

Religion and Migration in Northeast Asia¹

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When people move across borders, so do their gods. Changing dynamics of global migration are creating new religious frontiers. China, Korea and Japan, the three economic powerhouses in Northeast Asia, are witnessing both the expansion of immigration and increasingly complex religious landscapes. Yet, research on the intersection of religion and contemporary migration in this region is almost non-existent. Extrapolating from an ethnographic study in a Chinese immigrant congregation in Tokyo, this paper outlines some patterns of relationship between religion and migration in Northeast Asia. First, it shows that both migration and religion rely heavily on social network ties, and these social ties often both facilitate migration as well as spread religious beliefs. The nature of immigrant life tends to turn religious congregations into ethnic community centers and social services providers. Second, migration makes religion more salient in immigrants' lives. Migrants tend to impact their home region's religious practices by bringing in newly acquired religious knowledge, and channeling in religious resources by helping build transnational religious networks.

Key words: International Migration, Religion, East Asia, Social Networks, Transnational Religion

Countries in Northeast Asia have had strong religious influence on each other throughout history. Buddhism and Confucianism, together with native religions such as Daoism (China), Shamanism (Korea) and Shinto (Japan), dominated much of this region's religious and political history. Christianity entered China and Japan in the late 16th century and spread from China to Korea in the 17th century (Kwon, Kim and Warner 2001). The past two centuries witnessed its fast expansion in the Korean Peninsula. Starting from the late 20th century, it has also become the fastest growing religion in mainland China (Chan 2006). At present, both native and adopted religions have attracted large numbers of followers in this region.

Northeast Asia has also sent out millions of emigrants who have now formed large ethnic communities around the world. Overseas Chinese, Japanese and Koreans are among the most prosperous and entrepreneurial ethnic communities in North America, Southeast Asia and increasingly Oceania and Europe, as well. In recent decades, Japan, Korea and China have transformed from emigrant countries to immigrant countries. Large numbers of migrants from all over the world—skilled and unskilled, documented and undocumented—started entering Japan in the 1980s, Korea in the 1990s, and more recently, China. Moreover, despite historical grudges and territorial disputes, there has been a conscious effort to create a form of economic and cultural integration in this region. Therefore, these countries have seen increasing numbers of migrants from each other. The Chinese are the biggest foreign resident population in both Japan and Korea,

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while Koreans and Japanese make up the largest foreign student populations in China and among the biggest expat communities in big cities such as Shanghai.

Although the Northeast Asian region has fast-growing religious populations and sees increasing immigration, very little research has been done on the intersection of religion and contemporary migration in this region. This paper attempts to lay out some patterns of relationship between religion and migration in Northeast Asia. Data on religion and migration are scarce and on the religious beliefs of migrants, nonexistent. My understanding of the role of religion in the migration process and immigrant life is based on my fieldwork in a Chinese immigrant congregation in Tokyo between 2003 and 2005. Before introducing the relationship between religion and migration, in the following section, I first give a sketch of the religious and migration practices in the major countries of this region—China, Korea and Japan.

A Sketch of Religion in Contemporary China, Korea and Japan

Since economic reform in the late 1970s, China has been witnessing a huge revival of religion. It now has the world's largest Buddhist population, fast-growing Catholic and Protestant congregations, expanding Muslim communities and active Daoist temples (Ashiwa and Wank 2009). The government regulatory agency in China, Information Office of the State Council, reports that in 1997, there were 100 million religious believers, including 18 million Muslims, 10 million Protestants and another 4 million Catholics. It registered 85,000 religious sites including churches, mosques and temples, 300,000 clergy, and 3,000 religious organizations. Among the religious sites, 13,000 were Buddhist temples; 30,000 were Mosques; 4,000 were state sanctioned Catholic churches; and 12,000 churches and over 25,000 meeting places belonged to the faith of Protestantism (cited from Ashiwa and Wank 2009). However, the actual number of religious believers might exceed the official figure. For example, counting the number of Bibles printed and distributed by the China Christian Council and brought in from overseas, unofficial figures of Christian believers alone range from 35 million to 80 million (Chan 2006).

In Korea, the two largest religions are Buddhism and Christianity. Both arrived via China. Buddhism came to Korea in the 4th century and Christianity in the 17th century (Kwon, Kim and Warner 2001). According to South Korea's 2005 Census, over half of the South Korean population was religious. Of the religious population, 29.2% are Christian—including 18.3% Protestants and 10.9% Catholics, 22.8% are Buddhists, and the rest adheres to various new religious movements including Jeungism, Daesunism, Cheondoism, Taoism, Confucianism and Won Buddhism. A small minority of Koreans also profess Islam (see Table 1 for the breakdown). Large metropolitan areas had the highest proportions of people belonging to formal religious groups: 49.9 percent in Seoul, 46.1 percent in Busan, and 45.8 percent in Daegu. South Korea had the highest percentage of Christians in East Asia. With over 750,000 members in 2003, the Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea became the largest Protestant congregation in the world (Chan 2006).

In Japan, Christian communities are less visible than in Korea, with 3 million followers, consisting of a little over 2 percent of the total population (Shukyo Nenkan

Table 1. Percent of religious identification of aged 20 and over in Korea, Census 1985–2005

Religious Identification	1985	1995	2005	Differences 1995–1985	Differences 2005–1995
No religion	51	46	45	–5	–1
Buddhists	25	27	26	2	–2
Protestants	16	19	17	3	–2
Catholics	5	7	11	2	5
Other	3	1	1	–1	0
<i>N</i> (Unweighted)	615,892	592,718	661,685		

Note: The table is cited from Kim, J., Lee, Y., Son, J. and Smith, T. W. (2009), Trends of Religious Identification in Korea: Changes and Continuities. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 48: 789–793.

2009). However, according to the Japan Agency for Cultural Affairs' annual yearbook (Shukyo Nenkan 2009), 107 million Japanese people identify themselves as Shinto, 89 million as Buddhist and 3 million as Christian, with 10 million following "other" religions. Majority Japanese practice both Shinto and Buddhism simultaneously. Shinto shrines are the most important public spaces in Japanese urban neighborhoods and rural communities. Community festivals, ceremonial events and social gatherings frequently take place in Shinto shrines. Buddhist temples, on the other hand, function for the passed away. Funerals are commonly hosted in Buddhist temples.

Contemporary Migration in Northeast Asia

Because of the particular social and political contexts in Northeast Asia, the onset of contemporary migration within and into this region is rather recent. Communist China did not open its borders to let people in and out relatively freely until the mid-1980s. South Korea saw large outmigration after World War II and did not start importing brides, students and labor until recently. Japan, also, was considered a homogeneous country and even a negative case of immigration among developed countries. Outmigration is still a strong trend in Northeast Asia, especially China. Yet the booming economy in this region has made these countries increasingly attractive immigration destinations. In particular, the transnational economy in this region has produced fast-expanding population movements among each other. For example, the Chinese make up the largest immigrant population in both Japan and Korea. With geographic proximity, transnational social space is forming in this region.

Among these three countries, Japan started labor import first. The immigrant population in Japan is relatively small. By 2008, 2.2 million foreigners made up 1.74 percent of the total population.² The recent history of immigration to Japan began in the mid-1980s when Japan's economy was continuously developing while its reserve domestic labor force was being exhausted due to the low fertility rate and an aging population. Several doors were opened to allow outsiders to come in. The most important are the trainee system, the return of ethnic Japanese in Latin America, the

² Here the foreign population means registered resident aliens instead of the foreign-born population. Many resident aliens were Koreans with Special Residency Permits who were born in Japan. On the other hand, many naturalized foreign-born citizens were not counted.

plan to increase foreign students on Japanese campuses, and the expansion of categories of possible labor import.

In 1981, the Industrial Training Program for Non-Japanese was established for the purposes of “international transfer of skills, technology and knowledge,” and “contribution to the development of human resources, playing a central role in the economic development of developing countries.” Since 2005, “trainees” have been the single biggest group of new entrants every year, reaching over 100 thousand in 2008 but largely invisible to the Japanese public. Bound by contracts, they have designated tasks, limited mobility, and no legal possibility to settle in Japan. The late 1980s saw the return of hundreds of thousands of Japanese descendants from South America. The *Nikkei* migrants—people of Japanese descent—were preferred as migrant labor because they are supposedly ethnic Japanese. They are granted “Long Term Resident (*teijusha*)” statuses, and have few legal constraints on their mobility. The majority of *Nikkei* migrants take up manual labor in the factories of big Japanese companies and live in industrial towns in the Tokai area (Kitazawa 1992, Tsuda 1999, 2003). Another important immigration policy was the decision to accept students. Japan’s Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone proposed the “Plan to Accept 100,000 Foreign Students before the Beginning of 21st Century” during his visits to ASEAN countries in 1983. In 2008, the Japanese government approved the plan to recruit 300 thousand international students by 2020.³ This is a major pattern of migration from China to Japan. Between 1978 and 2008, over 300,000 Chinese entered the Japanese border as either language students or university students. A large number of them eventually entered the Japanese labor market and settled in Japan.

As a consequence of these immigration policies, Japan’s foreign population increased drastically in the decades since the mid-1980s. The largest foreign resident group is Chinese, making up over 30 percent of the total foreign population. The other four of the top five foreign national groups are Koreans (27 percent), Brazilians (14 percent), Filipinos (9 percent) and Peruvians (3 percent). In 2009, the biggest group of foreign residents was permanent residents, making up 40 percent of the total foreign population. Half of these permanent residents are in the category of special permanent residents, a label applied to pre-WWII migrants mostly from the Korea Peninsula.

Korea is a traditional migrant sending country. Over 7 million Korean descendants live overseas. The majority of these overseas Koreans live in China, Japan and the United States.⁴ Post-WWII migration brought many skilled Korean laborers and their families into the United States. The US is still the most attractive destination for education for Koreans. Korean students ranked number 2 or 3 among all foreign students in the US. However, in the late 1980s, with Korea’s continuous economic boom since the 1970s and labor shortage caused by sharply declining fertility, foreign workers started entering Korea. Aside from legal professional workers and laborers supplied through trainee programs, the majority of foreign workers work illegally in Korea (Kim 2004). In 2008, 1,158,866 foreigners had a status of sojourn in Korea (Korea

³ “Ryugaku 30 Mannin Keikaku’ Kosshi (The Central Points of ‘the 300 Thousand International Students Plan’),” available at <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/tyoukanpress/rireki/2008/07/29kossi.pdf>, accessed on August 27, 2009.

⁴ Statistics are obtained from Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Republic of Korea, available at http://www.mofat.go.kr/consul/overseascitizen/compatriotcondition/index6.jsp?TabMenu_TabMenu6, last accessed on April 7, 2011.

Immigration Service).⁵ Among them, 376,563 were labeled ethnic Korean Chinese, and 179,954 were other Chinese. Vietnam (84,763), Japan (51,763), the Philippines (46,894) and Thailand (45,198) followed as the top migrant sending countries. Excluding those who came for tourism or short business trips, the top visa categories held by foreigners were “residential” designated for those who married Korean nationals, “industrial trainees,” as in Japan, those who arrived mostly as labor supply to small and medium Korean firms that were experiencing labor shortages, and students. Therefore, the major patterns of migration into Korea are through international marriage, labor import, and international education. It is important to note that international marriage has become a main channel of immigration since the late 1990s. A low fertility regime and gender selection have caused rural Korea to have one of the highest gender imbalances in the world. Korean women leave villages for cities. Men in rural villages are left without marriage partners. Women from Southeast Asian countries are therefore brought in to fill the void.

With its native population at 1.3 billion, most regions in China do not see any foreigners except for tourists. However, long-term foreign residents of different ethnicities and nationalities are part of the ethno-scape of big cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. A traditional labor export country, China is now drafting its very first immigration law to deal with the border control pressure from the Southwest to Northeast.⁶ According to China’s Ministry of Public Security, about 2.85 million people, or more than 10 percent of the 26 million foreigners who entered China in 2007, came for employment. Of the nearly 539,000 foreigners who lived in China for more than six months, more than half were workers at joint ventures and solely foreign-owned companies or were family members of such employees. Although overall figures have yet to be updated, local statistics have projected a trend of more foreigners staying in China for longer periods. In December 2007, China’s largest city, Shanghai, announced a foreign population of 152,000 people, a 14 percent increase from the year before. In Beijing, the number was 110,000 in 2008, while in southern Guangdong, where an African community is emerging, the foreign population was at nearly 58,000 in the first half of 2009. China’s 2010 population census, for the first time, surveyed foreign residents in an effort to give experts and policy-makers more data on immigration trends.⁷ It is worth noting that the Japanese community is the single biggest foreign community in Shanghai. In fact, Shanghai has surpassed Los Angeles to be the home of the largest Japanese expat community.

Religion and Migration: the Case of the Chinese Catholic Center in Japan

Voluntary international migration, in most cases, is driven by economic motivations. People take the journey for the promise of a better life for themselves and their families. Studies in the migration from Latin America to the US have shown that

⁵ Statistics are obtained from Ministry of Justice, Republic of Korea, available at <http://www.immigration.go.kr/HP/IMM/newsimg/statistics/statistics2008.pdf>, last accessed on April 7, 2011.

⁶ China plans draft immigration law,” available at http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010-05/22/content_9881622.htm, last accessed on April 7, 2011.

⁷ Ibid.

religion influences the whole migration process, from decision making, preparing for the journey, to settlement and incorporation (Hagan and Ebaugh 2003). The spiritual support of religious faith and the physical and social network resources provided by religious communities in both sending and receiving countries are crucial for the success of the migratory act as well as adapting to the new socioeconomic environment in the host country.

There is scarcely any research that has examined the role of religion in the process of migration in East Asia. During fieldwork among immigrants in Japan, I observe that among the religious believers, such as Catholics and Buddhists, their religious faith provides them psychological support. Indeed, some undocumented Chinese Catholics I encountered in the immigrant congregation in Tokyo prayed before they took the journey. Many carried amulets for protection. More substantially, my fieldwork in the immigrant churches and existing literature indicate that in the actual migration process, the role of religion is most pronounced in the following aspects. First, the overlapping migration and religious networks, as well as the nature of immigrant life, tend to turn religious congregations into ethnic community centers and social services providers. Second, migration makes religion more salient in immigrants' lives. Migrants tend to have impact on their home region's religious practices by bringing in newly acquired religious knowledge, and channeling in religious resources by helping build transnational religious networks.

The Overlapping Religious and Migration Networks

Social networks perpetuate migration (Massey et al. 1993, 1994). Social networks also affect the demographic makeup and functions of religious congregations in the migrants' host society (Liu Farrer 2006). In this section, I introduce a Chinese immigrant Catholic congregation in Japan that consisted of mostly undocumented immigrants from Fujian Province. Although a single case could not possibly explain variations, by explaining how, over time, the only Chinese immigrant Catholic congregation in Japan transformed into a largely regional one and became embedded in kinship-based transnational migration networks, and how this consequently affected the balance of different dimensions of its congregational characteristics and its transnational practices, I argue that congregationalism is constrained by political and social environments in both host and sending countries as much as by the immigrant community's social and cultural characteristics.

The Chinese Catholic Center

In 1984, a Japanese nun and a student from Taiwan approached a Jesuit priest who was then teaching at a university and asked him to hold a mass for Chinese-speaking Catholics in Tokyo. A monthly mass thereafter began in the University Chapel. Since he did not speak Chinese, the priest gave the sermon in Japanese and a student translated it into Chinese. About 50 students and Chinese-speaking Catholics from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan attended the mass. In 1990, through the Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in China, a French priest who spoke fluent Chinese and had taught and lived in China was assigned to lead the congregation. The congregation was given an unoccupied Jesuit dormitory by the Society of Jesus in Japan. The new

pastor and congregation members renovated the seventy-year-old house and started a weekly Chinese mass in the fall of 1990. The Chinese Catholic Center was officially established. It was supported by the Society of Jesus Japan Province initially.

The Jesuit house had a chapel, office space, a common room, and a kitchen. It soon became a community center for Chinese immigrants. Members brought in friends and relatives. On Sundays, over 100 Chinese immigrants filled the house. After the worship, they lingered and confabulated. Volunteers cooked lunch. Everybody ate together. However, after the Kobe earthquake in 1995 the house was inspected and deemed to be unsafe. The center was told to evacuate the house before 2001. In the meanwhile, the French pastor also left Japan to take up a new post. The incoming leaders made a lot of effort in locating a new place for the congregation. With the support of the pastor of a Japanese parish and the Archdiocese of Tokyo, the Chinese Catholic Center moved into a Japanese parish church in 2001. On Sundays, a Japanese mass was held in the morning and a Chinese one in the afternoon. About 40 to 50 Chinese congregation members would stay on for tea and snacks after the worship. Children and youngsters set up a ping-pong table to play ping-pong. Several people watched TV, although most gathered around several round tables chatting, munching on snacks, or playing cards and Chinese chess.

Since moving into the Japanese parish, the congregation had more interaction with Japanese Catholics. It started issuing the Japanese version of a quarterly newsletter that used to be in Chinese only. Japanese people from the parish were also invited to participate in many center events, such as Chinese New Year celebrations and the center's anniversary celebrations. The Chinese congregation also took part in activities organized by Catholic parishes in that area. Although a few members from the Jesuit house era were nostalgic about the old exclusive environment and described the old place as resembling home more, most others liked the new place because it was spacious and they had more social interaction with Catholic Japanese. In any event, more and more members in the congregation came after it was relocated, and the Jesuit house became a center legend.

Creating a regional congregation

Starting with members from various regions in China and some core members from Taiwan and Hong Kong, the Chinese Catholic Center gradually became a predominantly Fujian immigrant congregation. By 2003, 90 percent of the congregants were from Fujian, most of them undocumented (See Table 2). The presence of a large number of Catholic Fujian immigrants in Japan provided the demographic base for the Chinese Catholic congregation in Tokyo to consist of members mostly from Fujian Province. Fujian, particularly rural areas around the capital city, Fuzhou, not only had one of the largest Catholic populations in China but also sent one of the largest migrant populations to Japan. Although around 210,000 Roman Catholics worshiped in registered churches in Fujian,⁸ there were numerous underground churches in the province.⁹

⁸ This number comes from the Overseas Missionary Fellowship. "China Church Survey," by Tony Lambert. Global Chinese Ministries Newsletter_March 2003, available at <http://www.us.omf.org/content.asp?id-17570>, last accessed on July 8, 2006.

Journalistic and academic reports often estimated China's Catholics to be three to four times of the official number (Madsen 2003). According to such a calculation, Catholics in Fujian were likely to approach a million. Some informants told me that in their home villages, every Sunday, at least several hundred people attended mass. In 2005, Ash Wednesday coincided with Chinese New Year. One center member learnt from his wife at home that over three thousand people congregated at their local parish.

Since the late 1980s, immigrants from areas surrounding Fuzhou started migrating into Japan. Fujian has consistently ranked among the top five among the sending regions of legal immigrants to Japan, together with three Northeast provinces and Shanghai. However, the number of undocumented Fujian immigrants was likely to be as high or higher. The Japan Coast Guard discovered organized human smuggling from China in 1990 for the first time. Since then, 80 percent of apprehended illegal entrants into Japan were Chinese, and almost all were from Fujian.¹⁰ Since the mid-1990s, the number of apprehended clandestine entrants from China was over one thousand every year. In my own survey among the Chinese immigrants in Japan, more than half of the Fujian immigrants who answered the question on legal statuses reported to be undocumented (Table 2). Many Fujian immigrants, including one sister from the center, believed there were likely over 100,000 Fujian immigrants in Japan, with or without legal statuses.

As important as the numbers of Catholics in Fujian and immigrants from that area was the conjunction of the kinship-based networks that were used for both international migration and religious activities. Fujian immigrants mostly came from rural areas around the capital city, Fuzhou (Liang and Ye 1999; Liang and Morooka 2004). The villages in these areas were naturally formed by and named after one or two extended families. For example, most people living in Chen-Li Village belong to either the Chen family or the Li family. Similar to rural migrants out of Mexico to the US (Massey et al, 1987), Fujian immigrants mostly migrated through kinship-based networks. As a result, neighboring villages often varied greatly in the number of emigrants and the destinations of migration. This was not only true to clandestine migrants whose illicitness required a high degree of mutual trust only attainable through closed social networks (Coleman 1990), but also applied to legal migrants who came to Japan on student visas. Because of the general ignorance of application procedures, the legally entered Fujian informants I interviewed mostly arranged their migration into Japan through "snakeheads"¹¹ by paying a substantial fee (Liu-Farrer 2008). Very often these "snakeheads" were in their extended families or connected to their extended families.

On the other hand, the Chinese Catholic community in general mostly developed through kinship networks (Madsen 1998, 2003). Members of the Chinese Catholic Center were either from families with generations of Catholics or were initiated into Catholicism through kin. According to my informants, during the 1980s and 1990s in

⁹ Because of the Chinese Communist Party's efforts to bar foreign influences over Chinese Christians, in contemporary China, Chinese Catholics were channeled into two competing organizations—the open church that belonged to the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association independent from the ecclesiastical authority of the Holy See and the underground church clustered around priests ordained by and loyal to the Vatican (Liu and Leung 2002; Madsen 2003).

¹⁰ Data is obtained from <http://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/info/kouhoushi/kouhoushi3.htm>, last accessed on Dec. 20, 2005.

¹¹ Snakeheads is a name they used for all brokers and middle agencies in the migration industry.

Table 2. Region and sex compositions of the Chinese Catholic Center (2003)

	Fujian	Non-Fujian	Missing ²	Total
Men	17	1	9	27
Women	24	5	22	51
Total	41	6	31	78

the villages of coastal Fujian, the number of Catholics increased rapidly because of the evangelizing efforts of neighbors and villagers. Since the majority belonged to non-official churches, they also relied on these networks to inform members of schedule changes and other church events. Through frequent communications between immigrants in Japan and their families at home and the growing former center members in their local parishes (a point I will elaborate later), the Chinese Catholic Center became known among Fujian Catholics in China. Many congregation members were aware of the existence of such a Catholic organization before they came to Japan. Among those who did not know about the center initially, after arriving in Japan and getting connected to the kin and friends here, they would soon find it.

As a consequence of the size of the Catholic population among Fujian immigrants and their kinship-based transnational migration networks and religious connections, the Chinese Catholic Center soon became a congregation consisting of an increasing number of Fujian immigrants. In 2003, when the church survey was administered, Fujian immigrants composed 90 percent of the congregation¹² (Table 2). With the increase of Fujian immigrants, it also became an important node in their transnational migration networks, which brought more and more immigrants from that region into the congregation.

Immigrant churches and community center functions

Although immigrants migrate mostly for secular, particularly economic reasons, religion increases salience when they become immigrants (Warners 1993). The sense of marginality in the unfamiliar socio-cultural environment of the host society, the trauma of status loss accompanying the downward mobility often inevitable in the migration process, and the hardship of labor and the loneliness of feelings tend to push immigrants into religion, particularly their own ethnic congregations (Greeley 1972, Hurh 1998). As Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) pointed out, “immigrants are attracted to specifically immigrant religious institutions in large measure because they seek to develop social networks with others who share their native language, customs, experiences, and problems.” As a result, immigrants establish religious congregations for themselves. These religious congregations are organizations where they seek economic and social

¹² 80 people (including myself) responded to the church survey conducted in October 2003. 33 people answered “China” to the question “birthplace.” 47 people wrote down cities or provinces. Among the 47, 41 marked “Fujian.” When asked about how they filled out the answers later, several Fujian members said they wrote down “China.” Given my observation that Fujian immigrants were sometimes reluctant to report their regional origin in social occasions and quite a few changed their birthplaces to other provinces in their fake passports and alien registration cards, I suspect most of these “Chinese people” were in fact from Fujian. I therefore could safely say the percentage was close to 90 by imputing the numbers.

resources, social support, status recognition and feeling of home (Hurh 1997, Liu Farrer 2006). In the case of the Chinese Catholic Center in Japan, the concentration of Fujian immigrants has paradoxical effects. On the one hand, it created an ethnic community and resource center for the Fujian immigrants, especially the undocumented migrants who were in much more urgent need of socioeconomic support. On the other hand, concentration of Fujianese created social, cultural and linguistic barriers for incorporating Chinese Catholics from elsewhere.¹³

Due largely to sensational media coverage of organized human smuggling from Fujian to Japan, Fujian Province was frequently associated with organized crime, and Fujian people with illegal immigrants. In addition, Fujian immigrants, compared to immigrants from other regions in China, were less educated and predominantly from rural areas (Liang and Morooka 2004). These social and economic characteristics created their underclass image. Fujian immigrants thus became isolated in the Chinese immigrant community in Japan. In my fieldwork with Chinese social dance in Tokyo, rare occasions where people from different regional and socioeconomic backgrounds intersected, I constantly heard discriminatory remarks toward the Fujian immigrants and clearly sensed an avoidance of their company. There was a clear separation of Fujian people from the others (Liu Farrer 2004). The Catholic Center was a rare public space where the Fujian immigrants did not feel discriminated against inside.

While Fujian immigrants cherished the fellowship at the center because they shared the same language, customs, and problems from being migrant laborers and victims of social prejudice, the Chinese immigrants from elsewhere sometimes felt marginalized in the environment. Fujian dialects were incomprehensible to other Chinese immigrants. Their relative lack of socioeconomic diversity also made the congregation unable to match the interests of Chinese from other regions who were mostly legal and more socially mobile. Other Chinese also depended less on the resources provided by the center because they were more likely to be affiliated with formal organizations and had alternative institutional resources. As a consequence, the Chinese Catholic Center saw fewer and fewer Chinese from elsewhere. I had met non-Fujian immigrants in the center who found the place through its webpage, but they left after several weeks. Those who remained were either connected to the congregation through immediate family such as spouses or kin, or because they had no alternative. The center had been the only place in Japan that Chinese mass was given.¹⁴ Non-Fujian Chinese who could not speak Japanese continued to participate in the congregation, although they rarely stayed to socialize after the worship.

The concentration of Fujian immigrants in the only Chinese speaking Catholic congregation in Japan affected its institutional characteristics in important ways. Measured by Ebaugh and Chafetz's two dimensions typical of congregational organization, the Chinese Catholic Center had a weak congregational structure and a strong community center feature (Liu Farrer 2006). In particular, it assumes an important function as resource providers.

¹³ Ambrose (2006) observed the same phenomenon in the Taiwanese protestant congregations in Tokyo.

¹⁴ In January 2005, another Chinese mass began in Saitama Prefecture.

1) *The Community center: home away from home*

Ebaugh and Chafez (2000) define the community center as a place that includes the communal celebration of secular holidays, secular classes, mundane services for members, recreational facilities and a community hall in which social activities occur. Although the Chinese Catholic Center in Tokyo was foremost a religious institution that provided guidance to immigrants' faith life and administered sacraments, it adopted many community center functions.

Because the center occupied an independent building during the first 12 years, its physical detachment from other Japanese institutions impressed on the congregation members a sense of social detachment from Japanese society. It helped the Fujian immigrants feel secure inside. As some members put it, "when you closed the door, it became our own world. We always spent the whole day in the center. The atmosphere was good. People greeted you when you walked in. We really felt at home there."

The center celebrated secular holidays such as the Chinese New Year. It had a common room where members could gather and socialize. Sometimes wedding receptions were held there. In late 2004, two newcomers from Hong Kong started offering English classes to the members. The center also provided limited recreational facilities such as a ping-pong table, a small library, cards and chess, and organized retreats during New Year holidays. Most importantly, the congregation provided social networks that were an essential resource for Fujian immigrants.

2) *Resource providers*

The biggest practical problems Fujian immigrants faced were housing and jobs. Undocumented immigrants had difficulties in finding housing because in Japan a guarantor was usually needed for leasing apartments. Fujian immigrants relied on social networks to solve housing problem. Most of them lived with kin or friends. However, their kin and friends were also frequently undocumented immigrants, and sometimes repatriated unexpectedly. The initial connection between the owner and the tenant could suddenly disappear. The roommates therefore had to find new housing. Occasionally, the roommates feared the police would raid their apartment after one person was arrested for illegal stay and opted to leave. The Chinese Catholic Center extended Fujian immigrants' social networks. Not only did many members end up sharing apartments, when emergencies occurred, they had more alternative places to go.

Because most Fujian immigrants came to Japan with the sole purpose to make money, and often came with heavy initial financial burdens, they not only needed jobs immediately upon arrival, but also changed jobs often in order to get better pay. Lacking language proficiency and frequently, proper documents, the majority of Fujian immigrants relied on relatives and friends' introductions and references for jobs. In the stagnating Japanese economy, good jobs were difficult to find. Because of the mass media's portraits of crimes committed by foreigners, not only did the undocumented immigrants but the legal ones also have trouble finding jobs. Networks therefore were essential for Fujian immigrants. According to my independent survey, over four-fifths of employed Fujian immigrants found their current jobs through kin and friends. The Chinese congregation, with a majority working part-time jobs in restaurants, food markets, and construction, was a good source for job information. Moreover, outside of

the church, job introductions cost money even among friends and relatives. Within the church, however, my interviewees claimed that members gave information about jobs for free. Several interviewees reported to have found jobs through people at the congregation.

These types of social resources available through the center were especially important for immigrants who had limited kinship networks in Japan or could not rely on them for assistance. Yimin, a young man I interviewed, was the first in his village to come to Japan. Typical of Fujian immigrants, he came with a debt of three million yen (about USD 26,000). After two years in a language school in Okinawa, he enrolled in a post-secondary vocational school in Tokyo. Without kin in Tokyo and knowing few people, he was out of a job for four months. He quit school and gave up his student dorm because he could not afford the tuition or the rent. His mother, through a church member in the local village, obtained the address of the congregation in Tokyo. When he finally knocked on the door of the center, he was homeless, living off a slice of bread everyday. He moved in with a center member and was introduced to jobs. Initially intending to pursue college education in Japan, Yimin regretted that he gave up the opportunity because he found the congregation too late. "If he had found the church earlier, we would all have helped him." One Center member told me, "We could at least loan him money to pay for the tuition."

In addition to network resources, because of the vulnerable political and social situations they found themselves in, the undocumented Fujian Catholic immigrants or their families turned to the center for social support and practical services they had trouble obtaining from other channels. Catholicism had a history of benevolence and assistance to people in disadvantaged situations (Degeneffe 2003). In practice, the Chinese Catholic Center was in close cooperation with the *Catholic Tokyo International Center*, which was founded and administered by the Archdiocese of Tokyo for migrant workers and foreigners staying in Japan. Since its establishment, the sisters of the Chinese congregation took upon themselves the task of visiting detained undocumented immigrants, helped communicate their needs to their families and friends and delivered goods. Several times they had to negotiate with the police in order to expedite the repatriating process for some congregation members in order to unite them with their families in difficulty. Furthermore, for undocumented immigrants, the center was the only place that gave official recognition to their marriage. Several informants of mine received the sacrament of matrimony and had wedding ceremonies at the center. Over the years, the Chinese Catholic Center gained publicity by sheltering an immigrant with a lethal injury. It was also known for raising funds to send another undocumented immigrant who was seriously ill back home. Both immigrants were from Fujian.

3) *Religious resources affecting incorporation patterns*

Although the Chinese Catholic Center had a large share of undocumented migrants and provides important social resources to this vulnerable migrant group, by providing alternative resources, it helps documented migrants stay legal. The Catholic Center is a part of an extensive formal organization and possessing resources and networks of its own, without discriminating against undocumented migrants, it exercises to help resource-poor legal Fujian immigrants access mainstream Japanese society.

Liu-Farrer (2008) describes the negative effects of social networks on Fujian immigrants, pointing out that the social networks, a majority of which were made up of undocumented migrants, contributed to visa overstaying among Fujian students. The ones that could avoid such network effects were those who participated in other social organizations and obtained alternative resources for effective adaptation in Japan. One such organization was church. Although the two Chinese religious congregations I participated in tended to have a concentration of Fujian immigrants, they were still able to provide resources conducive to retaining legal statuses and social mobility. In the Catholic congregation, although ninety percent of the congregants were Fujian immigrants and most were undocumented, there were also a couple of graduate students, several college students, two software engineers, several employees and self-employed business people that brought in information and possible connections. The clergy also helped students find schools and jobs. Yiling, whose father had been in Japan on an employment visa, was brought to Japan at the age of 17 as a dependent to earn more income for the family. The pastor and the sisters at the church helped her enroll in a junior college despite her father's objection. Her student status saved her from deportation when her father was found to be a visa-abuser. Also through church ties, she found employment at a kindergarten and finally obtained a work visa.

Transnational Religious Practices

In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to immigrants' transnational religious practices. Transnationality was considered an important institutional characteristic of immigrant congregations. For example, Yang (2002) describes three-layered trans-Pacific networks formed by contacts between individuals, single churches, and para-Chinese Christian Churches that connected migrants in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Mainland China to their counterparts in the U.S. and Canada. The Chinese Catholic Center's transnational practices also took on distinct characteristics because of the political and social situations of its members.

The Chinese Catholic Center, in comparison with the immigrant religious institutions being studied in US, had limited transnational practices. This was first because of the Chinese government's ban on foreign missionary work in China and the political sensitivity of the underground church where most Chinese congregants belonged. The center refrained from direct contact with immigrants' home organizations for fear it would potentially endanger the Catholics and their religious institutions in immigrants' hometowns. Secondly, the majority of its members were undocumented and therefore were not free to travel transnationally. This limited the resource exchanges between the center and the churches in immigrants' home villages.

Despite the difficulties, the center affected the religious institution in immigrants' home society through an expanding network of alumni reeducated in the Catholic doctrine and practices, and impressed with a vision of the world church and a sense of connection with a global Chinese Catholic organization.

Due to social isolation, the immigrants from rural Fujian had very limited knowledge of the Catholic faith. In the Catholic Center in Japan, the members participated in courses of Catholic doctrine and practices. I heard many immigrants comment that they

had never truly understood their faith until joining the center. The center also tried to develop among its members a reconciliatory attitude toward the official churches in Mainland China. Some researchers pointed out that the membership of the open and the underground churches overlapped and the boundary blurred in some areas (Lozada 2001; Liu and Leung 2002). However, in rural Fujian, the tension between the underground church and the official church seemed to be more heightened. Almost all Fujian immigrants in the Catholic congregation in Japan were affiliated with underground churches at home. After joining the Chinese Catholic Center, however, immigrants learnt to neglect the distinction between the open and the underground because several members from other regions in China were affiliated with official churches. The center also tried to give its members perspectives about the conflict. Priests from other overseas Chinese churches were invited to give lectures on Chinese church affairs.

The high member turnover at the center meant an increasing alumni population in China. Many former members were active in their local congregations after they went back home. Some organized youth leagues in their communities. Two of the five people I interviewed in Fujian assumed administrative roles in their local congregations. One middle-aged woman said she did not have to work for a living after returning from Japan. Coordinating with other members and organizing masses became her job. Although the Catholic Church was organized around the clergy and therefore the priests and sisters had more authority about religious matters, the former members tried to communicate to their religious communities what they had learned about the Catholic doctrine and practices in Japan. It would be difficult to assess the influence their education in Japan had on their home community, but the former members were expected to bring fresh air to the relatively isolated and conservative Catholic Church in rural China.

The center's nodal position in immigrants' transnational kin networks and its expanding alumni network also allowed the center to channel some educational resources into the congregations in immigrants' home villages. Three hundred former members left their contact information with the center, and received a quarterly newsletter. The members also sent home newsletters and other religious materials. The priests and the sisters visited members' families or former members in China every year. They took with them videos of the Chinese Center's activities, which included their family members in Japan, and other materials to distribute among them. When I visited Fujian in August 2003, the former pastor of the center had just left the Fuzhou area. About 40 Fujian alumni went to meet the priest, some flying over from other parts of China just for the occasion. Upon their requests, the clergy also offered lectures on doctrine to the local Catholic communities, and occasionally led worship services. However, because of their political sensitivity, these kinds of religious practices were infrequent.

Conclusion and Future Research Directions

The statistical data on religion and migration in Japan, China and Korea is scarce. Very little research has been done on this topic. As a result, this paper is largely based on my ethnographic study in a Chinese immigrant Catholic congregation in Japan. The patterns of the relationships between migration and religion are suggestive based on

this case study. First, it shows that both migration and religion rely heavily on social network ties, and these social ties often both facilitate migration as well as spread religious beliefs. Upon migration, such overlapping migration and religious networks affect the congregational structure of the immigrant churches. In many cases, similar to those in US immigrant communities, Chinese immigrant churches in Japan assume a weak congregational structure but strong community center functioning. The nature of immigrant life tends to turn religious congregations into ethnic community centers and social services providers. Second, migration makes religion more salient in immigrants' lives. Migrants tend to impact their home region's religious practices by bringing in newly acquired religious knowledge, and channeling in religious resources by helping build transnational religious networks.

Given the rapid expansion of both religion and migration in East Asian countries, much more effort is needed in order to produce more reliable and extensive data about the religious practices among the immigrants in this region and the relationship between religion and migration. What are the roles that religion plays in the migration process? What are the roles of migration in spreading, reducing or transforming religion? Aside from improving the data situation in general, the following issue areas beg attention.

1) *Churches and the border-crossing of North Korean refugees*

North Korea is one country this paper does not even mention. Due to draconian political control and total collapse of economic life, people flee North Korea in droves and often enter Chinese borders first before heading toward South Korea. There are a few reports on how Korean Christian churches are helping out these refugees. They are not only providing shelters but also actively involved in their migratory acts. However, no substantial research has been done.

2) *The growing Chinese Christian population and their missionary activities*

Chin-Kwang Chen (2006) has observed that the Chinese Christian communities are growing rapidly both in China and overseas. The conversion rate in China and among overseas Mainland Chinese is very high. Increasing numbers of Chinese congregations, mainly for Mainland Chinese, are established in not only traditionally immigrant and Christian countries, but also in countries such as Mongolia, most nations of the former Soviet Republic, most Eastern European countries and many Polynesian nations. The migration of Chinese Christian merchants, typically those from the Wenzhou region, has taken Christianity into territories that are dominated by non-Christian religions, such as the Middle East. Mostly congregating to worship in their local languages, these merchants sometimes also convert locals. Finally, with the expanding Christian community, the Back to Jerusalem movement is being revived in China.

3) *The Uyghurs migrants? Economic migrants, religious migrants or political migrants*

The Uyghurs are an important group of immigrants in Japan. Very little research has been done about this group. A Uyghur migrant community has been formed in Japan. A Japanese branch of the World Uyghur Congress was established. However, Uyghur migrants are not considered as religious or political refugees. Uyghur migra-

tion into Japan shares the same pattern as other Chinese. They often arrive as language students, enter educational institutions and then go on to become employees. According to the American Consulate in Japan, they also have a higher visa-overstay rate than other Chinese who apply to visit the U. S. However, Uyghurs are frequently Muslims. How their religion has affected their migration experience and how their international migration has influenced their religious practices are potentially fruitful areas of inquiry.

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