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Nodes and Hubs: An Exploration of Yiguandao Temples as ‘Portals of Globalization’

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Abstract: This paper takes a fresh look at the global spread of the Chinese–Taiwanese new religious movement Yiguandao (一貫道; the emic transcription is “I-Kuan Tao”) by directing attention to the concrete places where transnational connections and interactions actually transpire, i.e., temples, shrines, and other sites of worship. Emically known as “Buddha halls” (*fotang* 佛堂), these places range from large-scale temple complexes, to small niches of worship in people’s private residences. Yet, they all share the potential of becoming venues of transregional interactions through processes of migration, the circulation of personnel, and local outreach. I argued that we need to take the distinct character of these localities more seriously, in order to fully understand the global networks of Yiguandao groups. Through their specific embeddedness in both local affairs and transnational projects, these temples are not simply local chapters of the (mostly) Taiwanese headquarters, but instead they are “translocalities” or even “portals of globalization”—two concepts developed in migration and global studies to help understand the significance of place in the recent phase of so-called globalization. By exploring Yiguandao temples across the globe, this paper critically evaluated these approaches, and their usefulness for the study of global religions. Empirically, it drew on both print and online material, as well as ethnographic fieldwork conducted by the author in Taiwan, Vienna (Austria), California, South Africa, and Japan from 2016 to 2018.

Keywords: religion; transnationalism; globalization; space; temples; Yiguandao; I-Kuan Tao; Taiwan; Chinese religions



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“It’s not just Nike, Coca-Cola, or Benetton, for that matter, who are producing and distributing their products globally. Religious communities are also structured and operating across borders. They channel flows of ideas, rituals, and values. They bring people and practices from different places together under the same umbrella. The resulting encounters alter the fabric of everyday religious life. Moreover, they provide members with strong, intricate, multilayered webs of connections that are perfect platforms from which to live globally. They offer a haven in every port, be it London, Boston, or Bombay.” (Levitt 2007, p. 134).

1. Introduction

In the post-Cold War euphoria of the 1990s, globalization discourses often revolved around a sense of “anything goes” and nurtured imageries of a “global village” (Marshall McLuhan) that stands at the “end of history” (Francis Fukuyama). But for more than a decade, scholars have come to recognize that our world is anything but flat, and that places, spaces, and their entanglements matter very much in global processes of interaction. In 1996 sociologist Manuel Castells argued that “[t]he space of flows is not placeless”, but rather that places continue to be “the nodes of the network; that is, the location of strategically important functions that build a series of locality-based activities and organizations around a key function in the network. Location in the node links up the locality with the whole network” (Castells 2011, p. 443). Since then, scholars in the humanities, social sciences, and human geography have created various analytical frameworks to investigate how specific places are linked to globalization. In this regard, one may think of Roland Robertson’s

“glocalization”, Saskia Sassen’s “global cities”, and Arjun Appadurai’s “translocalities”. Despite their seemingly divergent perspectives and scopes, all of them agree on the significance of place and locality within the processes of globalization, which, in fact, are envisioned, promoted, executed, or rejected by specific actors in concrete places. Thus, in 1995, Roland Robertson contended that “[i]n this respect globalization, defined in its most general sense as the compression of the world as a whole, involves the *linking of localities*” (Robertson 1995, p. 35, emphasis added).

Beyond the significance of specific sites as nodes and hubs in transregional networks, these studies highlight the complex entanglements of these places that cut across regional or even national belonging (see, for instance, Appadurai 1996, p. 192). While most studies that build on Appadurai’s work on the translocal usually focus on migration, some scholars use it to look at religion. One of the rare examples in the field of Chinese religions is Irene Masdeu Torruella’s study of religious interactions between Chinese migrants in Spain and a local temple in their home county of Qingtian (青田縣), Zhejiang province (Torruella 2015).¹ Even without actually travelling to the temple, she argues that the migrants interact with the deities through the means of “proxy presences” (such as donating candles), and “long-distance divination practices” (by phone or video chat). Through these transnational ties, the temple Qingzhen chansi (清真禪寺) has become “a local place filled with social realities and networks that take place across different countries in Europe and diverse localities in Qingtian” and, thus, a translocality (Torruella 2015, p. 331).

Inspired by this intriguing case, this study explored another example of Chinese² temples that function as nodes and hubs in transnational and transregional interactions. Taking the Chinese–Taiwanese religious movement Yiguandao (一貫道) as a case in point, I examined how their temples, emically known as “Buddha halls” (*fotang* 佛堂), serve similar functions. These sites range from small niches in private residences to large temple compounds consisting of numerous buildings and structures, but they all share the potential of condensing not only religious, but also cultural and economic, interactions. Depending on the socioeconomic, cultural, and national composition of the membership of the individual *fotang*, and their level of commitment and outreach, some communities tend to cater chiefly to Chinese-speaking clientele, while others are more successful in attracting larger numbers of followers without any familial Chinese ties.³ Judging from my own fieldwork experience, however, the majority of *fotang* are rather “Chinese-centered”. Drawing on the analytical framework of “portals of globalization”, which was introduced more than a decade ago by a group of Leipzig-based global studies scholars, I argued that Yiguandao temples do not serve merely as nodes and hubs in a global religious network, but I also explored to what extent the specific sites feed into their respective local societies, and thus, offer a portal to globalization and various individual globalizing projects that cannot be reduced to religious ties with other Yiguandao temples alone. Thus, this paper contributes to the growing body of literature in regard to the concept of “portals of globalization”, which almost entirely leaves out the field of religion, and usually focuses on political, economic, and cultural interactions in sites such as trading ports, free trading zones, and universities. Building on textual scholarship and extensive ethnographic fieldwork in various sites in Taiwan, Vienna (Austria), South Africa, California, and Japan that I conducted from 2016 to 2018, I used empirical material from various Buddha halls across the globe to probe into the usefulness of the concept for the study of religions. Thus, rather than presenting a single case study, this paper aimed at advancing the applicability of the concept to hitherto untouched empirical grounds.

Before delving into the discussion of the concept of “portals of globalization” and how it has been utilized in global studies in Section 3, Section 2 introduces the global spread and transregional networks of Yiguandao practitioners, both of which emerged in the 1940s, but started to particularly take hold from the 1970s onwards. As the main part of this paper, Section 4 employs the concept of “portals of globalization” to look at how Yiguandao *fotang* function as pathways to transregional interactions in terms of human, religious, cultural, financial, and even material resources. I argued that Buddha halls, particularly

larger ones, enable practitioners and visitors to connect to processes of globalization and various individual globalizing projects, often without the need to travel themselves. In particular, this main section looks at Yiguandao *fotang* from four angles, exploring (1) their portal functions, (2) the financial, material, and religious networks they are integrated into, (3) the entanglements of mobile and immobile actors who convene at these temples, both physically and virtually, and (4) how they connect practitioners to a religious topography. The Section 5 summarizes the preliminary findings.

2. Yiguandao's Transregional Activism

Often considered one of the fastest-growing religious movements in Asia, Yiguandao (the usual emic transcription is “I-Kuan Tao”) grew from a centuries-old sectarian context in late imperial China, but it was only in early twentieth-century northern China when Yiguandao emerged as an independent religious community. It exhibits an innovative synthesis of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist teachings and practices, as well as sectarian traditions and popular religious influences (Jordan and Overmyer 1986; Lu 2008; Billioud 2020). Already making their first appearances in neighboring countries in the late 1940s, Yiguandao activists⁴ began to spread their teachings beyond mainland China, first to Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, and then also to southeast Asian countries. After the Communist takeover of China in 1949 and the harsh persecution of Yiguandao, particularly in the early 1950s (Hung 2010), most Yiguandao divisions and branches retreated to Taiwan and Hong Kong to establish new headquarters; there were a few notable exceptions in Myanmar, Korea, and Japan that developed independent of Taiwan and Hong Kong. After a nascent period of overseas connections, especially with southeast Asia, it was particularly during the course of the relaxation of migrant policies, and the increase in business migration from Taiwan and Hong Kong to North America and Europe after 1965, that Yiguandao activists succeeded in establishing a global network of temples, national associations, and one nominal “World I-Kuan Tao Headquarters”, established in Los Angeles in 1996.⁵ More than two decades later, in May 2020, this institution was supplemented by another seemingly similar organization, but based in Taiwan, the *Zhonghua Yiguandao quanqiu zonghui* (中華一貫道全球總會; “Chinese Yiguandao Global Association”).⁶ The exact relationship of these two institutions is not quite clear yet, but for the purpose of this paper it suffices to note that they serve as representative bodies, and they do not exhibit any sense of religious or organizational authority.

Seeing Yiguandao's tremendous development from a local religious group in late 1920s rural Shandong Province to a global movement that consists of more than twenty autonomous divisions, many more sub-branches and, presumably, millions of members worldwide, this expansionary dynamic emerged from the sect's inherent missionary appeal that not only draws on an eschatological sense of urgency, but also on its ability to produce practitioners who tend to “confirm” their faith (in the Weberian sense), among other practices, by proselytizing others (drawing on the analysis in Billioud 2020, pp. 58–64, 67–71). Thus, from a spatial perspective, Yiguandao activists create transregional networks that link numerous communities and individuals, as well as organizations and institutions, together. Since these various social condensations, as well as individuals, are usually affiliated with at least one particular Buddha hall, these networks are also webs of ties between places. As Yiguandao is not, as explained above, a centralized organization, such as the Roman Catholic Church, we observe various Buddha halls that serve not only as important nodes within the networks of their respective divisions, but also function as bridges in terms of cross-branch interaction. Moreover, as demonstrated later on in this paper, missionary expansion is not entirely in the hands of the mostly Taiwanese headquarters, but rather often international chapters develop into regional centers of religious interactions. Drawing on the usage in social network analysis, I called the more influential and significant nodes within Yiguandao's networks “hubs”, i.e., sites that are characterized by an above-average level of connection to other sites and which, because of their centrality, often occupy positions of prestige, authority, and legitimacy. In the

case of Jichu Zhongshu (基礎忠恕), one of Yiguandao's largest subdivisions, for instance, the numerous smaller *fotang* are nodes—as they connect particularly local practitioners to the overall community—while the headquarters Jichu Zhongshu daoyuan (基礎忠恕道院), on the outskirts of Taoyuan City (桃園市) in northern Taiwan, and the Los Angeles center Quanzhen daoyuan (全真道院), discussed below, serve as hubs, as they are the sites to which most regional and transregional ties are directed. Seeing it this way, and regardless of their location within or outside of Taiwan, both centers serve as transregional hubs or, as demonstrated below, portals of globalization. This, I argued, is a fruitful way to go beyond the purported dichotomous binary of “Chinese” *fotang* in Taiwan and “transnational” temples overseas. Rather, empirical data clearly show that both types of hubs are transregionally entangled (Billioud 2020, pp. 208–14).

3. Trans-National, Trans-Local, Trans-Regional? Religious “Portals of Globalization”

Readers will have already noticed the frequent use of “transregional” instead of the more established concept of “transnationalism”. By doing so, I followed an approach put forward by Matthias Middell and his Leipzig research group, who employ this terminology to highlight a greater diversity of spatial formats than the nation state (Middell 2018). They join a growing choir of critics who discard “transnational” because it takes the nation for granted. Thus, some scholars, such as historian Margrit Pernau, argue that we may very well think of quite a few types of relations that are clearly not transnational, but rather translocal, as they merely link people in two (or more) localities, where the nation is not involved at all (Pernau 2011, p. 70). I agree that not all social interactions that link various sites in different countries are, a priori, transnational. For instance, thinking of the tiniest village of a few dozen inhabitants, it is very likely that there will be some residents who need to travel transnationally for business purposes, or for their individual pleasure, but this does not make these locales transnational, per se. Inspired by Matthias Middell's recent take on the category of “spatial formats”, I contend that we clearly need to distinguish purely individual national crossings (for doing business or pursuing leisure activities) that are meaningful only for the actors themselves or a small group of linked individuals (family, friends, colleagues) on the one hand, and interactions that are relevant to a larger group of people—local communities, regional societies, or, eventually, society as a whole—and which often are *relatively* routinized and institutionalized, on the other (Middell 2019, pp. 18–19). In this understanding, I insist on the “relative” quality of routinization and institutionalization, as entirely single events (such as large festivities, meetings, or ritual occasions) may attract devotees from all over the globe, and thus, they can be meaningfully analyzed as transnational events.

As outlined in the introduction, many studies, particularly those in anthropology, favor the term “translocal” when talking about how two or more places are connected transregionally, as it highlights that these places are inhabited simultaneously by a sedentary and circulating population (Tan and Yeoh 2016, p. 41), i.e., by two types of spatial actors whom I call “settlers” and “visitors”, depending on the frequency of their border crossings (I return to this terminology below). Yet, thanks to the revolution in computer and communication technology since the 1990s, people do not need to be present physically, but through mobile phones and related devices, they are able to be co-present in more than one place. Hence, in his study of migrant places, Ruben Gielis argues that these sites serve as translocalities, in that they enable migrants to reach out to people in other places who are not themselves physically present (Gielis 2009, pp. 280–81). While this take helps to conceptualize Yiguandao *fotang* from a global studies perspective, as intersections of local settlers, translocal visitors, and virtual attendees, this framework falls short of taking different kinds of ties into account, as it merely focuses on human actors.

This is, I argue, where the concept of “portals of globalization” is helpful, “as it can encompass both a central position in global exchanges and a profound cultural influence owing to these [sites'] very positioning at the interface between cross-border networking and regional or national territorialization” (Middell 2019, p. 45). Going back to a series of

conferences in the late 2000s, global studies scholars Matthias Middell and Katja Naumann were among the earliest to propose the framework for global studies (Middell and Naumann 2010). Representing “places where flows and regulation come together” (Middell and Naumann 2010, p. 162), “places with a high intensity of global interactions in terms of people, goods, and ideas” (Baumann et al. 2017, p. 11), or “places where globalization processes crystallize or pop up repeatedly over time” (Castryck 2015, p. 11), the concept links long-term traditions, site-specific contexts, and specific agency, as actors may gain experience in global connectivity in these sites, which subsequently contributes to how these places acquire a specific role in collective memory and historical narratives (Baumann et al. 2017, p. 12; Middell 2017, p. 72). In their original formulation, Middell and Naumann argue that portals are

“places that have been centres of world trade or global communication, have served as entrance points for cultural transfer, and where institutions and practices for dealing with global connectedness have been developed. Such places have always been known as sites of transcultural encounter and mutual influence. They are not only places through which economic and military dispersion has taken place and global networks have been created, but also where a whole range of social forms and symbolic cultural constructions (of the ‘own’ and the ‘other’, of home and locality) challenge national affiliation in communities of migrants, merchants, and travellers from distant places.” (Middell and Naumann 2010, p. 162)

In a later contribution Middell goes further into detail, arguing that the

“definition of portals of globalization includes both physical locations and infrastructures, such as harbours, shipyards, warehouses, and markets, as well as institutions and political abstractions, such as citizenship rights and contractual enforcement by courts. From the standpoint of the men and women who lived and traded through such portals of globalization, these places can be seen as hubs of entrepreneurship, job markets, and even religious and political safe havens. On the other hand, they were also important sites of regulation and control, which included exclusionary practices and forced displacement.” (Middell 2017, p. 72)

In their attempt to further systematize the concept, Claudia Baumann, Antje Dietze, and Megan Maruschke identify four primary contributions: (1) it highlights agency, particularly beyond the perceived binary of Global North and Global South; (2) it identifies the scope and directionality of global interconnections in specific cases, and does not take a global scale for granted; (3) it considers temporal change as portals emerge, change their function, or become irrelevant; (4) and it specifies connectivity by identifying concrete mechanisms, infrastructures, actors, and media of interaction, rather than evoking abstract notions of flows, connections, and circulations (Baumann et al. 2017, pp. 14–16). Finally, the authors also plead that a “closer look at the positionality and agency of particular actors” is needed to analyze the “character and function of portals of globalization and the corresponding regimes of circulation and control” (Baumann et al. 2017, p. 16). Their assessment is particularly noteworthy, as it highlights that movements of people, things, and ideas are indeed vital to a portal that otherwise would be deserted and become irrelevant, while simultaneously resisting the ubiquitous notion of “flows”, which has permeated global studies since its inception. I fully agree with the reservations put forward by various scholars, who argue that the trope tends to deterritorialize, naturalize, homogenize, and abstract distinct human actions; it also overplays notions of mobility and fluidity, so as to invoke an “an image of movement as perpetual and in continuum, one that has neither an identifiable origin nor an end and one that crystallizes but momentarily” (Gänger 2017, p. 315; Spakowski 2018, p. 230; Tsing 2005, pp. 5–6; Stein 2017, pp. 42–48).

It is particularly the focus on “the local and historical particularity of the place, the idiosyncratic creativity of the actors, and the specific ways in which connectedness operates [that draws] empirical attention to the heart of the production of globalization” (Castryck

2015, p. 14). Due to its potential to look beyond “the usual political and economic global powerhouses” and “the usual suspects of globalization narratives, like imperial metropolises and industrial technologies”, (Castryck 2015, p. 16), the concept opens new ways to “not reduce globalization to political and economic processes at the expense of cultural and social dynamics” (Castryck 2015, p. 16). While there is an inherent, elitist bias in the original formulation (Middell and Naumann 2010, p. 162), nonetheless, the authors conclude that the framework also offers a “perspective on transnational movements and on their control ‘from below’” (Middell and Naumann 2010, p. 163). Likewise, Middell and Naumann argue that “it seems today that even small towns are becoming centres of the confrontation between the local and the global” (Middell and Naumann 2010, p. 163). Accordingly, a recent special issue also includes discussions of refugee camps, mining towns, or universities as portals of globalization (see *Comparatio*, vol. 27, no. 3/4).

It is the potential of the concept to address agency, the scope, scale, and historical evolution of global interconnections, as well as “the complex relationship between a specific place and its hinterland” (Dietrich 2017, p. 42) that makes it a promising outset for an analysis of religious sites as portals of globalization. Unfortunately, the proponents of the approach almost entirely leave out the realm of religion,⁷ as most studies investigate economic, political, cultural, and academic interactions. However, even a cursory look at the history of religions provides ample evidence that a number of religious sites throughout history can be analyzed through the lens of portals of globalization. In regard to Buddhism, for instance, the famous monasterial university Nālandā is a perfect match. Located in the northeastern state of Bihar, in modern India, and praised by some as the oldest university of the world, it was established in the fifth century and served as a transregional hub of Buddhist expertise that attracted hundreds of students from various Asian societies, including the famous Chinese pilgrims Xuanzang 玄奘 (602?–64) and Yijing 義淨 (635–713), or their Korean counterpart Hyech’o 慧超 (704–87). Nālandā also contributed to the spread of Buddhism to other regions as well, as, for instance, Śāntarakṣita (725–788), a scholar of Nālandā credited with having brought Buddhism to Tibet. Moreover, Nālandā was also part of a financial web of resources, as donations were acquired from both local and foreign rulers, some of them located as far away as Sumatra (Sen 2014, p. xvii; Freiburger and Kleine 2015, pp. 53, 94, 215, 325). In China, for instance, the city of Chang’an 長安 (present-day Xi’an 西安, in northwestern China), may likewise be interpreted as a historic portal of globalization. During the heyday of the Tang Dynasty (618–907), and with up to more than a million inhabitants, the then capital Chang’an was not only one of the largest and most cosmopolitan cities in the world at the time, but it was also a site of intense transregional religious interactions, as pilgrims from Japan and Korea, Buddhist monastics from India, Nestorian Christians from the Mediterranean, and Jews, Zoroastrians, and Manicheans settled there.⁸

4. Yiguandao *fotang* as “Portals of Globalization”

These two brief examples suffice to demonstrate the potential of the framework to explore religious interactions at specific locales—ranging from religious sites, such as individual temples, monasteries, shrines, mosques, or churches, to places with a great density of religious sites. In what follows, I sketched a very first attempt to analyze Yiguandao Buddha halls as portals of globalization. Even though the largest of them are not on a par with Nālandā or Chang’an in terms of size, population, diversity, or scope of transregional ties, I am still convinced that it is a promising endeavor to test the concept here, as we may gain an understanding of how, and in what ways, religious temples serve as transregional hubs. In what follows, I focused on a rather theoretical exploration, which is supplemented by empirical findings from my fieldwork. An in-depth case study of one particular *fotang*, however, is beyond the scope of this contribution.

4.1. Portal Functions

To begin with, I called attention to the metaphor of the portal as an entrance to, or exit from, specific places, but also as a gateway to specific activities and projects. This sense of directionality and purpose is, in my view, what clearly distinguishes the portals of globalization approach from, for example, the concept of translocalities, which does not make such claims. Portals can be accessed from both sides. For instance, Quanzhen daoyuan, the well-established regional hub of the Jichu Zhongshu subdivision in suburban Los Angeles, is not just a portal for Chinese practitioners to engage with fellow Chinese people, but also allows access to the American religious landscape—in which the temple is situated. Conversely, it is also very much a gateway for non-Chinese Americans to engage more thoroughly with what they conceive of as “Asian philosophies” or “Eastern wisdom”. Thus, many non-Chinese practitioners at the temple experience Yiguandao as a form of Daoism that, in their eyes, is more authentic than the average North American “Tao pop culture”.⁹ Thus, *fotang* portals are specific places where different groups of people meet and interact, and where their clearly distinct agendas are negotiated.

Even though they are accessible from both sides, portals—very much like doors in the real world—may not be open all the time or to everybody in the same way, which is why the metaphor nicely catches factual social, economic, or religious asymmetries, as well as processes of exclusion that may be deliberately imposed by “gatekeepers”. Although, generally speaking, Yiguandao Buddha halls are fairly open spaces and practitioners welcome people of any religious, social, or political background, we nonetheless may observe mechanisms of exclusion, which are not necessarily deliberately designed to keep someone out on purpose. For example, visitors need to accept vegetarian food as the only culinary choice, which some people find encroaches on their personal lives. More importantly, however, if one aims to become fully integrated into the community, to participate in rituals, or to lecture about religious or moral topics in the weekly classes, important demands are placed on the members, the first of which is initiation. Yiguandao practitioners usually treat it as a ceremony to transmit the true teachings and practices that enable ultimate salvation but without any connotation of conversion, and hence, initiates are absolutely free to continue their prior faiths afterwards. Yet, in reality, it is likely that many outsiders, who otherwise might be interested in Yiguandao, are distracted because *they conceive of it* as a conversion, which is frightening to some. In addition, to serve as a guest lecturer in the Sunday classes, practitioners have to meet a distinct set of criteria to become a “lecturer” (*jiangshi* 講師),¹⁰ including long-term commitment, a vegetarian lifestyle, and a formal ritual vow of the “pure mouth” (*qingkou* 清口), which combines demands for “clean” diets and language.¹¹ Finally, in order to become a *jiangshi*, practitioners are also required to be “shrine owners” (*tanzhu* 壇主), i.e., to possess a shrine or private Buddha hall (*jiating fotang* 家庭佛堂, “domestic Buddha hall”) beforehand. Thus, even though the portal is, theoretically, open to anyone, for individuals to pass through and to engage in close interaction with others at and through the temple, a certain level of commitment is needed.

Besides rituals or meetings that are held on a regular basis—ranging from weekly meetings to annual festivals—larger *fotang* also stage events that tend to attract devotees from other places, some of whom even reach out transregionally. One such type of event is the anniversaries of deceased leaders, which prompts dedicated practitioners from all over the globe to return to the headquarters and participate in the celebrations. It is at these meetings that members of the particular divisions exchange, socialize, and envision future collaborative projects together. During my fieldwork, for instance, I participated in the commemoration festival on behalf of the passing of Gao Binkai 高斌 (1924–2008), who was the long-term leader of Andong Division (安東組).¹² Held at the prospective new headquarters Andong Milesan (安東彌勒山), on the outskirts of Hsinchu City (新竹) in northwestern Taiwan, the event was attended by approximately 600 practitioners. I spoke to initiation masters (*dianchuanshi* 點傳師) and other committed devotees from Japan, Austria, the US, Thailand, Panama, and Australia. One year later, the centenary of

Gao's passing attracted 3500 participants,¹³ a number that signals the portal function of the headquarters, but which is still small, when compared to some of the largest divisions, such as Fayi Chongde (發一崇). In this case, for example, more than 7000 individuals attended the centenary anniversary of the late leader Chen Dagu 陳大姑 (1923–2008). These numbers were so large that they were required to be staged, in a similar fashion to Protestant mega churches in the US, at Heping basketball arena (和平籃球館) in Taipei.¹⁴

These, however, are by no means the only events that rely on the portal functions of Buddha halls. Thus, most Yiguandao divisions have a well-established tradition of staging youth camps, chiefly on an annual basis, that are intended to bring together the younger generation of followers from diverse places. While some cater primarily to people within one nation, most of them also target devotees in different countries. For instance, during my fieldwork, I observed one such event staged at Lingyinsi (靈隱寺), the headquarters of the Fayi Lingyin (發一靈隱) branch, located in the southern, rural outskirts of metropolitan Taipei. In this case, mostly overseas Chinese people from Japan (24 individuals), Hong Kong, Macao, the United States (6), South Korea (8), and Taiwan (12) came together for three days to engage in Yiguandao learning, mutual exchange, and other activities that seek to foster collective transregional identities.¹⁵ Similarly, Zhongshu daoyuan (忠恕道院), a temple located in Brisbane, Australia, has conducted annual summer study groups, for mostly Taiwanese temple youth, since its founding in 2002. Besides living at the temple and assisting in daily work for one month, the teenagers also usually attend an English class, and thus, are able to discover Australia through the specific *fotang* portal (Broy 2022, pp. 170–71).

Beyond religious interactions in the strict sense, *fotang* also serve as portals to Chinese culture more generally. Particularly in those sites that are located in countries where Chinese people are a minority, this portal function is salient not only for people with Chinese familial roots who aim to connect to this heritage, but also for non-Chinese actors, and “Sinophiles” who seek to immerse themselves in Chinese culture.¹⁶ On the one hand, most international *fotang* offer regular classes on diverse topics, ranging from Confucian scriptures and physical training (such as Taijiquan 太極拳), to vegetarian Chinese cooking and *yangsheng* (養生; practical advice for a healthier lifestyle). On the other hand, larger *fotang* in particular also often stage important cultural events that are part of the general Chinese festival calendar, such as the Lunar New Year. In my fieldwork at Quanzhen daoyuan in 2018, for instance, I witnessed a large event that attracted about 150 people and which, besides Yiguandao lectures and rituals, also entailed a tombola, and a traditional lion dance performance. This artistic presentation was performed by a troupe affiliated with another local Chinese temple devoted to Wong Tai Sin (大仙), a deity most popular in Hong Kong and Guangdong, and which is located in Monterey Park only 15 km away from Quanzhen temple.¹⁷ The professional ensemble, which was paid for their performance, is well-known in the local Chinese community and is hired for various events. This example is particularly instructive in demonstrating the deep-seated ties of Yiguandao communities to their respective local Chinese community.

On the same occasion, the Los Angeles center of Andong division staged a tombola and self-organized food court in the temple garden, which was attended by roughly 300 people. Besides a few non-Chinese initiates who appear to come to the temple only occasionally, the event also brought together the two prevalent linguist groups among Chinese migrants in the US that usually do not mix so easily. Due to the fact that Mandarin and Cantonese are not mutually comprehensible, and overseas Cantonese speakers in particular often do not comprehend Mandarin at all, the speakers of both languages tend to remain within their respective linguistic group. Hence, this event obviously served a portal function, as the host made all announcements in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English. Yet, the situation is even more complex, as the two linguistic groups are not to be reduced to two different regions on the Chinese mainland, but, in fact, many of them trace their familial origins back to various overseas Chinese communities in southeast Asia. Thus, the event at the temple was not only a perfect example of how linguistically and nationally diverse Chinese people

encounter each other, but it also served as a portal to a very transnational Chinese culture, as the food court provided self-made Chinese snacks that originated in various overseas Chinese destinations such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Taiwan.¹⁸ Thus, *fotang* portals do not only provide access to a purportedly monolithic “Chineseness”, but they are also nodes that link various regional Chinese traditions.

Finally, *fotang* are not only places where people from various national, cultural, and religious background interact, but they are also sites where transregionally and globally relevant topics are discussed and negotiated. Thus, they are sites where local actors link with actors and debates elsewhere. To mention a recent example, in 2021 many Yiguandao communities mounted campaigns to promote vegetarianism as a means to counter the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁹ Using the slogan “one vegetarian meal a day keeps the virus away” (emic translation of *yiri yizhai, yiqing xiaozai* 一日一齋, 疫情消災), these endeavors were immersed in an entire web of religious claims about the health, moral, karmic, and salvational benefits of vegetarian diets, both individually and collectively.²⁰ The signature phrase, and the idea behind it, were not invented separately by individual temples, but were part of a global campaign run by Yiguandao activists on social media, such as LINE, WeChat, Facebook, Telegram, and Instagram, depending on the regional links of the activists. For instance, actors associated with Taiwan tend to use LINE, while PRC Chinese will use the Chinese app WeChat more often, thus, further channeling flows of information and exchange spatially. Buddha halls, therefore, do not only serve as the sites where some of these campaigns happen physically, but they are also themselves become part of discourses held globally. Thus, social media outlets and official Yiguandao publications reported repeatedly about these local events. For instance, a recent issue of the *I-Kuan Tao Association General Correspondence*—the mouthpiece of the official Yiguandao association in Taiwan—shared the news about such an initiative by a community in northwestern continental Malaysia that belongs to the Fayi Chongde (發一崇) subdivision. In July 2021, a group of volunteers at the temple prepared and gave out more than 200 vegetarian meals a day, 6 days a week, to advertise the various benefits of this particular diet to the local population.²¹ In this example, the entire campaign goes full circle, as not only is the *fotang* community’s campaign embedded in global Yiguandao and more general discourses, but also the initiative itself has become a topic shared and discussed transregionally.

4.2. Financial, Material, and Religious Networks

In order to adequately analyze the various ties between a portal and other places, it is beyond doubt that all kinds of subjects and relationships need to be investigated, ranging from individual actors, to groups, or international religious bodies, but also in regard to the interaction and movement of people, goods, resources, ideas, and practices.²² For constraints of space, however, I limited the discussion to some brief notes about the financial and material networks that link *fotang* portals to other sites. It is also for this reason that I cannot go into detail here on to what extent my approach to investigate transnational religious temples through the lens of “portals of globalization” could be supplemented fruitfully by integrating actor–network theory (ANT), which aims to integrate non-human “actants” into the analysis of networks. While this, undoubtedly, is a promising endeavor, such a discussion unnecessarily complicates the present discussion, which is why I chose to postpone it until a future discourse.²³

Even though earlier research by Helen Rose Ebaugh, Janet Saltzman Chafetz, and their colleagues among migrant religious communities in the United States more than twenty years ago found that funds were usually raised locally (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a, p. 49), the experience of the construction of Yiguandao temples tell a different story. For instance, the construction of Vienna’s Honghang *fotang* (宏航佛堂) (Andong division), finished in 2015, reveals a global network of capital. A list of 348 donors displayed at the temple includes individuals, *fotang*, and private businesses in Austria, Taiwan, Hong Kong, southeast Asia, and the United States who all contributed to the building. Conversely, this Buddha hall is not merely a recipient of global movements of money, but the temple itself

is likewise performing as a financial activist in global charities. For instance, the Honghang community, along with three other Buddha halls based in Vienna, contributed financially to the official PRC fundraising project, initiated by the Chinese embassy in Austria, to aid the victims of the 2008 Sichuan Earthquake (Broy 2020, pp. 180–81). In a similar vein, the Los Angeles Andong temple, mentioned above, holds monthly vegetarian cooking classes for its members that are entitled *xingfuzhai* (幸福齋; “happy vegetarian”). The courses are not only designed to aid members in culinary self-help, but also to raise money for the construction of the new headquarters, Andong Milesan, in Taiwan.²⁴ Likewise, the money collected in the New Year tombola mentioned in the previous section was donated towards this aim. Thus, far from being dependent on unilateral allowances granted by the headquarters, those “peripheries” contribute significantly to the funding of large constructions, and also to collective humanitarian work. Thus, in general, the flow of capital among Yiguandao communities is multidirectional.

In terms of material objects—such as religious paraphernalia, books, or everyday goods—*fotang* are also integrated into a web of resources. One example is social welfare and disaster relief. In Taiwan, the Buddhist charity “Tzu Chi Foundation” (Ciji gongdehui 慈濟功會) is famous for its decades of charitable work, but after a great earthquake in central Taiwan in 1999, Yiguandao practitioners also began to be recognized as engaged activists (Song 2000; Zheng 2010, pp. 351–57). Thus, Yiguandao communities are eager to engage in humanitarian help and disaster relief in the Global South, thus, employing the Buddha halls to collect and distribute resources, including not only money, but also food donations and other supplies (Zheng 2010, pp. 351–70; Yang 2010, pp. 76–81). For instance, in the spring of 2015, activists of Tianshang Buddha Hall (Tianshang fotang 天上佛堂) in Kuala Lumpur, which is also the site of the Malaysian national Yiguandao association, raised 200,000 Malaysian ringgit (ca. EUR 51,000 as of April 2015), which was sent to a Yiguandao community in Nepal, close to Kathmandu, that was hit by a massive earthquake.²⁵ Similarly, during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Andong headquarters in Hsinchu spearheaded an initiative, animating practitioners from all across Taiwan to donate face masks, which the headquarters would then distribute on behalf of them to friends and families overseas.²⁶ At that time, Andong’s website frequently published brief notes and photographs of the recipients in their Buddha halls, thus, making visible the densely knit global web of interactions. Finally, books and pamphlets that are openly displayed on bookshelves at the temples, and many of which visitors are free to take home, also demonstrate the embeddedness in transregional networks linking various *fotang*, but also the publishers and individuals who donated them. For instance, in the Tianxin fotang (天信佛堂; affiliated with the Baoguang Jiande 寶光建 subdivision) located in Alhambra, CA, in Los Angeles County, I found that many books were originally printed in Singapore, Taipei, and even Sao Paolo.²⁷ Hence, the book collections of an Yiguandao *fotang* are not only indicative of the scope of its social network, but they also enable the temple to serve as a portal to various projects of a globalizing faith (see also Section 4.4 below).

4.3. Mobile and Immobile Actors

Similar to other religious communities, mobile activists, particularly initiation masters (*dianchuanshi*), are instrumental in creating transregional networks of temples. Eager to travel and to establish Buddha halls wherever their social or religious networks take them, they develop expanding networks of *fotang*, which they continuously monitor and repeatedly visit over the years. In his masterful analysis of the contemporary dynamics of Yiguandao, Sébastien Billioud makes a compelling case in point. Presenting data from a Buddha hall located in Kowloon, Hong Kong over the span of six years, he demonstrates not only that the sheer number of affiliated *fotang* increases significantly (+59%), but also that the regional distribution is impressive: as of 2015, the religious network of the Hong Kong Buddha hall consisted of 70 sites, as compared to 44 in 2010 (both numbers excluding the original Hong Kong *fotang*), which are distributed as follows: Taiwan (21), Japan (3), Thailand (15), Macao (9), Malaysia (6), eastern Malaysia (7), Singapore (1),

Vietnam (1), Nepal (2), Cambodia (3), Australia (1), and Hong Kong (1) (Billioud 2020, pp. 209–11). Taking into account the location of Hong Kong as a special administrative region within the PRC, and the outspoken aim of Yiguandao practitioners to reclaim mainland China, the factual numbers are even higher. Due to political reasons that do not allow open proselytization in China, they are excluded from the list. The transregional distribution of affiliated *fotang*, which is especially strong in southeast Asia, is instructive, as it demonstrates the extent to which individual communities and their temples serve as self-asserting religious hubs with distinct senses of mission. Far from simple bilateral links between one purported headquarters (in Taiwan) and numerous sites at the periphery, this case powerfully argues that Yiguandao practitioners tend to create complex networks that consist of multiple nodes and hubs. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the largest number of affiliated *fotang* in one particular society is in Taiwan (30%), which is where the Fayi Chongde subdivision, to which all these temples belong, is strongest and where its headquarters are located. However, the immediate head temple of these 21 *fotang* is not located in Taiwan, but in Hong Kong, which teaches an important lesson against stereotypical center–periphery relationships that are at the heart of many diffusionist models that dominate the transregional spread of religions.

This observation of the significance of mobile actors for the expansion and maintenance of transregional temple networks brings me to the equally complex relationship between mobile and immobile actors. As the implication of stasis as entailed in the qualifier “immobile” is not only empirically false, but also a normative statement, I prefer to distinguish between “settlers” and “visitors”, an ideal typical binary that draws on the duration of their stay in one temple. While settlers are usually long-term members of one particular local Yiguandao community and live at this place permanently, visitors stay there only temporarily and for a particular purpose, such as monitoring local developments (in the case of religious specialists), or to assist in everyday affairs (in the case of religious volunteers). Note that both categories are relational, as settlers of, for example, Honghang Buddha Hall in Vienna can very much be visitors at Quanzhen temple in Los Angeles, and vice versa. Hence, these terms are not only not essentialist, and not at all mutually exclusive, and they merely highlight an actor’s relationship to a particular site.

In highlighting the significance of settlers in globalizing projects, I argue that we cannot simply ascribe transregional spatial endeavors entirely to mobile practitioners, while the purportedly immobile ones do not appear in this story at all. As many of the examples that I analyzed briefly on the previous pages indicate, one does not need to be mobile at all to participate in transregional interactions. One significant reason for this is, obviously, computer-mediated communication, which, due to its space-time compression, makes co-presence across the globe possible.²⁸ But as Dominic Sachsenmaier argues convincingly in his case study of Zhu Zongyuan 朱宗元 (1616–1660)—a local elite and Christian convert in late imperial southeastern coastal China who never left his home region of Ningbo—modern means of communication are not necessary in order to become involved in globalization. Through his deep immersion in Catholicism, and intense interaction with European missionaries, he was far more transregionally entangled than most of his peers at that time (Sachsenmaier 2018). Likewise, the engagement of local people at a *fotang* in, for example, Los Angeles, and their interaction with other members of the community, enables them to participate in transregional processes. Even if both groups of actors are fairly immobile and, thus, travel only rarely, their engagement at this specific site links them to all kinds of networks, interactions, movements of material items, capital, and ideas, as these places are globally entangled.

Nevertheless, mobile actors are clearly at the heart of Yiguandao’s globalization projects. Their travels and transregional engagements are indispensable in the founding and maintenance of new sites of worship. Most often, economic motivations are at the heart of individual initiatives to relocate to another country, and thus, these actors often draw on established migration networks to find their own way. These connections, in turn, are then often used by practitioners to spread their faith. Hence, it is no wonder that

leading activists themselves coined the famous phrase “to bring the Dao to wherever your business takes you” (*shengyi zuo dao na, daowu jiu kai na* 生意做到哪, 道務就開哪) (Lu 2008, pp. 82–83). Yet, despite the obvious link between Chinese business migration networks on the one hand, and proselytization on the other, Yiguandao’s formatting of transregional space cannot be reduced to this pattern. Rather, there is a considerable cohort of devoted activists who travel voluntarily around the globe to monitor local developments or to assist local communities in their daily religious life, such as conducting important rituals, classes, or festivals. While many of them belong to the class of religious specialists, i.e., initiation masters (*dianchuanshi*) and lecturers (*jiangshi*), there is also a considerable number of volunteers, who are not particularly high-ranking members of their home communities, but who nevertheless are keen to assist their fellows in faith (Billioud 2020, pp. 210–11).

Most visitors come to a particular temple only on a short-term basis, usually to assist in specific events or meetings. But during my fieldwork, I also learned about many activists who stay at other *fotang* for weeks, and even for months. One particularly intriguing example was a Buddha Hall affiliated with the Fayi Lingyin subdivision and located in suburban Cape Town. Only one of three female temple managers whom I met is a settler, while the *dianchuanshi* is affiliated with the Fayi Lingyin headquarters in Taiwan but most of the time lives in Tokyo. The second visitor is a lecturer (*jiangshi*) who originally hails from Hong Kong, but migrated to the United States more than thirty years ago. Both women visit the Cape Town temple on a regular basis and are considered members of the local congregation.²⁹ Later during my fieldwork, I also found that members of even more communities visit the Cape Town temple too. For instance, in Japan in spring 2018, I encountered a female practitioner of PRC descent who has lived in Japan for more than thirty years, and who told me that she planned to visit precisely the same *fotang* later that year and stay there for several weeks.³⁰

This trend of transregionally mobile engagements, however, is not limited to religious specialists. Over the past two decades, official Yiguandao journals regularly published various testimonies of Taiwanese volunteers who visited overseas communities to assist their daily religious lives.³¹ During my fieldwork in Japan in spring 2018, I also encountered one Buddha hall in suburban metropolitan Tokyo that was founded just a few months prior, and which was being managed at the time by two female practitioners from Taiwan, until the equally Taiwanese *dianchuanshi* and other personnel were to visit one month later. One of them also told me that she had volunteered in other temples in Hong Kong and Malaysia beforehand. Yet, the distribution of authority was quite clear, as important decisions were always made by the initiation master who was contacted by telephone or LINE and who was, so to say, virtually present.³² One reason for this circulation of personnel is, obviously, a lack of local talent, but it also serves specific *fotang* to establish transregional networks of human circulation, which, simultaneously, helps activists to connect to these places.

Judging from my fieldwork experience, financial and material resources that enable the circulations of all types of resources usually come from the activists themselves, as the acts of voluntary giving money, material goods (such as food, paraphernalia, or books), and human resources is greatly privileged. Thus, the invitation to contribute whatever one feels to be capable of is an important mechanism of increasing commitment to the group (Billioud 2020, pp. 45, 215). For instance, during the initiation ceremony neophytes are usually asked to make two vows, the second of which requests them to contribute to Yiguandao by “donating financially and promoting the Dao” (*caifa shuangshi* 財法雙施).³³ Of course, an in-depth case study of one *fotang* portal would need to explore the question of who commands, coordinates, and sponsors these circulations in detail, but for the sake of brevity this is not possible in the present contribution.

4.4. Portals to Religious Topographies

The transregional networks that I described on the previous pages do not merely connect specific temples of the Yiguandao community in order to exchange information, ideas, goods, and personnel. They also link practitioners to all kinds of places and spaces that are

significant in Yiguandao beliefs and practices. Even though interaction with practitioners from other places fosters the sense of belonging to a global community, this section focuses on how concrete spaces and places are linked to each other. Inspired by the earlier work of historian Susanne Rau, I call this ensemble of interconnections “religious topographies”, to describe how religiously significant places across the globe are distributed, connected, and hierarchized, but also to look at how they structure practitioners’ perceptions of space. Far from being stable and fixed entities, the places that belong to them are subject to negotiations, conflicting interpretations, appropriations, and conversions to other usages. Finally, these topographies do not only comprise of specific buildings and sites in a strictly material sense, but also spatial practices and collective imaginations of space (Rau 2008, pp. 20–23). Note that I deliberately characterize the connected places and spaces not as “religious”, but merely as “religiously significant”, as I do not claim that religious topographies merely link “religious” places in the strict sense, but topographies of a specific religious group are also very likely to incorporate sites that the practitioners do not necessarily view as religious or sacred. For instance, the religious topography shared by Yiguandao practitioners also comprise historically and culturally significant sites in mainland China, but also Chinese sites in other localities, all of which represent and symbolize “Chineseness”, which is an important element of Yiguandao’s self-understanding and mission. Thus, these sites are linked to what Jens Reinke calls “Global China”, i.e., a globally dispersed social configuration that “is comprised of internally diverse, dynamic and interrelated clusters of actors and their individual globalization projects, all of which are linked to another, albeit to different degrees, by a certain cultural, social, and linguistic proximity” (Reinke 2021, p. 118).³⁴

Looking at how transnational migrants’ religious practices refigure traditional religious topographies, sociologist Peggy Levitt emphasizes that “faith traditions give their followers symbols, rituals, and stories they use to create alternative sacred landscapes, marked by holy sites, shrines, and places of worship” (Levitt 2007, pp. 12–13). Furthermore, she writes that “[r]eligious global citizens imagined themselves in global religious landscapes, dotted by religious buildings and shrines. [. . .] It was that they thought of themselves as living in an alternative topography, with residents, rules, and landmarks that mattered more to them than their secular equivalents” (Levitt 2007, p. 83). Even though she appears to primarily have physical sites in mind, her interpretation also holds true in the case of Yiguandao. Thus, besides the factual human, material, financial, or authority relations that link various *fotang* across the globe, and which have been discussed in this article, I shall use the remaining space to add a few comments on how *fotang* portals provide access to a repository of symbolic resources that link practitioners to the perceived global Yiguandao community, and to global China.

One case in point is that many larger *fotang* in Taiwan tend to display photographs of affiliated communities and their temples around the globe. To give one brief example, during my fieldwork at Chong’en *fotang* (崇恩佛堂) in New Taipei City’s Zhonghe district (中和區), which is the headquarters of the Fayi Tian’en (發一天恩) subdivision, I was presented with a picture wall depicting *fotang* and their communities in fifteen countries, ranging from Italy, Spain, and Great Britain in Europe, to the US, Australia, New Zealand, and Malaysia, Cambodia, and Indonesia in southeast Asia, among others.³⁵ By being exposed to this worldwide net of relations, temple goers are easily given a sense of belonging to a global community of Dao cultivators. Another more recent example, most likely catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which had a serious impact on collective religious gatherings in most societies, is that a number of headquarters in Taiwan have started to live-stream some of their most important religious events for their increasingly global audience. For instance, on 8 September 2020, the official Telegram channel and affiliated website *Yiguandao dianzibao* 一貫道電子報/*I Kuan Tao E Paper* advertised the celebratory inauguration of the Baiyang shengmiao 白陽聖廟 (“Holy Temple of the Era of the White Yang”), a monumental project managed and promoted most vividly by the Fayi Chongde subdivision. Held on 17 October 2020, the large ceremony attracted more than 10,000 practitioners and repre-

sentatives from all over the globe, and it also featured President Tsai Ing-wen 蔡英文 and various members of her administration. Besides the obvious portal function of Baiyang shengmiao to represent a physical place of transregional engagements, the entire ceremony was also broadcast live on YouTube in six languages (Chinese, Japanese, English, Thai, Indonesian, and Vietnamese),³⁶ which enabled practitioners at virtually every destination to participate.

Finally, *fotang* also exhibit all kinds of symbolic resources that link practitioners to China's past and its traditional culture. The architecture of the Baiyang shengmiao, for instance, closely resembles the world-famous Temple of Heaven (Tiantan 天壇), which is one of Beijing's most prominent landmarks that attracts millions of visitors per year. It also connects to China's past of Confucian state ritual, as the Tiantan was the place where the "son of heaven", i.e., the emperor, worshipped heaven as the representative of the supreme cosmic order. To add a last example, the Fayi Lingyin subdivision, and its headquarters Lingyinsi (靈隱寺), are named after a Buddhist monastery of the same name, which is not only one of Hangzhou's most famous Buddhist sites, but also the domain where the monastic life of the legendary twelfth-century monk and thaumaturge Jigong (濟公) began (Shahar 1998, pp. 212–17). In Yiguandao teachings, the eighteenth and final patriarch of the sect, Zhang Tianran 張天然 (1889–1947), is considered a reincarnation, and it was under his leadership that the hitherto local group developed into a nationwide movement from the late 1930s onward.³⁷

5. Conclusions

In this article, I probed the applicability of the framework of "portals of globalization" to a hitherto neglected field of inquiry, i.e., religion. By looking at how "Buddha halls" (*fotang*) of the Chinese–Taiwanese religious movement Yiguandao are entangled transregionally in terms of human, financial, material, religious, cultural, and symbolic links, I demonstrated that the concept is indeed useful in directing attention to how specific places provide access to these resources, and thus, enable practitioners to connect to processes of globalization and various individual globalizing projects. Thus, *fotang* do not merely represent crucial nodes and hubs within the global network of Yiguandao, but they also connect to many other groups of actors, practices, material objects, and imaginations, such as Chinese communities, traditional Chinese culture, and to the realm of "Sinophiles", who share an interest in Chinese culture or religion. In my view, this sense of directionality and scope is what distinguishes the concept of portals of globalization from other approaches (such as translocalities) that merely emphasize interaction and the copresence of, chiefly, human actors, thus missing out nonhuman entities, such as ideas, funds, and material objects. The concept highlights that Yiguandao *fotang*, and other temples, for that matter, are not merely sites where practitioners convene and worship, but that they represent places with a distinct set of resources and networks that enable practitioners, present both physically and virtually, to engage in globalizing projects, to interact with fellow practitioners on a transregional scale, to participate in global discourses, and to experience globalization "right around the corner". Of course, I need to add, not all *fotang* are, per se, portals of globalization, as transregional interactions need to attain a certain level of routinization and institutionalization, as well as a specific scope, that cuts across national, geographical, and cultural boundaries.

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Notes

- 1 While there exists a considerable body of academic literature about the global spread of various Chinese religious organizations, studies that aim to explore the significance and function of specific places and spaces in globalization processes do not figure prominently. For a brief state of the field survey about global Chinese religions up to 2017, see (Broy et al. 2017, pp. 5–9).
- 2 Throughout this paper, I shall use “Chinese” in a broad understanding to refer to individuals and communities who link themselves to (Han) Chinese ancestry, share (Han) Chinese cultural notions and practices, such as the Chinese language, and perceive of themselves as belonging to a global imagined community of Chinese. This wording, however, does not indicate any national identity of individual members of these communities. Instead, I will use “Taiwanese”, “PRC/Mainland Chinese”, or “Chinese American” etc. to further distinguish them. My understanding of the term “Chinese” mirrors emic perspectives that equally distinguish between Chinese nationals, i.e., citizens of the People’s Republic of China—which are referred to as *zhongguoren* 中國人—and (Han) Chinese people regardless of their national identities, who are addressed as *huaren* 華人. Hence, my usage of “Chinese” seeks to emulate the emic term *huaren*.
- 3 For many years already, Academia Sinica sociologist Yang Hung-jen works specifically on this kind of non-Chinese Yiguandao communities in Los Angeles in the United States as well as London and Manchester in the UK, see Yang (2015, 2017, 2022a, 2022b).
- 4 I use the word “religious activists” not to assume any political engagements, but to highlight how missionary zeal and a sense of eschatological urgency dominate these actors’ entire private and business lives, and thus to distinguish them from ordinary and occasional practitioners.
- 5 For a concise overview and interpretation of Yiguandao’s global spread, see (Broy 2020; Yang 2022b; Yang and Billioud 2022).
- 6 See the article “Yiguan xinchuan dao hua renjian 一貫薪傳 道化人間”, posted on *Yiguandao dianzibao* 一貫道電子報/*I Kuan Tao E Paper* on 19 April 2020, <https://iktepaper.weebly.com/27963212053042727841/5741320> (accessed on 19 April 2020). See also the entry in the “Taiwan Juridical Person Web” 台灣法人網, see <https://org.twincn.com/item.aspx?no=32891909&sn=410104> (accessed on 11 February 2022).
- 7 So far, only Matthias Middell hints rather generally that portals also served as hubs of “religious proselytization and conversion” and “religious and political safe havens” (Middell 2017, pp. 71–72), but without naming specific examples.
- 8 For a vivid description of Chang’an’s cosmopolitan ambience, see (Vogelsang 2012, pp. 255–56). For the various religious traditions in Tang-period Chang’an, see (Thilo 2006, pp. 290–369).
- 9 On the prominent role of Daoist elements—such as notions of Yin and Yang, *qi*, or the Dao (Tao)—in the recruitment of spiritual seekers by some of Quanzhen temple’s activists, see (Broy 2020, pp. 268–73). On the North American “Tao pop culture” more generally, see (Palmer and Siegler 2017, pp. 15–17), who also coined this phrase.
- 10 The concrete list of criteria and the temporal scope varies across the many Yiguandao divisions and branches, so I present a rather streamlined set of requirements that basically apply to all subgroups.
- 11 On the process of faith-building and increasing commitment to the group, see (Billioud 2020, pp. 33–55). For a sociological interpretation of the function of vows in faith-building processes among Yiguandao devotees, see (Lu 2008, pp. 78–90).
- 12 Fieldwork, 1 May 2017.
- 13 See the report in Andong’s mouthpiece *Pingjiang zhukan* 萍江竹刊, no. 172 (2018/5), 19.
- 14 See the report in *Fayi Chongde dianzibao* 發一崇電子報/*Fa Yi Chong De E-Paper*, article “Buxiuxi Pusa chengdao shizhounian Taipei dayuejin 不休息菩薩成道十週年台北大躍進”, uploaded on 6 May 2018, <https://www.fycdepaper.com/2148821271taipei/3752307> (accessed on 14 February 2022).
- 15 Fieldwork, 10 August 2016.
- 16 Similar functions, particularly in regard to non-Chinese practitioners, are also attested to international sites belonging to the Taiwanese Buddhist organization Foguangshan 佛光山, see (Chandler 2005, pp. 177–78; Reinke 2021, pp. 70–71), both authors of whom also discuss Foguangshan’s strategic commitment to Chinese culture. Similar observations have also been made in regard to migrant’s religious sites in the US more generally, see (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000b).
- 17 Fieldwork, 18 February 2018. The temple carries the official English name “Wong Tai Sen Taoism Center”.
- 18 Fieldwork at Andong daochang Hongluo fotang 安東道場宏洛佛堂, Duarte, CA, USA, 11 February 2018.
- 19 I discussed this campaign in a paper presented at the 2021 European Association for Chinese Studies in Leipzig, which I am currently preparing for publication under the title “Care of the Self or Pursuit of a Better World? The Transformation of Vegetarianism in Yiguandao Discourses from the Late Qing Period to the Global COVID-19 Pandemic”.
- 20 On the various layers of meaning ascribed to vegetarian practices in Yiguandao and Chinese religious life more generally, see (Broy 2019b).

- 21 *Yiguandao zonghui huixun* 一貫道總會會訊, no. 361 (2021/10), 56.
- 22 For a general overview of transregional religious networks and how to analyze them, see (Chafetz and Ebaugh 2002).
- 23 For a study of a transcultural Yiguandao community in London that employs ANT, see (Yang 2015). See also Chau (2013) for an earlier engagement with ANT in the study of Chinese religions.
- 24 Interview at Andong daochang Hongluo fotang, 6 February 2018.
- 25 See the special report in *Yiguandao zonghui huixun*, no. 287 (2015/8), no pagination.
- 26 I cite from a thread posted on Andong's official Telegram channel "Andong Milesan shengniangliang 安東彌勒山聖能量", 16 April 2020.
- 27 Fieldwork, 7 February 2018.
- 28 Recall, for instance, Irene Torruella's example of the Qingtian migrants in Spain and their "long-distance practices" and "proxy presences" that connect them to the local temple in China. See also Levitt (2007, pp. 23–24) for a similar argument that shows how migration also affects the lives of those who stay behind.
- 29 Fieldwork at Shengde fotang 聖佛堂, Milnerton, Cape Town, 4 December 2017.
- 30 Fieldwork at Chongxin fotang 崇信佛堂, Saitama Prefecture, Warabi City 埼玉県蕨市, 3 May 2018.
- 31 For two examples from mid-2000s South Africa, see (Broy 2019a, p. 33).
- 32 Fieldwork at Mingde shuyuan 明書院, Chiba Prefecture, Kashiwa City 千葉県柏市, 25 April 2018.
- 33 On the nature of vows and how they help to increase individual religious commitment, see (Lu 2008, pp. 71–90).
- 34 Note that this heuristic tool is designed to grasp the multifariousness of global Chineseness as a socially ascribed category beyond national borders, and it thus is not to be confused with other approaches that try to tackle the PRC's "economic expansion and globalizing strategy in other domains" as a "geopolitical and socioeconomic formation of power" that seeks to find "spatial and political fixes to its resource and profit bottleneck" (merging Lee 2017, pp. xii and 5).
- 35 Fieldwork, 15 March 2017.
- 36 See the announcement "Baiyang shengmiao anzu & luocheng zhibo yugao 白陽聖廟安座&落成直播預告" that was posted on *Yiguandao dianzibao* 一貫道電子報/*I Kuan Tao E Paper* on 8 September 2020, see <https://iktepaper.weebly.com/26368260323533824687/3633839> (accessed on 8 September 2020).
- 37 On Zhang Tianran and his postmortem career, see the detailed study in Billioud (2020, pp. 89–118).

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