Temple operates. Its Guanyin Hall is clearly a prime space for Wenzhou migrants in France because of the presence of divinatory tools. Often, after saluting Buddha in the main hall, believers head straight for this one. When a migrant leaves Wenzhou and sets out, and his family in Wenzhou goes to a temple to seek protection and consult his/her situation en route by divination, his/her family in France does the same in the Fahua Temple. They also follow the same procedure of vow-promise and thanksgiving once the migrant has arrived in France.

Apart from the divine answers the Guanyin Hall can provide, the Fahua Temple also responds to other religious needs of its believers, including the “lamps of light”

mentioned above being lit provide protection to those who write their names. As for worshippers who want to accumulate good karma, they have to participate in regular rituals. In this functional structure, the Taiwanese nun Ciqing 慈青, plays an essential role. She presides not only at the great annual ceremonies, but is also invited to do geomancy, preside over funeral rituals, and consecrate statues of the deity that believers wish to worship in their homes. Some followers bring their children or grandchildren to the temple and ask the nun to become their master. One striking aspect of such practice is that in Wenzhou this is called “eating rice” (*dafanchi* 打飯吃), and it is often a spirit medium who plays the role of godfather (or more often godmother). If a child often falls ill and if, according to the result of a divinatory consultation, he/she is advised to “eat rice” from a deity, he/she will be brought to a religious specialist (often a medium) to become an adoptive child of the deity that the medium embodies. The most popular godmother deity in Wenzhou is Fourteenth Lady Chen. Once this has been done, then the child comes regularly to take a bushel of the rice, which is eaten after mixing with rice at home. In the Fahua Temple, whereas the medium is replaced by the Taiwanese nun and the appellation of godmother is replaced by that of master, the function and practice remain remarkably similar.

As a sacred site for Wenzhou migrants in France, the Fahua Temple represents a public space for believers. They meet here on the occasion of regular rituals and communicate information. The Fahua Temple is often the starting point of fundraising to build a temple in China. Through it, migrants are connected as a community to their native land.

Who: Actors

When Wenzhou migrants took the initiative of building a temple, leaders of the ACRF attempted to assume control over this endeavor. They first sought advice from the Chinese Embassy in France, which advised them to create rather a Buddhist temple than a temple dedicated to the local deities of Wenzhou. Therefore, it is clear that the Chinese state exerted some influence over the founding of the Fahua Temple. Moreover, during the consecration of the statues of Buddha and Bodhisattvas, senior officials from the Office of Religious Affairs of China and the Chinese Embassy in France accompanied monks from a prominent Chinese Buddhist temple in attendance. Thus, it seems that, by opting for a Buddhist temple, the leaders of the ACRF chose to embrace a larger Chinese identity as well as that of Wenzhou. This identity corresponds to the leadership’s ambitions, since they wish to represent not only Wenzhou migrants but also the entire Chinese community in France. As a result, they seek the support of provincial or even national bodies in China, and to obtain more benefits from these relations. One of the founders of the Fahua Temple, Lin Debiao 林德標, for example, came to France from Li’ao in 1966. He is always keeping a close relationship with his hometown where he donated money to built roads, schools and temples. Lin Debiao took over the presidency of the ACRF in 2005. Soon after, he organized a meeting with the head of Overseas Chinese Affairs Office in China and considered bridging the relationship between China government and Chinese community in France his vocation.

In China, the construction of a temple is often initiated by local elites, and this was is also the case for the Fahua Temple. Nevertheless, Chinese elites in France are no longer the gentry of the past who had studied under the Confucian education system. Instead, many have peasant origins, and were among the first Wenzhou migrants in France. They thus climbed the social ladder by virtue of their seniority and economic prowess, not education. These rich merchants seek to play the same intermediary role between a local community and the state as the gentry used to do during temple

construction projects, promoting the temple to the state and taking advantage of the presence of official representatives to increase both the temple's prestige as well as their own symbolic capital. Although the temple is in France, their founders applied to the Chinese state, not the French state, because of their conviction that it is with the former that their status as "elites" will be more valued.

In the case of the Fahua Temple, the Chinese government promoted an institutionalized religion in order to have a channel allowing it to contact and possibly exert its influence over a community. This channel is all the more important when the Chinese government no longer has administrative control over overseas Chinese communities. Rich merchants, on the other hand, in order to gain the support of the Chinese government, have accepted a Buddhist framework for their religious organization, although popular practices are tolerated in the temple as well. These elites also take advantage of the construction of the Fahua Temple to present themselves as representatives of the Chinese community in France, thereby trying to curry more favor from the Chinese government.

While the ACRF is in charge of the economic management of the Fahua Temple, the organization of its religious life is entrusted to the Taiwanese nun who plays an indispensable role. Drawing on links to seminaries and large Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, she has established not only a series of regular rituals to cadence the practices of believers who come to worship the Buddha and Bodhisattvas or practice divination, but has also introduced them to Buddhist theories and practices while creating a system of organization by attributing functions to active members, establishing a hierarchy among believers, and creating rules that regulate the management of the temple. The traditional practices of Wenzhou believers have gradually been integrated into an institutionalized framework with the application of the religious norms brought by the Taiwanese nun without believers losing their Wenzhou identity.

The Fahua Temple case study also merits comparison with Wenzhou migrant Christianity. Processes of institutionalization have been shaping Wenzhou Protestant churches in France in recent years, albeit with somewhat different actors. Most such churches originally lacked a pastor or preacher, something that can be traced to their roots in Wenzhou, where they often organized around a group of lay leaders. During the initial phases of their development in France, Wenzhou churches more or less retained this practice of laymen management. As time progressed, however, Wenzhou churches in France established contact with Protestant churches in Taiwan, Hong Kong, the United States and other western countries. The latter had developed for a long time, and often possessed an institutionalized structure around a pastor as the prime source of authority. These organizations forged international networks through the establishment of branches or cooperation with local churches, while also sending missionaries to help Chinese Protestant migrants to found their own groups or to teach them how to organize their churches. Through such activities, these churches worked to guide Chinese Protestant migrants (including from Wenzhou) as to their religious norms, whether pertaining to the organization of a church or the training of its leaders.

At the same time, some leaders of Wenzhou Protestant churches in France, such as Lin Fuchun 林福春 of Eglise Evangelique Chinoise de France (*Jidujiao Faguo huaren jiaohui* 基督教法國華人教會), worked to institutionalize their groups and join international networks of Chinese Protestants. Lin Fuchun was born in Qingtian and moved to France in 1970s. She was converted to Protestantism in 1983 through her husband's family. She was one of the founders of Eglise protestante chinoise de Paris and was in charge of the training of young members. She later left to create her own church, seeking to build a more institutionalized organization. The creation of the branch of the GETS Theological Seminary in Paris in 2004 and that of the International

Chinese Biblical Seminary in Spain in 2008 gave these leaders the opportunity to train themselves in theology and church organization. Moreover, at the end of their studies, they could obtain theological and pastoral authority. When these new graduates were ordained pastors or preachers at ceremonies presided over by pastors from Taiwanese, Hong Kong or American Protestant groups, they were henceforth integrated into the international networks of Chinese Protestants. The application of the religious norms proposed by international Chinese Protestant groups encourages the creation of a common network among such churches in France, with the joint worship of some 20 Chinese Protestant groups on January 1, 2015 reflecting a trend towards deeper cooperation. This unprecedented event occurred at the initiative of a group of Protestant churches, many of whose members are of Wenzhou origin. They are very active in organizing trans-church meetings and inviting internationally recognized pastors or preachers to come preach in France.

The profile of Wenzhou Protestants elites also tends to be different from that of the Buddhist elites described above. While the former are also successful merchants, they tend to be younger and better educated. Practicing a deterritorialized religion, they are less attached to their native hometowns and less likely to pursue a Chinese identity. That is the reason why they have approached international Protestant groups and integrated their religious norms into their own groups. By adopting these religious norms, they seek to embody religious authority and rise through the hierarchy of the community.

What: Religious Norms and Structuring

As Julia Huang points out in her article, people travel in the age of globalization and transnationalism (Huang 2002). But that is not all. People also travel with material possessions such as money and immaterial possession such as ideas. The circulation of people then goes together with the diffusion of knowledge and norms often from a space where they are developed to another where they are underdeveloped and needed. That is why in the case of religious practices of Chinese migrants in France, Taiwan, Hong Kong and America play the role of the centre of exportation of religious norms. In these countries or regions, without strict state regulation and tight control over religious activities, non-official religious organizations have established their theoretical and practice system and aim for a world expansion against the backdrop of globalization. Among those organizations, Foguangshan and Tzu Chi (Yao Yu-Shuang 2012) have had a great deal of success with global expansion. From 1980s to the present day, Foguangshan and Tzu Chi have founded many overseas branches worldwide (Huang 2013; Chandler 2002), including France. Their headquarters in Taiwan oversees every local branch and makes sure coherent organization of local branches' activities. Especially Foguangshan, a Sangha-oriented organization supplemented by a layperson society, the Buddha's Light International Association, regularly sends monks to local temples and manages to generally implement the same religious norms.

However, not only organizations, but also individual actors can convey religious knowledge and norms through contact with others. The Taiwanese nun Ciqing of Fahua Temple was converted to Buddhism and became nun during college. Later, she followed Buddhist education in Fagushan 法鼓山. At the same time, she frequented different Buddhist temples, both big and small and is familiar with their internal organization. When master Ciqing arrived in Fahua temple and began to charge its organization, she also brought what she had learnt and seen in Taiwanese Buddhist temples.

The nun Ciqing created a volunteer group composed by the most active believers to whom she assigns administrative tasks. They are organized in tandem on daily duties such as overseeing temple, cleaning and ensuring daily offerings. Meanwhile, master Ciqing

taught them some simple rituals and use of musical instruments that volunteers may carry out the Sunday ritual in her absence and she also arranged volunteers to work in a group of four for regular rituals. By transmitting religious knowledge, the nun Ciqing delegates to volunteers an authority that places them on the top of ordinary believers, particularly on ritual occasions. Not only believers, but also members of ACRF, considered as leaders of Fahua Temple are integrated into the system of rotation. Every week, five members are expected to come to oversee the temple.

Besides the Sunday ritual and those on the first and fifth days of every month, the birthday of Guanyin, Dizang and Buddha's are celebrated. The Chinese New Year and the Ghost Festival are considered as two biggest events at the Fahua Temple. On these occasions, three Taiwanese monks are invited to preside a seven-day ritual.

Furthermore, master Ciqing has also organized pilgrimage-like trips for some active believers, often members of volunteers group, and bought them to Taiwan where they followed a short term training of meditation, recitation and other Buddhist teachings in several Buddhist organizations, especially that of Fagushan. When returning from pilgrimage, these volunteers share their experience and the religious knowledge that they have learnt with other believers and in return gain a kind of prestige. Thereafter, they are expected to lead ordinary believers in regular rituals.

For Protestant organizations, we find a globalization pattern quite different from that of their Buddhist counterparts. Like Buddhism, Taiwanese, Hong Kongese and American protestant organizations have exerted a great influence in Chinese churches in France. Chinese Overseas Christian Mission, Chinese Coordination Centre of World Evangelism and Evangelical Formosan Church have helped Chinese Protestants in France to create their own churches and paved the way for further development of local Protestantism. Nevertheless, except for two churches, the True Jesus Church and the Evangelical Mission and Seminary International, none of these Protestant organizations seem to have sought to construct a transnational network by founding local branches worldwide. Instead, they choose to send their missionaries to carry out evangelization work in countries where a Chinese community is settled and train local Chinese Protestants who then became their spokesperson.

The most significant and visible work that these transnational Protestant organizations have achieved is the foundation of two Chinese seminaries, the GETS Theological Seminary in Paris and the International Chinese Biblical Seminary in Europe in Spain, as I have showed above. The creation of the GETS Theological Seminary would not be possible without the initiative and efforts of the pastor Zhou Shuhui and the support of her institution, Evangelical Formosan Church while we attribute the foundation of the International Chinese Biblical Seminary to a charismatic Taiwanese Protestant, Wu Yong, who had created several missionary organizations. Meanwhile, these two seminaries maintain a close cooperation thanks to their founders' network with others Taiwanese seminaries, such as Taiwan Theological College and Seminary, China Evangelical Seminary, LOGOS Evangelical Seminary in Taiwan, Christ's Disciples Training Seminary and Chinese Christian Church Mission Association which provide them with experienced teachers and administrative staff. The GETS Theological Seminary has also joined the Asia Theological Association and received the official certificate of accreditation from ATA.

Based on the general pattern of Taiwanese seminary, these two Chinese seminaries in Europe offer various degree programs. The International Chinese Biblical Seminary in Europe is principally dedicated to pastoral training whereas the GETS Theological Seminary is more developed and complete and offers both research-oriented degrees such as Master of Arts in Christian Studies, Bachelor and Master of Theology and Doctor of Philosophy, and ministry-oriented degrees such as Diploma of Pastoral

Studies.

The creation of these Chinese Protestant seminaries represents a win-win game for both Chinese Protestants leaders in France and Taiwanese transnational Protestant organizations. On the one hand, thanks to the development of Internet, it is increasingly easier to find information on Protestantism. The old type of authority, often based on seniority, is facing challenge. The training that these seminaries offered enables Chinese Protestants leaders in France to gain, by the end of their program, a kind of theological authority generally acknowledged in the Protestant world. At the same time, the training allows them to integrate themselves into the general Protestant hierarchy once they are ordained as pastors. On the other hand, Taiwanese transnational Protestant organizations do not need to risk creating a pricey and unsuccessful overseas branch. By offering pastoral training, they manage to attract new Protestant elites and can henceforth exert an indirect influence through their graduates. When those graduates use the religious norms that they have learnt in seminary to structure their own churches, they share the same value system with ones who taught them, which reinforces the relationship between local Chinese churches in France and Taiwanese transnational organizations. Certain local graduates such as Lin Fuchun from Eglise Evangelique Chinoise de France have even been integrated into the management of the GETS Theological Seminary. Their churches thus became knots in the global network of these Taiwanese Protestant organizations.

Conclusion

With the increased flow of Chinese migrants in Western countries, an unprecedented major social phenomenon is emerging. If we choose to view a network as consisting of a set of actors and nodes along with a set of ties of a specified type that link them (Borgatti and Halgin 2011:1169), then the circulation of capital, people, knowledge, texts and norms situate China and Chinese communities residing abroad in a religious continuum, regardless of whether it concerns a practitioner or place of worship (Yang Fenggang 2002:130). Situated in this continuum, overseas Chinese migrants like those from Wenzhou continue to preserve as well as reinvent their traditions, but also need to reorganize their community to adapt themselves to new circumstances. They abide by a traditional system of values or adopt a new one. A variety of actors are engaged in this process including states or their agents, international organizations, as well as moral or religious authorities.

Whereas China always represents political appeal for traditional territorial organizations such as guild halls, overseas religious groups generally turn to Taiwan, Hong Kong or America to learn religious norms. Some groups are even exporting to China religious norms that they have learnt, because few religious organizations are able to develop a fully institutional form under strict governmental control. Furthermore, most of religious organizations are content with their local development and barely have the intention of spreading outside China. It is also possible that they hesitate to do so to avoid catching the government's attention. Only organizations with certain official backing are expanding to the overseas, which is in line with the Chinese government's project to export ideology. When a Wenzhou migrant in Netherlands, Hu Zhiguang 胡志光, asked Longquan Temple to send monks for regular residence in the temple that he, with the support of other Chinese migrants in Netherlands, built in Utrecht, the abbot of Longquan Temple and president of the Buddhist Association of China responded favorably to Hu's request. The first overseas branch of Longquan Temple, the Longquan Great Compassion Temple (*Longquan dabeisi* 龍泉大悲寺) was thus founded in 2015

with monks Xuecheng sent in charge of the daily organization of the temple. However, if we take a close look at evangelization strategy and the organization form of Longquan dabei Temple, we see they are, at least partly, inspired by Taiwanese Buddhist transnational organizations, especially Foguangshan.

The predominant place of Taiwan in exporting religious norms makes that island a “sacred site” for Chinese migrants in France. Leaders or active members of Buddhist groups, Protestant churches and Redemptive Societies such as Yiguandao and *Mile dadao* 彌勒大道 all regularly make pilgrimage to Taiwan to follow advanced training. In Tzu Chi, for instance, this kind of training gives participants a feeling of being part of an elite. When they return to France, they are expected to transmit the knowledge that they have learnt and lead the daily ritual. Thereby active members work their way up through the hierarchy in the group. Meanwhile, the pilgrimage to Taiwan enables participants to learn the fundamental value of their group: charisma of the founder, the history of the group and their headquarter.

But the religious adherence does not eclipse ethnic identification. Members of Chinese religious organizations in France, both Buddhism and Protestantism, are almost purely Chinese. Thus, Chinese identity remains the most encompassing label to attract followers and transnational organizations often play this ethnic card because it is the main channel through which they can approach their communities as a whole.

In short, the shaping of a migrant community is directed towards both native place identity as well as transnational institutionalization, blending the intervention of external forces such as the state and major international organizations, as well as internal forces such as the agendas of elites and average worshippers. All of these actors seek to impose standards that are favorable to them in terms of exerting influence. It is in this game of competing strengths that the community finds its way of development.

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