Religious Affiliations of the Chinese Community in Australia: Findings from 2016 Census Data

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Abstract: Through a systematic investigation—the first attempt of this kind—into the recently released 2016 Australian census data, this article presents a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the religious identity of the Chinese Community in contemporary Australia. Based on the empirical information derived from the census, this article details and interrogates the apparent high level of secularity among the Chinese community in Australia. It also demonstrates that, whilst Christianity is the most popular religion within the Chinese community, the proportion of people who claim to be Christian is significantly lower in the Chinese community as compared to Australia's general population. Furthermore, the proportion of believers in Buddhism, Ancestor Veneration, Confucianism, and Taoism within the Chinese community is significantly higher than the same proportion found within Australia's general population. It is also shown that even when using different definitions to demarcate the Chinese community, those being self-reported ancestry, languages spoken at home, or the birthplaces of parents, the religious profile of the community remains relatively stable. However, a further breakdown into ancestral, geographical, and linguistic groups reveals some noteworthy differences.

1. Introduction

Religious institutions within a society do not only reflect the unique history and culture of that place, but also have a profound impact on people within the society, both believers and non-believers alike. In today's highly globalised world, the religious lives of migrant communities are increasingly important to this picture and have begun to demand our attention in new ways. This is particularly obvious in, and relevant to, multicultural societies such as contemporary Australia, where the emergence of religious plurality has been identified as one of the main characteristics of multiculturalism, which has in turn become a pillar of the Australian national identity (Bouma 1995; Moran 2011).

Australian federal, state, and local governments frequently treat religion as a matter deeply intertwined with cultural diversity and multiculturalism, features of contemporary Australia that they are determined to nurture and develop.[1] Scholars from Australia and other countries have put

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[1] For example, the Australian Federal Government's Department of Social Services explicitly states the following message on the top of a webpage titled 'A Multicultural Australia' on its official website: 'All Australians share the benefits and responsibilities arising from the cultural, linguistic and religious diversity of our society' (DSS 2018). In addition, the State Government of New South Wales legislated its *Charter of Principles for a Culturally Diverse Society* in 1993, clearly stating that they recognise religious diversity, along with cultural and linguistic diversities, as 'a valuable resource for the development of the State'.

considerable effort into investigating the historical background, contemporary reality, and ongoing changes within religious life in Australia's multicultural society (Burnley 1998; Bouma 1999a, 1999b; Cahill 2009). However, while a noticeable amount of academic attention has been focused on how religions including Islam (Bouma et al. 2003; Saeed 2003; Shearmur 2014), Judaism (Rubinstein 1995), Hinduism (Bugg 2013), and various schools of Buddhism (Croucher 1989; Bouma et al. 2000; Halafoff et al. 2012) function in contemporary Australian society, to this date, there lacks a comprehensive and up-to-date report that systematically assesses the religious life of the Chinese Community in contemporary Australia.

The Chinese community has been an important part of Australian society for a long time, and particularly in recent decades the size and significance of the Chinese community has grown dramatically.[2] Members of the Chinese community have made remarkable contributions to various aspects of Australian society, including business, education, health, politics, and cultural fields, to name a few. It is, therefore, impossible to paint a full picture of Australia's dynamic multicultural society without a systematic examination of the religious experience of the Chinese community, and this article seeks to remedy the disappointing lack of research on this topic by answering the following questions:

- What are the religious affiliations of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia?
- In comparison with the general Australian population's religious affiliations, what are the distinctive features, if any, of the Chinese community?
- Within the Chinese community in contemporary Australia, what are the differences in religious affiliation among different subgroups?

To answer these questions, this article presents the findings of a systematic investigation into the recently released empirical data collected through the 2016 Australian census. To our knowledge, up to the present time, this is the first attempt to use the 2016 census data to provide a rigorous account of the religious affiliations of the Chinese community in Australia. Given the statutory nature of the census, it is reasonable to believe that the figures and patterns we report in this article are both more comprehensive and up-to-date than comparable data from other studies into the religious affiliations of the Chinese community in Australia.

Our study reveals several interesting and important facts regarding the religious affiliation of the Chinese community in Australia, including an overall picture of the community's religious affiliations, a discussion on how the Chinese community's religious profile compares to the general population's, and lastly how these profiles differ between different subgroups within the Chinese community. To elaborate on these findings and explain their broader social and historical context, the rest of this article is organised into four sections. The next section discusses the changing religious landscape in Australia, providing historical background which is essential for any attempt to understand the religious identity of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia. The third section introduces the census data and outlines the operational definitions of two essential concepts in this article—those being the 'Chinese community in contemporary Australia' and 'religion'. Here, we explain how we arrived at three operational definitions of the Chinese community and how relevant census questions were used to identify members of this community and their religious affiliations. The fourth section reports the key features of the religious affiliations of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia as revealed by the 2016 census data. We also discuss the similarities and differences in religious belief between different subgroups within the Chinese community. The fifth section, which concludes the report, presents a summary of the main findings and a discussion on relevant theoretical and empirical issues that deserve further investigation.

2　According to the 2016 census data, more than 1 in every 50 people who are current living in Australia was born in Mainland China, making Mainland China the fourth most common countries of birth after Australia, England and New Zealand. Moreover, in comparison to the information captured by the 2011 census data, the 2016 census data shows that the presentation of China-born Australian residents increased 50% during the 5-year span between the two censuses (ABS 2017b).

2. The Changing Religious Landscape in Australia

Religion has always played an important role in defining and shaping Australian society. The dynamics of the religious landscape do not only represent and reflect the general trends of Australian history, but religion itself is an essential part of Australia's past and present, changing the very nature of Australian society in a myriad of ways.

When considering the history of Australian religious belief, the more than 40,000 years of indigenous culture and religious activity must not go unmentioned (Bouma 2006), even though these traditions are not highly represented in modern census data. That being said, Australia's current religious landscape was profoundly affected by its colonial history. After British colonisation in 1788, the religious life of the average Australian changed dramatically. The colonies were predominantly British Protestant and brought with them an Anglican tradition which remains to this day, albeit not without changes (Lake 2011). Yet, with an influx of prisoners to the penal colonies, Irish Catholics and other non-Anglicans grew in number. Then in 1836, the *Church Act* was passed, which democratised the distribution of funding to religious organisations. However, even with reform of the biased funding allocation system, throughout the 19th century, Catholicism remained 'a merely tolerated religion in a Protestant British government and society' (Chavura and Tregenza 2015).

The British were not the only foreigners to bring new religions to colonial-era Australia. In the second half of the 19th century, many non-white immigrants came to Australia in search of gold or to work on 'cotton and sugar plantations, or as pearl fishers or camel drivers', which resulted in an increase in the number of Taoists, Confucians, Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs (Carey 1996, p. 83; Bouma and Halafoff 2017, p. 130). While there is debate as to whether or not Buddhism first made it to Australia with Zhang He's fleet in the 15th century (Swain 1995, p. 8; Adam and Hughes 1996, p. 6), 'the first concrete instance of Buddhists arriving in Australia . . . dates to 1848, with the first consignment of Chinese coolie labourers' (Croucher 1989, p. 2). This short period of religious diversity, while significant in its own right, did not lead to much conversion amongst the rest of the population, and given increasingly xenophobic policy at the turn of the 20th century, was short lived (Carey 2009, p. 20).

The Australian government's immigration policy after Federation in 1901 formalised the discriminatory colonial attitudes of the past, which as a suite of policies came to be known as the *White Australia Policy*. This policy limited non-white immigration and "British immigrants were still . . . actively sought through government subsidized schemes" (Moran 2011) until after the Second World War. Not coincidentally, during this period, Christianity dominated Australia's religious landscape.

As the *White Australia Policy* was gradually dismantled in the second half of the 20th century, new waves of immigrants introduced both new religions and new potential converts to Australia, transforming the country into a more culturally and religiously diverse place (Bouma 2006). This process saw the decline of the Christian faith on the whole and also saw changes in the size and importance of individual Christian denominations. Between 1967 and 1993 the percentage of people who attended church once a week dropped from 25% to 16%, once a month attendees halved from 12% to 6%, those who went several times a year dropped from 25% to 15%, and those who never attended church went from 17% to 36% of the population (Bean 1999). Roughly during the same time frame, the percentage of Catholics stayed relatively stable from 26.3% to 27.3%, while those identifying as members of the Anglican Church dropped from 33.6% to just 23.9%. From the early 1980s until the first few years of the new millennium, Church attendance numbers reportedly halved again (Evans and Kelley 2004). As of on the census night in 2016, just over half of the Australian population identified themselves as Christian, with the most numerous denomination being Catholicism at 22.61%, followed by Anglicanism at 13.25% of the entire population.

However, there are also counterbalancing trends, with the rise of Megachurches in suburbs and rural areas breathing new life into the Christian community, particularly by attracting large numbers of young members. Coinciding with the decline in traditional Protestant denominations like Anglicanism, 'since the late 1990s, the most rapidly growing Protestant church in Australia has been the Assemblies of God (AOG)' (Connell 2005), which paved the way for the most well-known of these Churches,

the Hillsong Church. This new model, which uses popular music, modern technology, and a seeker sensitive disposition, has succeeded in creating a 'total institution' (Hughes 2013), 'invoking a logic of perpetual self-development that is imbued with ever greater resonance as the purposes of the devotee and the Church become synonymous' (Wade 2016).

Outside the Christian faith, although no religion made up more than 3% of the Australian population at the time of the census in 2016, many religions have benefited from, and assisted in Australia's transformation into a multicultural society. According to Bouma and Halafoff (2017, pp. 132–33), the 2016 census data reveals that in contemporary Australia 'there are more Muslims (2.6%) than Presbyterians (2.3%) . . . more Buddhists (2.4%) and Hindus (1.9%) than Baptists (1.5%) or Lutherans (0.7%), and more Sikhs (0.5%) than Jews (0.4%)'. This shows the fast rate of diversification of Australian society. Another reflection of the new 'superdiversity' in Australian society is the 'rise of spirituality', reflected by the increasing number of people feeling that their religious belief was 'not adequately described' by existing options given in structured surveys such as the census, and opting instead to write in their own answer on the questionnaire (Barron 2002; Bouma 2006; Bouma and Halafoff 2017).

Meanwhile, the percentage of Australians selecting 'no religion' has increased from 6.7% in 1971, when this option was included as a response with a tick box in the census form for the first time, to 30.1% in 2016, when the latest census was conducted. The fact that those ticking 'no religion' in the 2016 Census overtook the number of any religious denomination reflects the rapid and profound secularisation of modern Australian society. That said, there remains debate as to what extent the increase in these numbers reflects a move towards a less religious society. Some argue that these statistics are overblown and that the drastic change which the numbers might suggest are not to be given too much weight (Evans and Kelley 2004). As Bouma (2006) points out, 'according to the 1983 Australian Values Study of "nones", 21.2% described themselves as "religious persons", 37.8% prayed "occasionally" or more frequently, while 16.2% said that God was "quite" or "very" important in their lives'. This may be due to the 'shyness' and 'muted manner' of public expressions of faith in Australia (Wade 2016). However, according to the more recent evidence, the 'nones' in Australia are not only growing in number but also reflect a genuine decline in pious belief in Australian society (Bouma and Halafoff 2017). This is a pattern not dissimilar to what has happened in other member countries the Commonwealth, such as Britain and Canada (Brown 2010, 2017; Marks 2017).

The profound changes in Australia's religious landscape in the last fifty years, largely driven by new flows of immigration and subsequent increases in the ethnic and cultural diversity of Australian society, have created new challenges for the study of Australia's religious profile and especially for studies of social and ethnic subgroups. Given the significant variations in religious beliefs and practices among different social groups in contemporary Australia, it is unreasonable to assume that the spectra and structure of religious affiliations are similar among different social groups or between a particular social group and the entire population. As the diversity of religions and social groups increases, there is a new demand for scholars to understand the particular situations of these communities. It is only through an in depth understanding of these smaller sections of society that we are able to gain an accurate picture of contemporary Australia's religious landscape.

As revealed by the 2016 Australian census, the Greater China Region has become one of the most common places of birth for Australian residents. Moreover, two of the three most common non-English languages spoken at home by Australians are Chinese dialects, and more than 1 in every 20 residents in today's Australia identify as having Chinese ancestry. Therefore, to fully understand the diversity and dynamics of Australia's religious landscape, it is necessary to develop a comprehensive, rigorous, and up-to-date understanding of the religious affiliations within the Chinese community. Luckily, this has now become possible thanks to the release of the 2016 Census data by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in late 2017. In the next section, we will offer a detailed introduction to the census data and define both the 'Chinese community in contemporary Australia' and 'religion' in the context of the census data.

3. Data and Definitions

The 2016 Australian census provides a rich empirical dataset which makes it possible to conduct an in-depth analysis on the religious profile of the Chinese community in Australia and its subgroups. The census received responses from over 95% of Australian residents in 2016, offering comprehensive coverage of many important demographic, economic, and social features of contemporary Australia. The census also provides a few key pieces of information which makes it possible for us to identify members of the Chinese community. This information pertains to one's ancestry, the birthplaces of one's parents, and the main language(s) spoken at home. The census data also includes information on respondent's religious belief, making it possible to single out the religious faiths and affiliations of any given subset of the population, including the Chinese community. Moreover, given its structural nature, the 2016 census data allows us to compare the situation and structure of religious affiliations between different subgroups within the Chinese community in Australia, as well as between the Chinese community and the entire censused population. In the rest of this section, we first provide some background information on how the census data was collected and structured. We then decide on the operational definitions for the two most essential concepts in this article—the 'Chinese community in contemporary Australia' and 'religion'—in accordance with the structure of the data in the census. In defining the Chinese community, we review the religious experience of the first wave of Chinese immigrants to Australia in the 19th century, tracking major trends to the modern day. In summarising the earliest records of Chinese people in Australia and highlighting important historical experiences of the Australian Chinese community, we attempt to demonstrate why using multiple different strategies to identify this community is preferable to settling for a one-dimensional definition. We also report on the general demographic features of the Chinese community in Australia and the statistical features of the general population's religious belief across all states and territories.

3.1. Census Data, Limitations and Benefits

The Australian census, a nation-wide survey on the Australian population and their housing information, was first conducted over 100 years ago. The *Census and Statistics Act 1905*, which still exists today after numerous amendments, requires the Australian government to carry out a national census on a regular basis. It also provides relevant government agencies with the power to direct individuals and businesses to disclose the information which is sought. The first Australian census was held in 1911. Since then, the duty of designing and conducting the national census has been held by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and its predecessor the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, which was established under the *Census and Statistics Act* in 1905 and ceased functioning in 1974. Following the 1911 Census, subsequent national censuses of Australia were held in 1921, 1933, 1947, 1954, and 1961. Since 1961, the census has been conducted every five years, and the 2016 Census was Australia's 17th national census. The census night conventionally falls on the second Tuesday of August. Following this convention, the 2016 Census was held on the night of 9 August.

The aim of the Census, according to the official statement from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, is to 'accurately collect data on the key characteristics of people in Australia on Census night and the dwellings in which they live' (ABS 2017a). With a five-year budget of around $470 million, the 2016 Census is the largest statistical collection undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The census form includes 51 questions relating to the characteristics of individuals, plus an extra nine questions relating to households. Altogether, these 60 questions reveal a substantial range of demographic indicators, including a population count, statistics on the sex, age, income, Indigenous status, country of birth, language, ancestry, family structure, education, occupation, and religious belief of all Australian residents.

In the 2016 Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics introduced a new 'digital first' approach, moving the census online through their website and adding new login functionality, as an alternative to the traditional paper form. The 2016 Census had a response rate of 95.1%, with 63% of people completing the Census online. According to the *Report on the Quality of 2016 Census Data*, which was

produced by an independent assurance panel appointed by the Australian Statistician, 'the changed approach led to a more efficient, effective and modern Census operation' (Harding et al. 2017).

Like all structured surveys, the census primarily focuses on straightforward and measurable information, and it really only provides cross-sectional data at the particular time of the census night. It is therefore unrealistic for the census to capture the more nuanced and complicated features of religious life, such as the meaning of being a religious practitioner or the details of interactions between members of a particular religious group. As we will further elaborate later in this section, the census also has a predefined categorisation system for religions. Although this system covers a great number of well-known religions and denominations, it is inevitable that the some of the detailed differences between certain religious traditions have been ignored or overlooked during the coding process. The census form also only allows each person to identify one religious affiliation, and this may be problematic for people participating in the activities of multiple religions or religious organisations. Furthermore, the census lacks indicators which adequately describe the level of religiosity of respondents, and it is therefore impossible to distinguish between those very committed religious practitioners and those who only occasionally take part in religious activities. Despite these limitations, the census data remains one of the most valuable sources of empirical data for the analysis of religious belief within the Chinese community in contemporary Australia. This research is made possible by the census' unparalleled comprehensive coverage and the substantial range of demographic information elucidated by the census.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics began releasing the census results through their website in April 2017. The first comprehensive census dataset was released in June 2017, and a more detailed dataset, with information like occupation of respondents, was released in October 2017. Due to privacy concerns, publicly available census data accessible via the website of the Australian Bureau of Statistics appears in an aggregated form. That is to say, although it is possible to calculate the demographic and religious features of a given geographic unit (such as a state or territory) or a given group of people (such as all of the Queensland residents whose fathers were born in China), it is not possible to precisely estimate the correlation between one's level of income and their religious affiliation, due to the lack of individual data. The statistical analysis provided in this report follows the structure of the census data, and hence is always in aggregated forms. The operational definitions of the two most essential concepts of this article—the 'Chinese community in Australia' and 'religion'—are also developed in accordance to the structure of the census data and are elaborated on below.

3.2. Defining the Chinese Community in the 2016 Census

Chinese people have been a part of Australian society for over one and a half centuries. They have a rich cultural and spiritual history, and religion has played a significant role in their lives. Chinese people were probably first in Australia, at least in any great number, during the time of the Australian gold rush in the 19th century. Research shows that 'according to Chinese official statistics, 10,000 Chinese left for Australasia during the 1801–1850 period, while the number increased to 60,000 from 1851 to 1875' (Sheng 2011). While the allure of gold was clearly a pull factor encouraging Chinese immigrants to make the journey to Australia, there were significant push factors, including natural disasters, overpopulation, conflicts between different ethnic groups in South China, and the brutal civil wars during and after the Taiping rebellion. This early Chinese immigration caused an influx of new religion in Australia, although due to relatively low levels of cultural exchange between the white community and the Chinese, these new religions were generally not adopted by the rest of the Australian community. That said, due to high numbers of Chinese immigrants, 'in 1857 there were 27,288 Buddhists in the Colony of Victoria, compared with 158,006 Anglicans' (Bouma 2006). In addition to Buddhism, because traditionally in China belief in one religion was not mutually exclusive with belief in another, these immigrants also brought with them Taoism, Confucianism, and other Chinese religions (Swain 1995; Carey 1996; Marshall 2011).

While the early Chinese settlers harboured aspirations for better lives and newfound wealth in Australia, they and their followers soon became victims of the racial discrimination imposed by Australia's colonial authorities, which eventually lead to a great reduction of the Chinese population in Australia (Willard 1923; Chapman 2007). Anti-Chinese sentiments continued after Australia's federation in 1901. With the establishment of the *White Australia Policy*, the voice of the Chinese community during the first half of the 20th century was further silenced. Although some members of the Chinese community are still able to date their ancestry back to the generation which arrived during the Australian gold rush, they had to keep a low profile until after the dismantling of the *White Australia Policy* in the mid-20th century.

New waves of Chinese immigrants began arriving in Australia in the 1970s—with the first ethnically Chinese immigrants coming as war refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia, followed by economic migrants from Hong Kong, and finally students and business people from Mainland China and Taiwan (Chapman 2007; Ngan and Chan 2012). From 1978 to 2006, Australia's higher education sector alone has attracted '1,076,000 Chinese students', of which 'only 275,000 have returned' (Cao 2004).

The Chinese community in contemporary Australia consists of all aforementioned immigrants and their descendants, and it is in itself a highly diverse group. For example, whilst the young university graduates who recently decided to reside in Australia are likely to speak Chinese at home, some multi-generational Australian-born Chinese may not speak Chinese at all. Yet, despite the differences in the language that they speak at home, both the young university graduates and the multi-generational Australian-born Chinese are likely to submit the same answer when they are invited to identify their ancestry. The title of 'Chinese' has become politically complicated as a result of historical and contemporary power struggles (Ma and Cartier 2003), and we do not use the term to represent any political disposition. Following the academic and social convention in contemporary Australia, we use the term 'Chinese community' as an umbrella term to describe Australian residents who are either migrants from the Greater China Region or their descendants. The Greater China Region includes not only the Chinese mainland but also several regions where not all local residents necessarily regard themselves as Chinese nationals today (Chapman 2007; Ngan and Chan 2012).

Given the structured nature of the Census, even when a person explicitly reveals that they have some association with elements of Chinese identity like ancestry, language, or birthplace, it is impossible to know the extent of their actual connection with the Greater China Region. However, whilst Chinese identity is a contested notion, it is one where the word of the individual is uniquely important. Therefore, census data, which is derived from individuals own answers, at least offers a good starting point for identifying those who claim some sort of Chinese identity, be it through ancestry, birthplace or language.

Furthermore, given the diversity and complexity of Chinese identity, instead of arbitrarily choosing one single indicator to define the Chinese community in contemporary Australia, we feel it necessary to identify members of this community through a variety of dimensions to capture its nuances. It is important to note here that such demarcations are unable to capture the unique political and ethnic identities of different members of the community, but they are certainly superior to one dimensional definitions.

The 2016 census includes three types of information that make it possible for us to decide whether a person should be considered as a member of the Chinese community—those being ancestry, birthplace, and language. Each of these can be used as operational definitions of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia. In order to take a more comprehensive look at the religious life of the Chinese community, rather than concentrating on any single dimension, we defined the Chinese community through each of these three dimensions separately.

First, Q18 of the Census Form asks for the ancestry of each person in a family and requires the person to provide up two answers. In reality, for people who provide two ancestries, it is impossible to know which one they consider as their primary ancestry. It is also possible that people who provide two ancestries did not intend to decide on an order of importance in the first place. Therefore, when the ancestry dimension is applied to identify the membership of the Chinese community

in contemporary Australia, we use a variable named ANCP in the census data as our selection criteria. This variable allows us to select people who identify at least one of their ancestors as Chinese, Taiwanese, Chinese Asian, or Tibetan, and we consider these people as our operational population for the Chinese community in Australia when this community is defined by ancestry.

Second, the Census Form also includes three questions that are related to birthplace. Q12 asks "in which country was the person born", Q14 asks "in which country is the person's father born", and Q15 asks "in which country is the person's mother born". To ensure accurate data, we focus on people whose parents were both born in the Greater China region, which includes the Chinese Mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan. We did not simply look at one's own birthplace because we believe that the second generation of immigrants whose parents were both born in the Greater China region are likely to have cultural bonds with the birthplace of their parents to some extent, even though by their own birthplace alone they would not count as Chinese. We also excluded people who have only one parent born in the Greater China region. We do not believe that these people necessarily have less of a link with the Greater China region or the Chinese community in Australia. However, including them would have introduced the risk that our operational population defined by birthplace is too similar to that defined by ancestry.

Finally, the Census Form includes two questions related to language. Q17 asks how well the person speaks English, but the answer to this question is not directly relevant to whether a person should be recognised as a member of the Chinese community. We therefore focus on Q16, which asks respondents who speak a language other than English at home to identify the non-English language that they speak most frequently at home. In particular, when the language criterion is applied to demarcate the Chinese community in contemporary Australia, we included all of the people who indicate Chinese as their most frequently spoken non-English language at home. Within this operational population, we include people who report that they speak Cantonese, Hakka, Mandarin, Wu, Min Nan, and other Chinese dialects that are not further specified in the census data.

Using these definitions, it is possible to outline some of the general demographic features of the Chinese community in Australia, which gives us a contextual background through which we can better understand the community. Table 1 presents the statistical information regarding the demographic features of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia. As previously discussed, we define this community through individual's self-reported ancestry, the birthplaces of their parents, and the non-English language most frequently spoken at home. According to the information outlined in Table 1, as of 9 August 2016, there were 1,232,900 members of the Chinese community in Australia, defined by self-reported ancestry. This counts for 5.27% of the entire Australian population on the census night. The scale of the Chinese community defined by the other two dimensions is significantly smaller. On the census night, there were 770,068 Australian residents whose parents were both born in the Greater China region, making up 3.29% of the country's population; and there were 927,944 Australian residents for whom a Chinese dialect was the most frequently spoken non-English language at home, making up 3.97% of the Australian population.

Table 1 also shows how the Chinese communities defined through different dimensions intersect with each other. For example, among the Australian residents who report at least one of their top two ancestries as Chinese, Taiwanese, Chinese Asian, or Tibetan, only slightly more than 60% have both parents born in the Greater China region, and less than three fourths count a Chinese dialect as one of the major languages spoken at home. Yet, among the Australian residents who have both parents born in the Greater China region, more than 90% use a Chinese dialect as a major language at home, and more than 98% report that their ancestry is Chinese, Taiwanese, Chinese Asian, or Tibetan. Equally interesting is that among Australian residents who use a Chinese dialect as one of their major languages at home, although nearly one fourth do not have both parents born in the Greater China region, over 95% reported Chinese, Taiwanese, Chinese Asian, or Tibetan as one of their top two ancestries. Clearly, the coverage of the Chinese community in Australia is significantly wider when it is defined by a person's ancestry rather than by language or parental birthplace.

Table 1. The general demographic features of the Chinese community in Australia (as revealed by the 2016 Census data).

	Australia		Ancestry			Birthplace			Language		
	N	%	N	%	Δ	N	%	Δ	N	%	Δ
Gender											
Male	11,546,638	49.34%	569,760	46.21%	−3.13%	350,017	45.45%	−3.89%	427,249	46.04%	−3.30%
Female	11,855,248	50.66%	663,136	53.79%	3.13%	420,058	54.55%	3.89%	500,690	53.96%	3.30%
Age											
Medium Age	38		30		−8	30		−8	31		−7
Education											
Year 12 Completion	9,879,965	42.22%	821,973	66.67%	24.45%	552,277	71.72%	29.50%	649,429	69.99%	27.77%
Income											
Medium Weekly Total Household Income Range ($)	1250–1499		150–1749		250	100–1249		−250	125–1499		0
Marriage (>15)											
Never married	6,668,916	35.03%	428,072	41.35%	6.32%	269,308	39.76%	4.73%	326,091	40.28%	5.25%
Widowed	985,201	5.18%	24,915	2.41%	−2.77%	16,714	2.47%	−2.71%	19,967	2.47%	−2.71%
Divorced	1,626,891	8.55%	52,615	5.08%	−3.46%	35,203	5.20%	−3.35%	40,226	4.97%	−3.58%
Separated	608,056	3.19%	16,997	1.64%	−1.55%	10,245	1.51%	−1.68%	12,094	1.49%	−1.70%
Married	9,148,220	48.05%	512,619	49.52%	1.46%	345,786	51.06%	3.00%	411,171	50.79%	2.74%
Total valid	19,037,284	100.00%	1,035,211	100.00%		677,256	100.00%		809,549	100.00%	
Not applicable	*4,364,607*	*18.65%*	*197,689*	*16.03%*	*−2.62%*	*92,812*	*12.05%*	*−6.60%*	*118,395*	*12.76%*	*−5.89%*
Geographical Distribution											
New South Wales	7,480,230	31.96%	520,549	42.22%	10.26%	357,392	46.41%	14.45%	401,198	43.24%	11.27%
Victoria	5,926,624	25.33%	374,787	30.40%	5.07%	227,687	29.57%	4.24%	289,045	31.15%	5.82%
Queensland	4,703,192	20.10%	142,010	11.52%	−8.58%	84,296	10.95%	−9.15%	99,060	10.68%	−9.42%
South Australia	1,676,653	7.16%	52,977	4.30%	−2.87%	33,770	4.39%	−2.78%	40,615	4.38%	−2.79%
Western Australia	2,474,414	10.57%	105,508	8.56%	−2.02%	44,857	5.83%	−4.75%	71,477	7.70%	−2.87%
Tasmania	509,961	2.18%	7286	0.59%	−1.59%	4130	0.54%	−1.64%	5264	0.57%	−1.61%
Northern Territory	228,838	0.98%	6501	0.53%	−0.45%	2369	0.31%	−0.67%	3634	0.39%	−0.59%
Australian Capital Territory	397,393	1.70%	22,780	1.85%	0.15%	15,487	2.01%	0.31%	17,238	1.86%	0.16%
Other Territories	*4583*	*0.02%*	*491*	*0.04%*	*0.02%*	*82*	*0.01%*	*−0.01%*	*418*	*0.05%*	*0.03%*
Total	23,401,891	100.00%	1,232,900	100.00%		770,068	100.00%		927,944	100.00%	
Intersection											
Chinese *Ancestry*	1,232,900	5.27%	1,232,900	100.00%		755,716	98.14%	−477,184	895,971	96.55%	−336,929
China as the *birthplace* for both parents	770,068	3.29%	755,716	61.30%	−14,352	770,068	100.00%		718,044	77.38%	−52,024
Chinese as the main *language* spoken at home	927,944	3.97%	894,262	72.53%	−33,682	718,044	93.24%	−209,900	927,944	100.00%	

As shown in Table 1, generally speaking, no matter which operational definition of the Chinese community is used, its major demographic features are pretty similar. For example, across all definitions of the Chinese community there are slightly more women, averaging around 3% more than the rest of the community. Similarly, across all three categories, the Chinese community is 7–8 years younger on average, which is a significant gap indeed. The year 12 completion rate within the Chinese community is particularly high, with those counted as Chinese by birthplace boasting the highest completion rate, at 71.72%, 29.5% higher than the National average. In terms of average income of the subcategories, those defined as Chinese by ancestry are slightly better off than those who are Chinese by birthplace, with the former coming in within the $1500 to $1749 band, and the latter in the $1000 to $1249 band. As for marriage data, Chinese of all subcategories have more in the never married category and less in the widowed divorced or separated categories than the rest of Australia. Chinese across all categories also have a slightly higher percentage of married people, with 1–3% more married than the rest of the population. Geographical dispersion is an also important part of the picture, and in terms of the distribution of the Chinese population, the States of New South Wales and Victoria are in the lead. Both states have significantly larger Chinese populations than the rest of Australia, with New South Wales' proportion of Chinese roughly 10–15% higher than the national average. Queensland has the lowest density of Chinese people, at almost 10% lower than the National average. Interestingly, New South Wales has the highest proportion of Chinese who were born in the Greater China region, at 14.5%. All this information provides a useful starting point from which to gain a greater understanding of this community and its demographic features.

3.3. Defining Religions in the Census

'Religion' is a highly contested concept. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify how the census categorises religion before we can truly understand and correctly interpret the information which it reveals. On the 2016 Census Form, the sole question on religion is Q19, which asks for 'the person's religious belief'. This is an optional question, and each individual is only allowed to identify one religion as their answer. Unfortunately, for those who believe in more than one religion, for instance someone who follows Confucian ideals and also attends a Buddhist temple, the census is unable to capture their true religious profile, which is particularly limiting for the Chinese context (Marshall 2011). The census form allows people to choose from a list of common religions in contemporary Australian society, providing a box for identifying with Catholicism, Anglicanism (Church of England), the Uniting Church, Presbyterianism, Buddhism, Islam, Greek Orthodox, Baptist, and Hinduism. In addition, people can also identify themselves as 'no religion' or specify their own religious belief in the designated place if a tick box option is not provided. Given this is a system of self-identification, there is no standardised set of criteria for what would make you a Buddhist, Christian, or Catholic. While this could be viewed as a drawback, with extremely pious and semi-lapsed believers being lumped in the same category, it is also reasonable to see the individuals own opinion as paramount for questions of personal religious identity.

The answers given to Q19 are coded in accordance with the *Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups*, which was lastly updated in July 2016, just a few weeks before the Census night. One limitation previously mentioned is the difficulty in establishing facts beyond the simple question of identification with a religion, like the level of involvement, the extent of individual's faith, and more broadly how religious ideas influence their lives. Particularly in the case of the Chinese community, different conceptions of religion have made analysis of survey results difficult, with the difference between words like religion (*zongjiao*) and belief (*xinyang*) often leading to very different responses (Johnson 2017).

According to the *Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups*, a religion is generally regarded as 'a set of beliefs and practices, usually involving acknowledgment of a divine or higher being or power, by which people order the conduct of their lives both practically and in a moral sense'. As explained on the official website of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'this method of defining

religion in terms of a mixture of beliefs, practices, and a supernatural being giving form and meaning to existence, was used by the High Court of Australia in 1983'. The High Court stated that 'for the purposes of the law, the criteria of religion are twofold: first, belief in a Supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief, though canons of conduct which offend against the ordinary laws are outside the area of any immunity, privilege or right conferred on the grounds of religion' (ABS 2016a). This definition, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, describes the nature of all entities included in the *Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups*, apart from one broad group named 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation'.[3]

The *Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups* presents religious beliefs in a hierarchical system. The top and broadest level within the categorisation system includes five major religious traditions, namely Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism along with two other categories, which are "Other Religion" and "Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation". This level of specificity is represented by a one-digit code, and as the data is broken down, each new level of specificity introduces more digits. After the broadest category which just specifies the overall religion with one digit, new levels of detail specify the relevant denomination and Church/religious institutions which are represented by further digits. We have selected what we viewed as relevant statistical categories for the purpose of analysing the Chinese community in Australia as compared to the general population.[4] The tables in this article provided only depict these select categories and are not an exhaustive representation of the complete dataset.

It should be noted that the *Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups* is developed mainly in a western social context, so the level of detail provided in the Christian code category is far in excess of the detail provided in all other code categories. The Christian one-digit code has almost 100 different four-digit codes below it, while different denominations and schools within Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam are not further specified. This approach clearly has its limitations and has resulted in a reduction in the quality of the data for non-Christian religions. Notwithstanding, the census is still the most comprehensive set of data for religious belief in Australia thanks to its unparalleled coverage and response rate.

Once the operational definition of religion is clarified, the 2016 Census data gives us great insight into the religious beliefs of people living in Australia, providing perspective on the distribution and density of religious belief over the country, both geographically and within subgroups of the population.

As shown in Table 2, the most populous religion for the entire population dataset is Christianity, with a majority of respondents (52.14%) claiming some form of Christianity as their religion, which given previous discussion of Australia's Anglican roots should come as no surprise. Density of Christian belief is highest in New South Wales (55.13%) and lowest in the Australian Capital Territory (45.26%) and the "other territories" (36.53%). Catholicism is the largest Christian denomination, with 22.61% of the population, followed by Anglicanism with 13.25%, which reflects the general historic trend of a decline in Anglicanism in modern Australia. The State with the highest density of Catholics is New South Wales at 24.68% of the state's population, which is marginally higher than Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, and the Australian Capital Territory. The most Anglican state is Tasmania at 20.26% of their overall population, and the least Anglican state is Victoria with only 8.89% of their population subscribing to Anglicanism.

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[3]　According to the ABS (2016a), the 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation' group could be considered to 'be outside the scope of the religion topic'. This broad group has been included 'for practical reasons and to make the classification more useful'. It includes personal spiritual beliefs, secular beliefs and the response 'No Religion'.

[4]　For the full range of codes, see ABS (2016b).

Table 2. The percentages of selected religions in Australia and Australian states and territories (as revealed by the 2016 Census data).

All but Overseas Visitors	New South Wales	Victoria	Queensland	South Australia	Western Australia	Tasmania	Northern Territory	Australian Capital Territory	Other Territories	Total
Missing Data	**9.16%**	**9.29%**	**10.05%**	**8.77%**	**10.39%**	**9.46%**	**16.71%**	**9.27%**	**19.04%**	**9.57%**
1 Buddhism	**2.78%**	**3.09%**	**1.49%**	**1.88%**	**2.13%**	**0.81%**	**1.88%**	**2.52%**	**6.46%**	**2.41%**
2 Christianity	**55.13%**	**47.84%**	**56.08%**	**49.16%**	**49.80%**	**49.66%**	**47.81%**	**45.26%**	**36.53%**	**52.14%**
201 Anglican	15.49%	8.89%	15.38%	9.99%	14.34%	20.26%	9.14%	10.69%	15.29%	13.25%
203 Baptist	1.27%	1.31%	1.86%	1.58%	1.70%	1.47%	2.17%	1.03%	0.54%	1.47%
207 Catholic	24.68%	23.27%	21.70%	18.04%	21.42%	15.68%	19.71%	22.28%	10.16%	22.61%
213 Jehovah's Witnesses	0.30%	0.25%	0.53%	0.35%	0.45%	0.40%	0.22%	0.17%	0.21%	0.35%
215 Latter-day Saints	0.22%	0.20%	0.43%	0.19%	0.27%	0.31%	0.25%	0.19%	0.08%	0.26%
217 Lutheran	0.27%	0.47%	1.20%	3.07%	0.33%	0.27%	2.50%	0.57%	0.25%	0.74%
223 Eastern Orthodox	2.52%	3.48%	0.69%	2.48%	0.96%	0.44%	1.71%	1.54%	0.17%	2.15%
225 Presbyterian and Reformed	2.51%	1.95%	2.97%	1.06%	1.82%	1.97%	1.30%	1.84%	1.46%	2.25%
233 Uniting Church	2.91%	3.28%	5.12%	7.00%	2.33%	3.74%	5.73%	2.40%	4.51%	3.72%
24 Pentecostal	1.04%	0.90%	1.53%	1.14%	1.06%	1.05%	1.17%	1.02%	0.46%	1.11%
3 Hinduism	**2.43%**	**2.30%**	**0.97%**	**1.38%**	**1.56%**	**0.51%**	**1.44%**	**2.59%**	**0.27%**	**1.88%**
4 Islam	**3.58%**	**3.35%**	**0.95%**	**1.72%**	**2.04%**	**0.50%**	**0.94%**	**2.50%**	**14.19%**	**2.58%**
5 Judaism	**0.49%**	**0.71%**	**0.10%**	**0.06%**	**0.22%**	**0.05%**	**0.06%**	**0.17%**	**0.10%**	**0.39%**
6 Other Religions	**0.85%**	**1.23%**	**0.75%**	**0.98%**	**0.93%**	**0.47%**	**1.79%**	**0.94%**	**0.93%**	**0.95%**
605 Chinese Religions	0.03%	0.03%	0.03%	0.02%	0.03%	0.02%	0.06%	0.03%	0.08%	0.03%
6051 Ancestor Veneration	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*
6052 Confucianism	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.01%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*
6053 Taoism	*0.02%*	*0.03%*	*0.02%*	*0.01%*	*0.02%*	*0.02%*	*0.05%*	*0.03%*	*0.08%*	*0.02%*
7 Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation	**25.57%**	**32.18%**	**29.61%**	**36.06%**	**32.94%**	**38.53%**	**29.36%**	**36.76%**	**22.73%**	**30.09%**
7101 No Religion, so described	25.16%	31.74%	29.11%	35.54%	32.46%	38.03%	28.96%	36.11%	22.22%	29.63%
7201 Agnosticism	0.11%	0.12%	0.11%	0.11%	0.11%	0.12%	0.09%	0.22%	0.13%	0.11%
7202 Atheism	0.12%	0.13%	0.15%	0.17%	0.15%	0.17%	0.13%	0.19%	0.06%	0.14%

The second biggest overall belief category is 'Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation' (30.09%), and of that, the 'no religion' category makes up the vast majority (29.63%). In terms of minority religions, Buddhism is most represented in Victoria at 3.09% of their overall population, when the supplementary category 'other territories' is not considered. As for the 'Chinese religions', the Northern Territory has the highest density of Taoists and Confucians in Australia and also has around twice the density of overall affiliation with Chinese religions (which includes Taoism, Ancestor Veneration, and Confucianism) in comparison with the rest of the population.

These general features of the religious landscape in contemporary Australia serve as reference points for the more specific analysis of the religious affiliations of those defined as Chinese by the census, which we discuss in greater depth in the next section.

4. Empirical Findings

In this part of the article, we offer four different cross-sections of the Chinese community and an account of their unique religious profile. We begin with general findings, detailing the trends that are present across the three definitional datasets, which use different features of respondents to demarcate the Chinese community. We then focus in on each definitional dataset individually. Within these three datasets, further distinctions are made, such as separating Chinese language speakers into the specific dialect they speak most frequently at home. This kind of detailed breakdown gives us valuable insight into the relevant differences and similarities between the different subgroups of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia.

4.1. General Findings

On the whole, as shown in Table 3, the three different approaches used to define people as Chinese all returned fairly similar results, which makes it possible to outline some of the general features of the Chinese community in Australia. Of those features, one interesting phenomena is that Chinese people are more willing to divulge their religious identity, with the answer rate for the question about religion (which is optional) twice as high among the Chinese community as compared to the general population. This may be reflective of higher levels of concern over privacy and religious discrimination in the general population (Bouma 2006). Alternatively, this could be due to the high number of people with no religious affiliation in the Chinese community who may not be as invested in this information and therefore are not as worried about disclosing their non-belief. One further possibility is that in collectivist societies the individuals rights, including the right to privacy, are not as important as the rights of the collective, so we might expect people to feel an obligation to contribute to such public data collection efforts (Chen 1995).

One other clear point from the data is that members of the Chinese community are much more likely to identify themselves in the 'no religion' category, with all the subgroups of Chinese one to two times more likely to respond in this way. This seems to reflect a higher level of secularisation in the Chinese community, which could be a consequence of the forced process of secularisation undertaken by the Communist party during the 20th century (Tao 2017). While self-identification as non-religious could predate Communist China and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), our data shows that those whose parents were born in China are more likely to declare themselves in this category, and given those people were probably exposed to this religious policy for some amount of time, it is likely to be a significant factor.

Table 3. The religious affiliations of the Chinese community in Australia.

	Australian Residents	Chinese Community Defined by Ancestry			Chinese Community Defined by Parent's Birthplaces			Chinese Community Defined by Language		
		%	Δ	C%/A%	%	Δ	C%/A%	%	Δ	C%/A%
Missing Data	**9.57%**	**4.62%**	**−4.95%**	**0.48**	**4.47%**	**−5.10%**	**0.47**	**4.60%**	**−4.97%**	**0.48**
1 Buddhism	**2.41%**	**15.37%**	**12.96%**	**6.38**	**11.55%**	**9.15%**	**4.80**	**15.46%**	**13.05%**	**6.42**
2 Christianity	**52.14%**	**24.82%**	**−27.32%**	**0.48**	**14.69%**	**−37.45%**	**0.28**	**17.64%**	**−34.50%**	**0.34**
201 Anglican	13.25%	2.94%	−10.31%	0.22	1.84%	−11.41%	0.14	1.99%	−11.26%	0.15
203 Baptist	1.47%	2.31%	0.84%	1.57	2.22%	0.74%	1.50	2.29%	0.81%	1.55
207 Catholic	22.61%	9.48%	−13.14%	0.42	4.09%	−18.53%	0.18	5.29%	−17.33%	0.23
213 Jehovah's Witnesses	0.35%	0.14%	−0.21%	0.39	0.08%	−0.27%	0.23	0.09%	−0.26%	0.27
215 Latter-day Saints	0.26%	0.19%	−0.08%	0.71	0.08%	−0.19%	0.29	0.08%	−0.18%	0.30
217 Lutheran	0.74%	0.10%	−0.65%	0.13	0.06%	−0.69%	0.08	0.08%	−0.66%	0.11
223 Eastern Orthodox	2.15%	0.21%	−1.94%	0.10	0.34%	−1.81%	0.16	0.18%	−1.96%	0.09
225 Presbyterian and Reformed	2.25%	1.61%	−0.65%	0.71	0.93%	−1.32%	0.41	1.17%	−1.08%	0.52
233 Uniting Church	3.72%	1.45%	−2.27%	0.39	0.99%	−2.73%	0.27	1.15%	−2.57%	0.31
24 Pentecostal	1.11%	1.43%	0.32%	1.28	0.42%	−0.69%	0.38	0.87%	−0.24%	0.79
3 Hinduism	**1.88%**	**0.09%**	**−1.79%**	**0.05**	**0.02%**	**−1.86%**	**0.01**	**0.07%**	**−1.81%**	**0.04**
4 Islam	**2.58%**	**0.30%**	**−2.29%**	**0.12**	**0.28%**	**−2.31%**	**0.11**	**0.21%**	**−2.38%**	**0.08**
5 Judaism	**0.39%**	**0.02%**	**−0.37%**	**0.06**	**0.01%**	**−0.38%**	**0.03**	**0.01%**	**−0.38%**	**0.03**
6 Other Religions	**0.95%**	**0.38%**	**−0.57%**	**0.40**	**0.31%**	**−0.63%**	**0.33**	**0.41%**	**−0.54%**	**0.43**
605 Chinese Religions	0.03%	0.28%	0.26%	10.42	0.28%	0.25%	10.20	0.34%	0.31%	12.38
6051 Ancestor Veneration	*0.00%*	*0.01%*	*0.01%*	*3.58*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*2.29*	*0.01%*	*0.01%*	*3.65*
6052 Confucianism	*0.00%*	*0.02%*	*0.02%*	*14.29*	*0.02%*	*0.02%*	*14.30*	*0.02%*	*0.02%*	*14.24*
6053 Taoism	*0.02%*	*0.25%*	*0.23%*	*10.79*	*0.25%*	*0.23%*	*10.60*	*0.31%*	*0.28%*	*13.06*
7 Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation	**30.09%**	**54.40%**	**24.31%**	**1.81**	**68.67%**	**38.58%**	**2.28**	**61.61%**	**31.53%**	**2.05**
7101 No Religion, so described	29.63%	54.15%	24.53%	1.83	68.48%	38.86%	2.31	61.41%	31.78%	2.07
7201 Agnosticism	0.11%	0.08%	−0.03%	0.69	0.05%	−0.06%	0.42	0.06%	−0.06%	0.49
7202 Atheism	0.14%	0.04%	−0.10%	0.30	0.02%	−0.11%	0.17	0.03%	−0.11%	0.22

That said, we should not jump to conclusions about the extent of the secularisation in the Chinese community. It is possible that individuals who claim "no religion" still believe in certain religious concepts (like karma, *fengshui*, or reincarnation) and in some sense are still deeply bound up in religious thinking (Johnson 2017). This would also explain the relatively low numbers of Chinese specifying Atheism as their response to the question on religious belief, with just 0.02–0.04% answering in this way, compared to 0.14% in the general population.

One similarity between the Chinese community and the entire population dataset is that Christianity is also the most populous religion within the Chinese community. Chinese Christianity is certainly not a new phenomenon, and in the last few decades, home grown evangelical protestant groups have been gaining strength in China and abroad (Johnson 2017). In fact, some Chinese expat religious communities are very connected with Christians in China (Poon and Cheong 2009), and Christianity has been playing an important role in the integrating overseas Chinese into western societies (Yang 1999; Marshall 2016; Lu et al. 2012, 2013). The flow of ideas is now not only bilateral between China and other countries but rather transnational and global (Yang et al. 2017), creating a transnational identity that appeals to some overseas Chinese (Huang and Hsiao 2015). This trend, which has been documented to some extent in other western liberal democracies, could benefit from further research in the Australian context.

However, the percentage of Christians among the Chinese community is 27–38% lower than Australia's national average. Chinese defined by the birthplaces of their parents are the least Christian, with the percentage of Christians among this group at 14.67%, closely followed by those defined as Chinese by birthplace at 17.64%, and those who are Chinese by ancestry have the highest proportion of Christians out the subgroups at 24.82%. The reason that rates of Christianity are lowest when we define the community through birthplace may be because many families who have been here for two or more generations are excluded through this definition. For example, as shown in Table 1, of the Australian residents who report at least one of their top two ancestries as Chinese, Taiwanese, Chinese Asian, or Tibetan, only slightly more than 60% have both parents born in the Greater China region. Those excluded in the definition by parental birthplace are a group which is more likely to have Christian beliefs given a longer period of exposure to Australian society.

Among the denominations of Christianity, Catholicism is the largest in both the Chinese community and the general population. However, for two of the three definitional datasets of the Chinese community, the Baptists outnumber the Anglicans, whereas in the general population, Anglicanism sits comfortably in second spot. This finding shows us that the Chinese community is less Anglican than the general population of Australia, which is understandable given Australia's early roots as a British colony and the fact that many Chinese only recently immigrated to Australia.

The second most populous religion in the Chinese community is Buddhism, with roughly 10–15% of the Chinese community across the three definitional datasets. This percentage reflects the position that Buddhism occupies in the religious landscape of contemporary China (Tao 2012). Although in absolute terms few members of the Chinese community claim they are followers of Chinese religions, the proportion is still about 10–12 times higher than the general population. Very few members of the Chinese community are affiliated with Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism.

Another important difference between the Chinese community and the general population is the number of people who respond in the "no religion" category. Those who were born in the Greater China Region are particularly likely to fall into this category (68.48%), and those defined by ancestry and language are seemingly also quite secular, with 54.15% and 61.41% respectively answering in this category. However, across all categories, there were significantly less Chinese people willing to specifically declare themselves as an agnostic or atheist. This leaves the question about the subtleties of these people's religious belief or lack thereof open for debate.

4.2. Findings by Subgroup: Ancestry

When we use ancestry to define the Chinese community, the majority of respondents (54.4%) fall into the "no religion" category. However, as reported in Table 4, the proportion of the respondents who identify as atheists is significantly lower in the Chinese community defined by ancestry than in the entire population dataset. This, as we discussed in the previous section, indicates that some of the people who claim "no religion" may not outright reject the concept and practice of religion, rather simply do feel comfortable declaring their faith in one religion, or have broader spiritual beliefs. For people who claim Chinese ancestry, this could be for a number of reasons. Firstly, among this group there are a considerable number of people who relocated to Australia from Mainland China during and after the 1980s, and due to the deliberate marginalisation of religion-related scholarly discussions and media reports by the state apparatus in Mainland China since the mid-20th century (Yang 2004; Yao 2007), it is possible that they do not have a very good understanding of concepts associated with religion, including atheism. This hypothesis will be explored further through an analysis of the religious affiliations of respondents with both parents born in Mainland China, and we will elaborate our findings in Section 4.4. In addition, the concept and category of "religion" that we know today was not established in China until the late 19th century, when the country began to modernise its culture and society (Ashiwa and Wank 2009; Goossaert and Palmer 2011; Marshall 2011). In traditional Chinese scholarly thought, the concept of "religion" is not only ambiguous but also peripheral. This, together with the widespread disagreements on whether Confucianism should be regarded as a religion (Sun 2013), may have influenced the mind-set of people with Chinese ancestry when it comes to the identification of their religious faiths.

As shown in Table 4, Christianity takes first place as the most common religious belief in the Chinese community defined by people's self-reported ancestry, with almost a quarter of the respondents identifying themselves as Christians. However, this proportion is significantly lower than that of the general Australian population, which is more than twice as high. Buddhism is the second most common religious belief, with more than one in every six respondents reporting a belief in Buddhism. Buddhists within the Chinese community defined by ancestry total 15.37%, which is more than 10% higher than the entire population dataset. Although only 0.28% of the respondents who claim ancestry from the Greater China Region reported that they believe in Chinese religions such as Ancestor Veneration, Confucianism, and Taoism, this proportion is almost ten times higher than that of the general Australia population. On the other hand, Hinduism and Islam are relatively underrepresented across those claiming Chinese ancestry. The proportions of Hindus and Muslims in the Chinese community defined by ancestry are only approximately 1/20 and 1/8 as high as those in the general Australian population.

Among all subgroups included in this definitional dataset, the religious affiliations of those who specifically site "Chinese ancestry" appears to have the most similar structure with the entire definitional dataset. This is reflective of the fact that among those who claim that their ancestors were from the Greater China Region, the vast majority simply identify their ancestry as Chinese. That said, the more interesting findings come from the religious affiliations of people who claim their ancestries as Taiwanese or Tibetan.

Australian residents who claim Tibetan ancestry are distinctive in terms of their exceptionally high level of religiosity and, in particular, their predominant affiliation with Buddhism. As demonstrated in Table 4, almost nine out of every ten Australian residents who reported Tibetan ancestry believe in Buddhism. Although the census did not ask these people to specify the particular Buddhist sect they follow, it is reasonable to assume that Tibetan Buddhism is immensely popular among this group, as it plays an important role in making and shaping the Tibetan identity (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998; Whalen-Bridge 2015). Hinduism is also slightly more popular in those claiming Tibetan ancestry (0.69%) than in other subgroups (albeit the figure is still much lower in comparison with the general Australian population), which is probably best explained by Tibet's geographic proximity to India.

Table 4. The religious affiliations of subgroups within the Chinese community in Australia (grouped by ancestry).

	Australian Residents Total	Ancestry: Chinese	Ancestry: Taiwanese	Ancestry: Tibetan	Ancestry: Chinese Asian (Not Elsewhere Classified)	Ancestry: Chinese Community Total
Missing Data	**9.57%**	**4.60%**	**5.80%**	**1.92%**	**5.12%**	**4.62%**
1 Buddhism	**2.41%**	**15.21%**	**19.69%**	**88.50%**	**14.80%**	**15.37%**
2 Christianity	**52.14%**	**24.98%**	**15.14%**	**2.18%**	**54.65%**	**24.82%**
201 Anglican	13.25%	2.97%	1.44%	0.69%	2.47%	2.94%
203 Baptist	1.47%	2.32%	1.43%	0.64%	16.13%	2.31%
207 Catholic	22.61%	9.57%	3.43%	0.64%	17.08%	9.48%
213 Jehovah's Witnesses	0.35%	0.14%	0.13%	0.00%	0.00%	0.14%
215 Latter-day Saints	0.26%	0.19%	0.19%	0.00%	0.00%	0.19%
217 Lutheran	0.74%	0.10%	0.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.10%
223 Eastern Orthodox	2.15%	0.21%	0.15%	0.00%	1.33%	0.21%
225 Presbyterian and Reformed	2.25%	1.61%	1.73%	0.00%	1.71%	1.61%
233 Uniting Church	3.72%	1.45%	1.60%	0.00%	3.23%	1.45%
24 Pentecostal	1.11%	1.44%	1.01%	0.00%	5.31%	1.43%
3 Hinduism	**1.88%**	**0.09%**	**0.03%**	**0.69%**	**0.00%**	**0.09%**
4 Islam	**2.58%**	**0.30%**	**0.12%**	**0.00%**	**2.47%**	**0.30%**
5 Judaism	**0.39%**	**0.02%**	**0.04%**	**0.00%**	**0.00%**	**0.02%**
6 Other Religions	**0.95%**	**0.36%**	**1.70%**	**0.37%**	**1.52%**	**0.38%**
605 Chinese Religions	0.03%	0.27%	1.58%	0.00%	0.95%	0.28%
6051 Ancestor Veneration	*0.00%*	*0.01%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.01%*
6052 Confucianism	*0.00%*	*0.02%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.02%*
6053 Taoism	*0.02%*	*0.24%*	*1.57%*	*0.00%*	*0.95%*	*0.25%*
7 Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation	**30.09%**	**54.44%**	**57.48%**	**5.80%**	**22.77%**	**54.40%**
7101 No Religion, so described	29.63%	54.19%	57.18%	5.59%	20.68%	54.15%
7201 Agnosticism	0.11%	0.08%	0.10%	0.00%	0.00%	0.08%
7202 Atheism	0.14%	0.04%	0.08%	0.00%	0.00%	0.04%

The Taiwanese ancestry category has the highest proportion of respondents claiming that they have no religious belief. However, this subgroup also has relatively high numbers of Buddhists at 19.69%, around 5% higher than the group who identify their ancestry as Chinese. In fact, Buddhism is the most common religion within this subgroup, and Christianity—the most popular religion in the general Australian population—comes in second. In addition, Taoism is most popular amongst those claiming Taiwanese ancestry (1.57%), with this subgroup also boasting the highest proportion of subscribers to Chinese Religions (1.58%). This relatively wide distribution of religious affiliations among the respondents who claim Taiwanese ancestry perhaps reflects the fact Taiwan itself has a highly diverse religious landscape, as demonstrated by the Religious Diversity Index Scores computed by Pew Research Center (2014).

Among the four subgroups included in this dataset, respondents who report their ancestry as "Chinese Asian not elsewhere specified" have the highest proportion of Christians (54.65%). This category may include people who do not know exactly the details of their ancestry, which could be because they have been in Australia for many generations, and as such are more likely to have been influenced by a historically powerful Christian community. Another possibility is that this group includes immigrants from Southeast Asian countries like Singapore and the Philippines where Christianity plays a relatively more significant role in society. We will further investigate these nuanced differences within the Chinese community in Australia by looking into the results of the other two definitional datasets.

4.3. Findings by Subgroup: Language

Defining the Chinese community through language naturally lends itself to a further breakdown into the different dialects spoken by Chinese people. In fact, it was not until the Republican period that Mandarin started to become the standardised Chinese for the region. Chinese dialects are particular to place, but can broadly be grouped into northern and southern dialects, with much higher levels of linguistic diversity in the South (largely due to the more mountainous terrain limiting interaction between the different areas in ancient China) (Chen 1999). Of those many and varied southern dialects, four of them are recognised by the 2016 Census and hence listed in Table 5. Such a breakdown gives us one new lens through which to analyse the religious affiliations of the Chinese community in Australia.

Within the Chinese language community, Min Nan speakers have exceptionally high proportion of Buddhists (at 41.93% of the group), followed by Hakka speakers at a much lower but still significant proportion of 20.19%. Both Min Nan and Hakka dialects are more frequently spoken by those from Taiwan, and proportions of Min Nan and Hakka speakers in Mainland China are relatively low. Thus, it is not surprising, given those who claim Taiwanese ancestry report relatively high numbers of Buddhists at 19.69%, that this group also follows suit.

The Hakka speakers themselves also have particularly high numbers of Christians (46.37%), which is almost as high as the proportion in the overall Australian population (52.14%). Min Nan speakers have the second highest proportion of Christians (26.61%), and for both Min Nan and Hakka speakers the largest denomination is Catholicism at 8.15% and 34.18% respectively. This could be explained in couple of ways. Firstly, these people may have arrived in Australia earlier than other groups, leaving more time for conversion to locally popular religions and denominations (Chapman 2007; Ngan and Chan 2012). Alternatively, this may reflect the relative historical success of Christian missionaries within this language community (Constable 1994; Lutz and Lutz 1998).

Table 5. The religious profile of subgroups within the Chinese community in Australia (grouped by language).

	Australian Residents Total	Language: Mandarin	Language: Wu	Language: Cantonese	Language: Hakka	Language: Min Nan	Language: Other Chinese	Language: Chinese Community Total
Missing Data	**9.57%**	**4.36%**	**4.82%**	**4.93%**	**5.99%**	**5.75%**	**5.28%**	**4.60%**
1 Buddhism	**2.41%**	**13.44%**	**14.87%**	**18.23%**	**20.19%**	**41.93%**	**10.87%**	**15.46%**
2 Christianity	**52.14%**	**14.68%**	**14.43%**	**23.23%**	**46.37%**	**26.61%**	**7.15%**	**17.64%**
201 Anglican	13.25%	1.85%	3.07%	2.35%	2.67%	2.12%	0.67%	1.99%
203 Baptist	1.47%	1.61%	1.54%	3.87%	1.52%	2.43%	0.65%	2.29%
207 Catholic	22.61%	3.58%	4.52%	8.01%	34.18%	8.15%	2.49%	5.29%
213 Jehovah's Witnesses	0.35%	0.10%	0.18%	0.09%	0.10%	0.11%	0.04%	0.09%
215 Latter-day Saints	0.26%	0.08%	0.00%	0.08%	0.08%	0.07%	0.02%	0.08%
217 Lutheran	0.74%	0.05%	0.00%	0.13%	0.21%	0.07%	0.02%	0.08%
223 Eastern Orthodox	2.15%	0.25%	0.15%	0.06%	0.00%	0.06%	0.12%	0.18%
225 Presbyterian and Reformed	2.25%	1.06%	0.89%	1.43%	0.86%	2.07%	0.28%	1.17%
233 Uniting Church	3.72%	1.16%	0.95%	1.15%	0.46%	1.79%	0.42%	1.15%
24 Pentecostal	1.11%	0.78%	0.47%	0.96%	1.45%	3.13%	0.22%	0.87%
3 Hinduism	**1.88%**	**0.07%**	**0.00%**	**0.06%**	**0.00%**	**0.08%**	**0.07%**	**0.07%**
4 Islam	**2.58%**	**0.26%**	**0.00%**	**0.10%**	**0.14%**	**0.06%**	**0.30%**	**0.21%**
5 Judaism	**0.39%**	**0.01%**	**0.00%**	**0.01%**	**0.00%**	**0.03%**	**0.00%**	**0.01%**
6 Other Religions	**0.95%**	**0.38%**	**0.50%**	**0.39%**	**1.10%**	**1.37%**	**0.27%**	**0.41%**
605 Chinese Religions	0.03%	0.31%	0.47%	0.33%	1.10%	1.14%	0.21%	0.34%
6051 Ancestor Veneration	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.01%*	*0.04%*	*0.02%*	*0.01%*	*0.01%*
6052 Confucianism	*0.00%*	*0.02%*	*0.00%*	*0.02%*	*0.10%*	*0.02%*	*0.04%*	*0.02%*
6053 Taoism	*0.02%*	*0.28%*	*0.33%*	*0.30%*	*1.00%*	*1.08%*	*0.14%*	*0.31%*
7 Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation	**30.09%**	**66.79%**	**65.44%**	**53.05%**	**26.37%**	**24.14%**	**76.08%**	**61.61%**
7101 No Religion, so described	29.63%	66.59%	65.03%	52.86%	25.90%	23.78%	75.95%	61.41%
7201 Agnosticism	0.11%	0.04%	0.15%	0.09%	0.12%	0.13%	0.03%	0.06%
7202 Atheism	0.14%	0.03%	0.00%	0.03%	0.00%	0.06%	0.01%	0.03%

The Hakka and Min Nan language groups have one more commonality, which is that they both have far lower numbers within the "no religion" category. Only around a quarter of Min Nan and Hakka speakers considered themselves to be in this category, as opposed to much higher numbers within Mandarin and Wu speakers (almost two third in each case). That is to say, the Hakka and Min Nan speakers appear to be significantly more religious than the Mandarin and Wu speakers. This is probably reflective of the turbulent and at times repressive religious policy on the Mainland during the 20th century (Tao 2017).

As for the Cantonese speakers, around half fall into the "no religion" category, with the other half split roughly between Buddhism and Christianity (18.23% and 23.23% respectively). Cantonese speakers in Australia tend to come from Hong Kong, Macau, and the Pearl River Delta in Guangdong province, a region that has a rich history of trade and interaction between different cultures, which explains this diversity in religious belief (Liu 2003).

4.4. Findings by Subgroup: Birthplace of Parents

As for Chinese defined by parental birthplace, the data allows for a further breakdown into the specific areas in which respondent's parents were born, giving us a better understanding of how specific cultural backgrounds influence religious belief. The subcategories shown in Table 6 include those with both parents born in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, or Taiwan.

According Table 6, the group with Taiwanese-born parents has a particularly high proportion of Buddhists (22.16%) compared to the other locations, which have less than half the proportion of Buddhists (ranging from 5.32% to 11.44%). This agrees with the findings from the last two sections, namely that those claiming Taiwanese ancestry and/or speakers of Min Nan/Hakka dialects (who are statistically more likely to be from Taiwan than from other places within the Greater China Region) also have a higher proportion of Buddhists.

Those whose parents were born in either Hong Kong or Macau have much higher rates of Christian belief (34.54% and 36.94%) than those with parents born in Mainland China and Taiwan (12.66% and 12.91%). The largest denomination of Christians for those with Hong Kong– and Macau-born parents is Catholicism, with Macau's Catholic proportion particularly high at 26.93%, whereas the Hong Kong category has a relatively larger Baptist community at 6.46% compared to Macau with just 1.96%. Both Hong Kong and Macau have a long history of being colonised by European countries. In fact, they remained under the rule of Britain and Portugal, respectively, until the end of the 20th century. During the colonial period, Hong Kong and Macau were deeply influenced by the presence of Christianity, and this period of history has left its mark on the religious landscape of those territories, which in turn is reflected in the religious beliefs of those with both parents born in these places (Leung 2001).

The group with both parents born in Taiwan has a much higher proportion of subscribers to Chinese religions (1.5%), and an exceptionally high proportion of those people are believers in Taoism (1.45%). This is most likely reflective of the fact that, since the mid-20th century, the proportion of adherents to traditional Chinese folk religions and Taoism are significantly higher in Taiwan than in other territories within the Greater China Region (Katz 2003; Yang and Hu 2012).

Table 6. The religious profile of subgroups within the Chinese community in Australia (grouped by the birthplaces of parents).

	Australian Residents Total	Parent Birthplaces: Both Mainland China	Parent Birthplaces: Both Hong Kong	Parent Birthplaces: Both Macau	Parent Birthplaces: Both Taiwan	Parent Birthplaces: Chinese Community Total
Missing Data	**9.57%**	**4.41%**	**4.34%**	**3.80%**	**5.55%**	**4.47%**
1 Buddhism	**2.41%**	**11.44%**	**5.32%**	**6.67%**	**22.16%**	**11.55%**
2 Christianity	**52.14%**	**12.66%**	**34.54%**	**36.94%**	**12.91%**	**14.68%**
201 Anglican	13.25%	1.70%	3.63%	1.38%	1.01%	1.84%
203 Baptist	1.47%	1.83%	6.46%	1.96%	1.47%	2.22%
207 Catholic	22.61%	3.30%	12.67%	26.93%	1.95%	4.09%
213 Jehovah's Witnesses	0.35%	0.08%	0.06%	0.00%	0.12%	0.08%
215 Latter-day Saints	0.26%	0.06%	0.13%	0.00%	0.14%	0.08%
217 Lutheran	0.74%	0.04%	0.17%	0.00%	0.03%	0.06%
223 Eastern Orthodox	2.15%	0.39%	0.03%	0.00%	0.02%	0.34%
225 Presbyterian and Reformed	2.25%	0.76%	2.05%	0.69%	1.64%	0.93%
233 Uniting Church	3.72%	0.90%	1.24%	1.50%	1.83%	0.99%
24 Pentecostal	1.11%	0.36%	0.66%	0.35%	0.89%	0.42%
3 Hinduism	**1.88%**	**0.02%**	**0.04%**	**0.00%**	**0.02%**	**0.02%**
4 Islam	**2.58%**	**0.31%**	**0.09%**	**0.00%**	**0.05%**	**0.28%**
5 Judaism	**0.39%**	**0.01%**	**0.00%**	**0.00%**	**0.01%**	**0.01%**
6 Other Religions	**0.95%**	**0.22%**	**0.26%**	**0.00%**	**1.66%**	**0.31%**
605 Chinese Religions	0.03%	0.19%	0.20%	0.00%	1.50%	0.28%
6051 *Ancestor Veneration*	*0.00%*	*0.01%*	*0.01%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*
6052 *Confucianism*	*0.00%*	*0.02%*	*0.00%*	*0.00%*	*0.04%*	*0.02%*
6053 *Taoism*	*0.02%*	*0.16%*	*0.20%*	*0.00%*	*1.45%*	*0.25%*
7 Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation	**30.09%**	**70.93%**	**55.42%**	**51.32%**	**57.63%**	**68.67%**
7101 No Religion, so described	29.63%	70.75%	55.18%	50.75%	57.46%	68.48%
7201 Agnosticism	0.11%	0.04%	0.11%	0.00%	0.06%	0.05%
7202 Atheism	0.14%	0.02%	0.05%	0.00%	0.02%	0.02%

In terms of the "no religion" category, those with both parents born in Mainland China have very high representation (70.93%), with other subgroups ranging from 51% to 57%. Of the parents of this group, a large proportion probably arrived in Australia after 1980s, which means that these families are likely to have been influenced the radical secularisation process sponsored by the Communist regime in Mainland China during the 20th century. This does not only mean that people in this subgroup are less likely to believe in any particular religion, but they are also less familiar with concepts associated with religion, such as agnosticism and atheism, probably due to the deliberate marginalisation of religion-related scholarly discussions and media reports by the state apparatus in Mainland China since the mid-20th century (Yang 2004; Yao 2007). This is evidenced by the high numbers of non-religious people in this group (70.93%) and the relatively low numbers of people specifying a belief in atheism (0.02%) or agnosticism (0.04%). Interestingly, this group, although they have very close ties to Mainland China, do not have particularly high numbers of believers in Chinese religions. This is perhaps reflective of a contemporary China that is somewhat disconnected on a spiritual level with its ancient past (Tao 2012; Yang 2012).

It should be noted that, in this section, we only report on the religious belief of people who have both parents born in the same territory within the Greater China Region. For example, respondents with one parent born in mainland China and the other born in Hong Kong are not included in Table 6 due to space restrictions. It is reasonable to believe that the distribution of religious belief amongst these mixed parent groups falls in between the numbers for those with both parents born in each location, although this should be confirmed by further empirical studies into the census data.

5. Conclusions

Through a systematic analysis of the recently released 2016 Australian Census data, this article presents a comprehensive picture of the religious affiliations of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia. Our findings show that members of the Chinese community are comparatively more willing to disclose their religious beliefs than the general population, with half as many Chinese respondents choosing not to answer the question regarding religious belief. In comparison with the general population of Australia, members of the Chinese community are far more likely to claim that they do not have any religious belief, making the Chinese community a highly secular social group even in the context of the rapid secularisation in contemporary Australia. However, even with higher levels of 'no religion', the proportion of people in the Chinese community willing to specifically identify themselves as an 'atheist' is comparatively lower than the general population. While the Christian denominations are the most populous religious groups in both the Chinese community and the general population, the proportion of Christian belief among the Chinese community is significantly lower. Second to Christianity, Buddhism is the next most popular religion within the Chinese community. In addition, although relatively few members of the Chinese community in Australia reported that they affiliate with Chinese religions, the proportion of believers in Chinese religions (including Ancestor Veneration, Confucianism, and Taoism) among the Chinese community is ten to twelve times higher than the proportion within the general population.

As highlighted in this article, the Chinese community in Australia is made up of people who arrived in the continent during different historical periods and came from different places in and beyond the Greater China Region. Therefore, it is only natural that their religious lives vary greatly, reflecting the diversity of their cultural and ethnic identities. We therefore used three differently defined cross-sections of the Chinese community in Australia to ensure a decent coverage of this community, and to gain further insight into the particular break down of religious belief amongst subgroups. On the whole, the three definitional datasets returned similar results. However, there are significant differences in the religious profile of different subgroups within each definitional dataset of the Chinese community. For example, whilst almost 58% of the people who report their ancestry as Taiwanese claim they have no religious belief, people who report a Tibetan ancestry are almost all Buddhists, with only 5.8% claiming that they do not believe in any religion. Similarly, whilst

only around a quarter of Min Nan and Hakka speakers claimed that they have no religious belief, an overwhelming two thirds of Mandarin and Wu speakers declared themselves as non-religious.

This article offers a significant amount of much needed information on the religious affiliations of the Chinese community in Australia and sheds new light on how the Chinese community adapts to, and evolves in, a contemporary multicultural Australian society. As we demonstrated in this report, while broad similarities exist across the Chinese community in Australia, a more nuanced breakdown of the datasets reveals some interesting differences in the religious affiliations of Chinese people who are from different places, speak different dialects, or claim different ancestry. The Greater China Region is a religiously and culturally diverse place despite the efforts that certain regimes in the region have made to overturn or marginalise this trend (Tao 2015; Liang 2018). This diversity is reflected in the data collected through Australia's 2016 Census. The differences between the subgroups within the Chinese community are best understood through contextual understanding of the historical and demographic reality of the specific Chinese regions and cultures with which respondents claim ties. Furthermore, the context of immigration, both in terms of the departure and arrival location and time of relocation are important parts of the picture. From the original gold miners of the 19th century to the hundreds of thousands of Chinese students currently studying in Australian higher education institutions, the diversity of the Chinese community has enriched the multicultural fabric of Australian society.

While this article has made use of previous empirical and analytical research where relevant, a heavy emphasis has been placed on the 2016 Australian Census data. Although the census data is the most comprehensive and up-to-date resource for assessing the religious life of Australian residents, there are inevitably limitations given the way it is designed and conducted. The census does not tell us about the detail of individuals relationship with their religious belief and counts the extremely pious and the nominally religious in the same way. Further, cultural and linguistic differences, as pointed out by Johnson (2017), can make a significant difference in how people respond to survey questions. Another significant limitation comes from the structured nature of the data, and the absence of coded detail within non-Christian religions in the census' design, meaning that information on specific denominations or schools of non-Christian religions are not captured by the census. Lastly, the quality of data for the Chinese community may be threatened by the itinerancy of Chinese exchange students, whose population is statistically significant, yet whose personnel is changing frequently with old students graduating and new students arriving all the time.

Notwithstanding such limitations, we hope that the census data analysed in this article will serve as a foundation for subsequent qualitative investigations into the socio-political meaning of religious practice, the impact, and implications of these practices among the Chinese community in contemporary Australia. This can be achieved through the creation and analysis of new survey data that focuses on the religious life of the Chinese community in contemporary Australia or through qualitative research based on interviews, participant observations, and in-depth case studies from an Australian context. Assessing the religious profile of the Chinese community in Australia also presents opportunities to make sense of some intriguing questions in other social scientific fields. Unlike some other immigrant communities in Australia, which predominantly follow one or a few religions, the religious profile of the Chinese community in Australia is particularly rich and diverse. Moreover, existing scholarly work has demonstrated that religious affiliation has a complicated and profound influence on national and ethnic identities (Ngeow and Ma 2016; Poon 2016). Beyond this article, we hope that further investigation into the religious profile of the Chinese community in Australia will contribute to a new and better understanding of Australia's multicultural society.

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