

Christian Capital: Singapore, Evangelical Flows and Religious Hubs

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ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship has pointed out the ways in which religions are increasingly commodified, primarily through two mechanisms: the monetisation of religious objects and practices, and the materialisation and extension of religious-symbolic power through new technologies and practices. These two mechanisms of monetisation and materialisation provide very concrete ways of understanding religious commodification, but they do not provide a complete picture of how religious capital is created and sustained in the holistic context of society, city and nation considered in relation to international capital flows. “Christian Capital” includes not only the commodity, consumerist and media empires particularly associated with global-reach “megachurches”, but also the less-tangible situational, relational, human-social and influential wealth created between religious agencies and their urban-national contexts. Using the case of Christian agencies in Singapore and their strategic creation of transnational influences, this paper offers a conception of Christian capital that incorporates not only the materialisation of religious influence in terms of finances and commodities, but also its expression in less tangible but significant ways in terms of the creation of an international “brand” of Singapore Christianity.

KEYWORDS

Evangelical Protestantism; Singapore; Christian capital; religious hubs

Introduction: Religious Capital, and the Capital “Hubs” of Religions

Defined broadly, “capital” is any form of wealth or property, including not only financial and material wealth, but also “abstract” (non-material) wealth in the form of useful services and knowledge, and “social capital” – “an informal exchange embedded in cultural systems which ... holds important economic implications” (Svendsen & Svendsen, 2004, p. 16). Often it is the global financial market whose transnational movements have the most direct impact on developing nations (Mosley, 2003, pp. 2–5), and which are equated with transnational capital. It is important to follow Bourdieu in seeing capital beyond the purely financial or material, in its manifestation as “cultural capital”, “social capital”, “symbolic capital” and other forms of social relations that embody value and benefit (Bourdieu, 1990). Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic capital” is a critique of the “ethnocentrism” of what

he calls “economism”, the reduction of all transactions to a “self-interestedness” that can be measured by or equated with money (1990, pp. 112–113). Yet this ignores the “good faith economy” of “friendly transactions”, “trust”, goodwill “relationships”, “gratitude” and other deeply-abiding but often “misrecognised” elements of human transactional behaviour (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 115–118). This is as true of modern social units (the city, the nation) as it is in the tribal societies from which Bourdieu draws his main examples: while noting that human capital – the investments that result in increased “productivity” and “incomes”, the ability to “spend their incomes more intelligently”, and the ability to “get more pleasure out of life” – is inseparable from the human mind and thus “intangible” and not open to “empirical tests”, Machlup (1984, pp. 420–435) goes on to discuss a nation’s investment in education and childcare, and the migration of better-educated individuals, as significant ways of increasing human capital. This broader and more inclusive use of the term “capital” is thus consonant with factors influencing geographies of migration, talent flows, liveable cities, pilgrimages, cultural influence and imperialism, beyond the issues of foreign direct investment and loans that might be more narrowly conceived as a geography of “capital”.

Likewise with religion and religious flows, it is necessary to recognise that religious capital is more than the financialisation and materialisation of religion. Max Weber’s seminal work on the “Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism” shaped much subsequent sociological thinking about the structural affinity between Protestant Christianity and the ownership of capital, but he was primarily interested in “capital” as “money or goods with a monetary value”, and did not consider other ways in which religion embodied different forms of capital (Weber, 2001, p. 26). Recent scholarship on “religious commodification” has sought to “redefine religions as market commodities as well as exchange in the spiritual marketplace” (Kitiarsa, 2008, p. 6). Even when this process goes beyond the more common marketing of religious goods such as amulets or charms, the central assumption has been an equation of religion – its influences, rituals, processes and symbolism – with material manifestations that can be bought and sold. Thus we have Weller’s (2008, pp. 17–18) interesting study of Asian charismatic Christianity’s “commodification of charisma through mass production of artefacts or videos”, in turn sustaining a “prosperity” phenomenon that could be measured in terms of worldly material wealth; or Turner’s (2008, p. 43) recognition that the advent of Christian television and film ushered in an era of the “commodification of the Christian message”, as the cassettes of messages of “radical clerics” likewise did for “fundamentalist Islam”.

This recent and salient focus on religious commodification should not at the same time blind us to the other process, which we might term the “spiritualisation of capital”, in which material resources such as finances and goods are de-materialised into non-tangible religious capital such as goodwill, credibility and branding for the religious organisation. We should also be cognisant of the fact that some aspects of religion, while they can certainly be considered forms of capital or wealth, are less easily equated with financial or material things. While the books or DVDs of a well-known preacher are clearly forms of religious commodity, it is less clear that the preacher’s name-recognition, credibility or influence constitute distinct commodities. Moreover, the creation and utilisation of those forms of symbolic or intellectual capital in this example is not clearly assignable to the individual preacher alone: the resources of the surrounding religious institution and religious networks, even the relative advantages of location (city), regime (state) and social resources (infrastructure), are contributing sources of religious capital; and conversely, the strategic

leveraging of the preacher's name directly advances not only the preacher's commodification (in sales of books, invited talks etc.) but also that of the religious institution, religion and even the city as a hub of that religion.

Thus, religious capital is more properly studied in relation to religious "hubs" – significant nodes where a concentration of a particular religion's tangible and intangible resources obtain – than in relation to individual religious figures or organisations as if they operated alone. Particular attention should be paid to (some) global cities as religious hubs, due to the confluence of different forms of religious capital and strategic advantages possessed variously by religious agencies, communities, the city and even the state. It is clear that hubs of "religious economies" (to varying extents, depending on the particular religion's alignment with market forces) move religious commodities, consumption and giving through global channels (Poon et al., 2012, p. 1974). These economies are not only produced and controlled by religious agencies, however; nor are they only measured in terms of the financial and material commodities such agencies produce. They are also aided by and constituted in the other capital accruing from the social, economic, infrastructural, political, geographical and strategic contexts in which those agencies function. In recent years, Protestant Christian missiologists have increasingly recognised the role of major cities in enhancing religious capital, given the increasingly mobile, heterogeneous (in socioeconomic, racial-cultural and other terms) and often needy flows of people into cities (Greenway & Monsma, 1989; Davey, 2002; Hammond & Overstreet, 2011). Expansion-minded and evangelical religious organisations take to cities as natural hubs for their operations, not only because large cosmopolitan cities have heterogeneous groups that are logical targets for evangelical activities (and para-religious activities such as social justice and welfare), but also because the city is a "center for commerce, a marketplace to expedite the flow of the earth's abundance" – in essence, an "administrative centre" for religious capital (Greenway & Monsma, 1989, p. 29). The recognition of the importance of cities in contemporary evangelical projects is in keeping with the understanding that cities – especially the larger global cities – are "immense concentrations of economic power", competing with (but also at times complementing) each other as "command centres" of flows of people, capital, culture and other resources (Sassen, 1999, p. 105).

The intersection of global city and faith parameters determines the emergence of faith capitals (etymologically from Latin "caput", the head or leader) – the leading hubs or zones that direct the religious resources (capital) of that particular faith economy. The need for both sets of parameters to coincide explains why Kuala Lumpur (rather than, say, nearby global cities Singapore or Bangkok, both with significant Muslim communities) should become a hub for Islamic banking and tourism. Even though there are also significant Buddhist and Christian communities (around 21 and 9 per cent respectively) in the country, Kuala Lumpur is a global city within a nation in which Islam is the constitutional religion and the religion of the majority of the people (around 58 per cent) (Alim, 2014, pp. 103–125). Kuala Lumpur's advantage over Jakarta (a nearby hub, in the largest Muslim nation in the world, Indonesia) is in turn explained by Malaysia's early and protracted efforts to develop Islamic banking and Muslim tourism (al-Amine & al-Bashir, 2012, p. 434; Oxford Business Group, 2012, pp. 165–166). By the same token, if Singapore cannot compete with cities such as Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta in terms of Islamic-linked flows, that allows Christian- and to a certain extent Buddhist-linked ones to emerge in a manner that they are unable to do in cities where Islam is the national and dominant religion. Both Kuala Lumpur and

Singapore fare better in their respective religious economies than, say, Dhaka (which is the main city in a larger Muslim nation than Malaysia) or Surabaya (the stronghold of Chinese Christians in Indonesia), partly because the global city stature of the former two cities aids those religious flows to a greater extent than in the latter two secondary cities.

Singapore as the “Antioch of Asia”: Global Flows, Regional Influence, Evangelical Capital

Singapore in many ways epitomises the confluence of evangelical Christian capital and religious flows in the context of the Asian global city. As Poon et al. (2012, pp. 1970–1972) have argued, Singapore is both a “cosmopolitan world city” (as shown by indicators such as its “emergence on the global economy”, high standard of “material life”, multi-racial and multi-cultural population from all parts of the world) as well as a “religious hub”, particularly for Buddhism and Christianity, the religions with the largest communities of adherents (33 and 18 per cent respectively) and also with “mega organisations” (in both religions) each with thousands of regular attendees. Singapore can thus be considered a hub for both religions, although its standing as a hub for Buddhism in the region is qualified, given the proximity of countries with larger populations of Buddhist adherents (both in absolute numbers and as percentages of the national population – for example, Thailand, Myanmar, Japan), as well as with significant Buddhist symbolic capital in the form of popular pilgrimage sites such as India’s Bodhi Gaya, Thailand’s Wat Phra Kaew, Laos’s Luang Prabang, Indonesia’s Borobudur and others. In contrast, the proportionate size of Singapore’s Christian population is significant compared to those of most of the other countries in Asia, as are the various forms of Christian capital exercised by the churches and Christian organisations therein. It arguably has potential to become a hub for Islam as well, due to the same economic and strategic advantages, although here its role will continue to be overshadowed by Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta, nearby hubs with considerably greater concentrations of Islamic flows and resources.

Singapore’s position as a Christian hub in Asia is a function of a combination of religious and socioeconomic factors. Firstly, Singapore is one of the four Asian Christian “hotspots” in terms of a critical mass of adherents. Christianity in Asia as a whole occupies something of a marginal position, by virtue of its generally more recent establishment compared to religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism, its historical association with European colonialism (and present-day association with Western countries such as the US), and its relatively weak position vis-à-vis the larger Asian religions in the cultural politics of most countries in Asia (Goh, 2005, pp. 1–4; Goh, 2009, pp. 9–11). In most of the countries and regions of Asia, the Christian population is in single digits in percentage terms – in the low single digits in India, Thailand, Pakistan and Bangladesh. The notable exceptions are the Philippines, the only Christian-majority nation in Asia with more than 90 per cent of the population Christian; South Korea, which has a Christian population of around 30 per cent; Hong Kong SAR, which has a Christian population of around 12 per cent; and Singapore (KOSIS, 2007; Information Services Department, 2013, pp. 346–347; Department of Statistics Singapore, 2011).

The four urban centres for these regions – Manila, Seoul, Hong Kong and Singapore – are all Christian hubs in Asia, although they play somewhat different roles in Christian flows according to their different political, social and economic regimes. Seoul, for example, is home to the largest megachurch in the world – Yoido Full Gospel Church, led by well-known

pastor David Yonggi Cho, which claims more than 750,000 members (Yoido, “Emeritus Pastor Cho”). Yoido plays a significant role in the way in which Seoul Christianity is plugged into global evangelical circles (through Cho’s appearances as a speaker, the circulation of his sermons on social media and his books in Christian bookstores, the church as a paradigm of church growth and leadership, international visitors and contributors to the church, the church’s mission work in South Korea and other countries). South Korea is the second-largest sender of transnational Christian missionaries after the US, and Seoul is the organisational hub of missionary and other evangelical flows, with the “high visibility” of the numerous large churches, Christian seminaries and universities, and para-church organisations such as Christian bookstores and presses and the offices of Korean and foreign missions agencies (Grayson, 2006, pp. 18–22; Moon, “The Acts,” p. 3; Johnstone & Mandryk, 2001, pp. 387–389). Yet Seoul’s relative strength as a Christian hub does not mean that there is no role for other hubs elsewhere in Asia: its geographical position in northeast Asia, its geopolitical and historical preoccupation with North Korea, its work among well-developed Korean diasporic networks and the generally low levels of English proficiency among residents all dictate a particular pattern of evangelical flows that mark but also limit Seoul’s niche. Hong Kong’s economic, cultural and geographical networks mean that it has also been the historical missions hub for flows into and out of China, and through the Chinese (and particularly the Cantonese-speaking) diaspora. Manila, without quite the same economic flows and resources as Hong Kong or Seoul, with a generally higher English-language competence than South Korea or Hong Kong, and with a predominantly Catholic society and a widely-dispersed overseas population, has Christian networks and flows that have predominantly been among diasporic Filipino communities, particularly in Anglophone countries such as the US and among Catholic transnational networks.

Likewise, Singapore’s development as one of the Christian hubs of Asia has been shaped by its socioeconomic and geographical parameters. As a hub for tourism, aviation, financial services, and research and development, and as a cosmopolitan city attracting foreign talent to live and work there, Singapore is at the centre of flows of human, financial and cultural capital into and out of Asia, and especially Southeast Asia (Yeoh et al., 2001; Sriram et al., 2001; Chang, 2001; Abdul Rahman, 2010). More than just flows of capital, the idea or brand of Singapore’s governance and policies, its reputation and influence on especially countries in Asia – what Chua (2011) has termed “Singapore as model” – have also proven to be significant as an export or flow from Singapore. Not merely a vague or impressionistic influence, the Singapore “model” has had concrete manifestations in collaborative projects in which a Singapore brand of (variously, among other elements) public housing, town planning, industrial plant design, education, or research and development organisation is exported to countries such as India, China, Indonesia and others (Goh, 2005, pp. 219–221; Chua, 2011, pp. 37–49).

In evangelical Christian circles, Singapore has often been called the “Antioch of Asia”, a reference to the vibrant apostolic church described in the book of Acts chapter 11 (Goh, 2004). Judging from recent invocations of the term among Christian leaders and missiologists based in Singapore, “Antioch of Asia” describes the aspiration for Singapore to capitalise on its global positioning to become a “thriving, growing, missionary-sending” hub, a means to “reach major countries like China, India and Indonesia”, a Christian “gateway to Asia” (Pousson, 2008; Thomas, 2008; Yee, 2006). Singapore has a relatively large number of Protestant seminaries (Trinity Theological College, Singapore Bible College, Rhema Bible

Training Centre, TCA College, Far Eastern Bible College, among others) which provide training for Christian pastors and leaders not only from Singapore but also from surrounding countries. A significant number of international Christian organisations, including Alpha, Campus Crusade, Youth With a Mission (YWAM), OMF International, Open Doors International, Derek Prince Ministries, Integrity Music, Antioch Missions, and many others, have regional offices in Singapore. Singapore has become a regional event centre for large-scale conferences (both one-off and recurring) organised by Singapore-based as well as international Christian organisations. These include conferences by the “Alpha” movement originating from London’s Holy Trinity Brompton church; by the “Healing Rooms” movement based in Spokane, Washington; the “Kingdom Invasion” series of conferences organised by Singapore’s Cornerstone Community Church but featuring well-known international speakers; the “Asia Messianic Forum”, a collaboration between Asian and Israeli churches; the “Fire” conference organised by evangelist Reinhardt Bonnke’s Christ for All Nations; and many others.

The financial capital of some of the larger Christian organisations – apart from the capital embodied in their human resources and expertise, symbolic and leadership capital, intellectual capital and so on – gives some indication of the significance of Christian capital in Singapore (Chong, 2015, pp. 218–220). One of Singapore’s biggest churches, New Creation Church, is well known for its ability to raise funds, having set a record by collecting S\$21 million in a single day in 2010 (Feng, 2014, p. 6). It has a business arm, Rock Productions, which owns the S\$500 million, 5,000-seat Star Performing Arts Centre (which is let out commercially as well as being used for church purposes), as well as a recreational and restaurant cluster for which the church paid S\$10 million in 2001 (Feng, 2014, p. 6). The Salvation Army Singapore, one of the larger Christian social welfare organisations in Singapore, in its 2014 Annual Report reported almost S\$38 million in incoming resources, and total reserves of more than S\$124 million (Salvation Army, 2014, pp. 41–42). While these are among the larger Christian organisations, there are also other megachurches (including City Harvest and Faith Community Baptist Church), and a number of large international Christian social welfare organisations (including the YMCA of Singapore, the Metropolitan YMCA, World Vision Singapore, Society of St Vincent de Paul Singapore) operating in Singapore. The significance of religious organisations in the Singapore social welfare landscape is seen in the fact that they make up almost 60 per cent of all registered charities in Singapore, by far the largest category (Charities Unit, 2014, p. 11). In 2012 “Religious and Others” (as such charities are categorised by the Commissioner of Charities) accounted for S\$1.804 billion in collections, which was less than the receipts of educational charities (the most popular philanthropic cause in Singapore), but larger than those collected by all the other sectors (Charities Unit, 2014, p. 13). The majority of the religious charitable organisations in Singapore are Christian.¹

If capital in the twenty-first century is chiefly defined by “inequality” (Piketty, 2014, pp. 15–16), then it is appropriate to describe Christian capital in Singapore as a pronounced inequality with most of the other countries in Asia – a surplus of financial, human, symbolic and cultural resources. Even as the state uses its financial and other capital (knowledge, human expertise, branding) as a tool to further its international relations with other countries, so too do the Protestant evangelical organisations conjoin their capital strategically to those projects in order to further their evangelical influence beyond Singapore’s shores. In this they are motivated by what might be called “Antioch thinking” – the combination of a

basic evangelical imperative based on the Biblical “Great Commission” to carry the gospel to “every nation”, and a conviction about Singapore’s particular regional role in this enterprise, given its relatively high wealth, concentration of evangelical Christian organisations and resources, and strategic location as the main Christian hub within Southeast Asia and even further afield to South Asia (Goh, 2009). Yet how is this surplus or inequality mobilised in relation to some of the surrounding countries, and which countries? The following sections will discuss cases of three different types of Christian capital flow out of Singapore: ad hoc flows of financial capital, developmental flows of financial and human capital, and branding flows of symbolic and cultural capital. There are clearly overlaps between these cases and types of flow, but collectively they indicate the channels and strategies by which Christian capital aligns itself with other (non-Christian, non-religious financial, geographical, national) resources in order to maximise its spread. In each case, too, the limits of and constraints on the flows of Christian capital are seen.

Financial Ad Hoc Flows: Crisis Relief and the Role of Christian Agencies

Perhaps the most obvious and direct way in which Singapore Christian capital is manifested is in the work of Christian agencies in transnational disaster relief. Several natural disasters over the last decade or so, occurring within close proximity of Singapore, demonstrated the readiness of Christian relief organisations to channel flows of capital – in the form of volunteer labour, food and supplies, administrative support, finances – to the affected areas. The December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami that hit (among other regions) parts of Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Thailand is perhaps the best-known example of such an event, but others include the May 2006 Java earthquake, the November 2013 Typhoon Haiyan (Typhoon Yolanda) disaster in the Philippines, the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, China, and the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Among other things, relief aid in the event of crises becomes a means for Singapore to bolster its relationships and strengthen its credibility with other countries (Lim, 1999, p. 115; Ganesan, 2005, pp. 21–22). Singapore Christian aid organisations such as the Salvation Army, Crisis Relief Singapore, the YMCA, and churches and denominations such as Faith Community Baptist Church, City Harvest, the Methodist Church of Singapore, Bethesda CARE (Community Assistance Relationship Enrichment), Catholic Medical Guild and others, capitalise on these factors to play a significant part in Singapore’s relief efforts in crisis regions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005).

In the 2004 tsunami crisis, many of the Singapore churches and Christian organisations mobilised to send aid to nearby Aceh in Indonesia. Most participated by sending relief missions consisting of medical personnel, general volunteers and supplies; in addition, some of the larger Christian organisations (such as the Salvation Army, YMCA, Touch Community Services) also organised campaigns to collect funds and donated goods from members of the public (Lee, 2007, p. 76).

The alignment of such efforts with governmental agendas of promoting foreign relations and political neighbourliness is evident, and acknowledged by both Christian aid agencies and the government. Government resources (financial aid from Temasek Holdings, resources from government-linked companies, army, civil defence and government hospital staff) flowed alongside NGO resources including those from Christian organisations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005). Closer and more specific government–Christian organisation collaborations also took place: Touch Community Services (the social services arm of Singapore

megachurch Faith Community Baptist Church), whose “International” department (TCSI) was set up in 1999 precisely to extend the church’s aid overseas to crisis-hit areas, was one of the church organisations active in providing relief to places such as Sri Lanka and Aceh in the wake of the 2004 tsunami. In October 2005, Touch Community Services International (TCSI) partnered with Member of Parliament Dr Lily Neo and the grassroots organisation she advises (the Kreta Ayer-Kim Seng Citizens’ Consultative Committee, KAKSCCC) to organise a visit to Kalutara and Hambantota in Sri Lanka. KAKSCCC raised the sum of S\$150,000 for relief efforts, and on the visit MP Lily Neo and TCSI leaders gave out fishing boats, engines, three-wheeler vans, sewing machines and other livelihood necessities to affected families (TCSI, 2005). The Singapore government’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported the work of the various Christian organisations and churches in its list of relief efforts undertaken by Singapore to help its tsunami-hit neighbours (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005).

The ability of many Christian groups to raise funds and send mission teams reflects the resource-rich nature of church and Christian organisations in Singapore, in turn a reflection of the relative wealth of the Christian community and general public in Singapore compared to many of the countries in the surrounding region. The extreme need of the crisis-hit communities, and the diplomatic channels that are utilised to facilitate cross-boundary aid, combine to create an enhanced opportunity for Christian capital to move quickly and with significant impact, yet a number of qualifications to this as an example of Christian capital flows need to be made. In the first place, while Christian organisations were prominent in the relief efforts for crises in nearby countries in recent years, they were by no means the only NGOs or the only religious organisations that were involved. The Singapore Buddhist Federation, Bright Hill Monastery (a Buddhist temple), the Bodhiraja Buddhist Society, the Buddhist Research Society, the Ti-Sarana Buddhist Association and the Muslim organisation Darusalam Youth Wing all contributed in various ways to Singapore’s tsunami disaster relief efforts (Lim, 2007; Lai, 2012, p. 221). Also, in seeking a strategic alignment with national capital resources and the national diplomatic project, religious capital runs the risk of losing its distinct identity amidst the larger national project. After listing the various government and voluntary organisations involved in Singapore’s relief efforts, the Vice-Chairman of the Singapore Tsunami Reconstruction Facilitation Committee (TRFC) closed his 2007 update with the slogan “Flying the Singapore flag in the service of humanity” – a reminder that the capital flows originating from Singapore’s various religious organisations were ultimately part of the national wealth and bound by a larger national agenda.

Despite the general alignment of Christian capital flows with the government’s foreign relations machinery in such moments, there were also concerns about the evangelical agenda that was perceived to have been associated with the relief efforts of Christian groups in particular. The concern that Christian humanitarian aid is often involved with evangelical agendas has risen to the fore, not just in Singapore but in other Christian hubs such as South Korea, the US and elsewhere (Chan, 2005; Moll & Olsen, 2006). In a way this is an older problem, dating from at least colonial-era missionary activity where Western missionaries were often accused of intertwining aid to poor natives with evangelism (Bayly, 1989, pp. 280–285; Copley, 1997, pp. 11–12; Carson, 2003, pp. 153–154). Singapore Christian organisations involved in the tsunami aid efforts, particularly in the Muslim stronghold of Aceh, did not entirely escape such controversy. After strongly-worded accusations by Acehnese Muslim leaders about Christian aid workers coming into the region to mix aid and evangelism,

Singapore's relief-coordinating agency the TRFC issued a "code of conduct" for NGOs participating in its relief efforts, requiring them (among other things) to "respect culture and custom" and "not to further [a] particular political or religious standpoint" (Jauhola, 2013, p. 45; Lim, 2007; Ghosh, 2005, p. 32). The wariness of Muslim strongholds in Indonesia (particularly in Sumatra and Java) towards evangelical influences by Singapore Christian organisations continues to be a particular obstacle to the flows of Singapore's Christian capital to Indonesia. For this reason, ad hoc relief provides a particularly opportune means for such flows to enter what is otherwise a highly resistant area and dangerous ground for any efforts perceived as being Christian evangelicalism. Outside such relief windows, evangelical activities by Singapore Christian organisations in Indonesia are largely confined to specific areas such as the Chinese Christian hub of Surabaya, or to outlying islands such as Kalimantan and Sulawesi that lie outside the central Muslim strongholds.

Developmental Flows: Strategic Leveraging of National Branding

Ad hoc flows of Christian capital are not primarily concerned with larger and longer-term effects (social, financial or religious), focusing rather on immediate crisis relief. Strategic flows differ in having a more sustained presence and impact in mind, necessitating a more careful positioning in order to achieve this impact without offending local sensibilities or giving offence. Such influxes are strategic not only in the sense that they are planned and sustained as part of a larger evangelical strategy, but also because part of the strategy is a socioeconomic inequality between sender and receiver nations – an inequality that is factored into the strategy, as creating a want or demand that the sender nation is well positioned to fill. With the emergence of the economic as well as Christian capital of hubs such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Seoul, Christian capital flows to parts of Asia that are still in need of strategic and sustained development no longer come exclusively from Western centres in countries such as the US and Canada, but come from other parts of Asia as well.

Singapore's Methodist Missions Society (MMS) is illustrative of this phenomenon. The MMS was established in 1991 to strategise and coordinate some of the missions projects of the individual Methodist churches in Singapore. Methodism is one of the larger Christian denominations in Singapore, with a considerable amount of Christian capital embodied in its more than 30,000 members, and the 51 churches and "preaching points" (essentially start-up churches), 15 schools, and various charitable and welfare organisations under its umbrella (Methodist Church in Singapore, "Church Directory"; "Ministries"). Singapore Methodists have long been part of the "better educated", "more privileged socio-economic and English-speaking backgrounds" associated with mainline (Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian) Protestant Christianity, a trend that continues to the present day (Goh, 2005, p. 42; Chong & Hui, 2013, p. 20). Centralised agencies such as the Methodist Welfare Services (established in 1982) and the Methodist Missions Society became necessary to coordinate and give something of a common strategic thrust to the numerous outflows of resources in charitable and evangelical projects from the various Methodist bodies.

The Methodist Missions Society aims specifically at channelling Methodism's collective resources overseas, bringing social aid and development resources in tandem with evangelical influence. According to then-Director Reverend Dr Clarence Lim, an early strategic decision was made to focus initially on the country fields of Cambodia, Thailand, China and Vietnam, these countries being chosen for the following reasons:

1. of their proximity to Singapore
2. they provide ample opportunities for ministry and missions work
3. they have large populations of unreached people groups
4. their authorities are open to and welcome having Singaporeans go in and co-operate ... in their development
5. Singapore's national push toward regionalization helps smooth the way and makes resources available
6. there's no viable and established Methodist presence [i.e. no competition and duplication of effort]. (Lim, 2011a, p. 2)

Goals of social aid and development overlap with those of religious influence and evangelism (“ministry and missions work”), with MMS seeking to maximise its capital by leveraging “Singapore’s national push toward regionalisation” and the receptiveness to this on the part of local authorities.

The MMS’s work in Cambodia exemplifies this strategy. Cambodia’s 1993 elections marked the end of its era of internal violence, and the beginning of a period of political stability under Prime Minister Hun Sen. The MMS was quick to see opportunities in the country, and sent an exploratory team in 1994. In this they were aided by a Methodist businessman with business ties in Cambodia, David Tan from Trinity Methodist Church in Singapore, who initiated MMS’s contacts with various Cambodian ministers, officials and NGO leaders. The financial backing of another Singapore Methodist, William K. H. Koh of Bedok Methodist Church who donated US\$900,000, allowed MMS to purchase a property at 68–70 Street 317 in Khan Toul Kork, Phnom Penh, which became the centre of operations for the Methodist Church in Cambodia. The approval by the Cambodian government’s Ministry of Cults and Religions was very quickly forthcoming, on 20 May 1996 (MMS, 2011). In 2000, yet another Singaporean Methodist businessman, Robert Kee from Covenant Community Methodist Church, took the lead in setting up the Community Outreach Services (COS), which was established by MOU with the Cambodian government. This soon transformed into the COSI Children’s Village and Orphanage, which had an initial intake of 100 children. COSI was officially opened by HE Samdech Hun Sen, Prime Minister of Cambodia, on 30 May 2002, at an event graced by Singapore’s ambassador to Cambodia HE Verghese Matthews and other Cambodian Members of Parliament, the Governor of the province, and other local dignitaries (MMS, 2011; Lim, 2011b).

The support for MMS’s Cambodia projects at the governmental and diplomatic levels indicates both the extent to which such developmental aid was welcome in the country, and the success of the MMS in leveraging the burgeoning ties between the governments of both countries. Cambodia joined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, of which Singapore was already a member) in 1999, so aid projects from Singapore from the late 1990s onwards benefited from the cachet of Cambodia’s impending entry into ASEAN, and thereafter the growing relationship between the two nations under the aegis of ASEAN. The MMS presence in Cambodia, which remains strong to this day, represents a flow of Christian developmental aid facilitated by expediency and timeliness in government-to-government relations – a combination that made Cambodia “the easiest mission field” for the MMS, in the words of Quek Koh Eng, MMS’s Area Director and Director of Operations (Quek, 2011).

The success of the MMS strategy in Cambodia was echoed to a certain extent elsewhere, for example in Vietnam, even though the communist government there had a much more suspicious view of religion and especially of the evangelical activities of foreigners. The MMS work in Vietnam started at about the same time as that in Cambodia, with a visit by a medical group in 1994. The 1994 team recommended support for building a 70-bed children's wing to the Ho Chi Minh City Cancer Centre. A letter of intent was signed on 26 August 1995, for MMS to provide expertise and training in the area of paediatric oncology (Lim, 2011a).

In July 1994 an MMS team visited the University of Agriculture and Forestry's Centre for Foreign Languages, at the university's invitation. Arising out of this visit, MMS started to send teams to provide English-language training for Vietnamese teachers (Lim, 2011a, p. 10). In 1998 MMS met with Vietnam National University for exploratory dialogues, and from 1999 onwards helped to organise teaching methodology seminars for English Language teachers in Ho Chi Minh City (in partnership with the Anglican Church in Singapore), and to raise funds for books and other resources (MMS, 1999, pp. 8–9). The twin pillars of paediatric medicine and education (including English Language training) became the main thrusts of MMS's work in Vietnam, leveraging Singapore's reputation as both a medical and educational hub, and Vietnam's readiness to receive such flows of human and intellectual capital. As with Cambodia, the Vietnamese receptiveness – despite the communist government's general wariness of religion and foreign evangelical influence – is seen among other things in the level of governmental endorsement for these MMS projects. For example, MMS's "Love Child Charity Clinic" – a project in collaboration with the Ho Chi Minh Committee of Population, Family and Children, which was the first licensed humanitarian project in Vietnam by a Singapore organisation – was officially opened on 15 January 1999 by Pham Phuong Thao, Vice-President of Ho Chi Minh's People's Committee (MMS, 2004, p. 18; 1999, p. 8).

After around two decades of work in Cambodia and Vietnam, it is clear that MMS's strategic efforts have borne fruit. As of 2013 MMS had 200 church plants of various sizes in Cambodia, ranging from "churches" so designated (with more than 30 worshippers) to "outreach points" (with 15 or fewer) (Lim, 2015; MMS, 2013). Although these are generally small churches, at an annualised average of 20 churches per year, the pace of these church plantings speaks to the efficacy of MMS's efforts, the returns of goodwill and trust it has established in its most successful field of Cambodia. The results in its other fields, including Vietnam (statistics for which are treated with sensitivity by MMS), are less dramatic, although growing nevertheless. It might well be that the small size of these nascent Christian communities relative to the overall national population is partly responsible for the tolerance with which these evangelical flows have been regarded to date. Nevertheless, measured as the rate of growth (starting from a zero base) of the work of one evangelical organisation from one of the smallest countries in ASEAN, the results (particularly in a successful field such as Cambodia) tell a story of the efficacy of Christian capital in the form of evangelical flows aligned strategically with tactical advantages.

Symbolic Capital: "Antioch", Megachurches, Celebrity Power

Bourdieu's notion of "symbolic capital" can be understood as being primarily about "distinction" – "capital, of whatever kind", which is perceived as distinctive and superior, being recognised as occupying a higher position in the "ranks, orders, grades and all the other

symbolic hierarchies” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 238). It follows from this that “symbolic capital is attracted to symbolic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 238), continually reinforcing the perception of its superiority that allows it to acquire a premium over alternative and competing forms of symbolic capital – in other words, in symbolic as well as financial capital, wealth generates more wealth.

The US continues to be the main global source of Protestant Christian symbolic capital. Within the US, particular locales emerge as evangelical Protestant hubs, defined by a branded institution or group of individuals. One such hub, for example, is Houston, Texas, with megachurches such as Lakewood Church, well known for celebrity pastor and bestselling author Joel Osteen and Grammy-winning recording artist Israel Houghton. The renown of Lakewood Church (which regularly reports 38,000 attendees at its services) is due in large part to the reputation of Osteen, who claims to be the “most watched inspirational figure in America” via his sermons which are broadcast on US television and in “almost 100 nations around the world” (Lakewood Church, “Leadership Team”). His inspirational books, such as the 2004 *Your Best Life Now*, are bestsellers (some of them have topped the New York Times Best Seller list), which have reached a broader audience including non-Christian readers. Houghton is a songwriter and artist whose musical CDs of worship songs have won multiple awards (All Music, “Israel”). Like Osteen, he has a strong international presence, through his tours and performances (including in Singapore), album sales, and the use of his songs in church worship services around the world.

Other well-known examples of influential churches and celebrities include Rick Warren’s Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California; Bill Johnson’s Bethel Church in Redding, California; T. D. Jakes’ Potter’s House Church in Dallas, Texas; and others. There are also some well-known hubs outside the US, such as Nicky Gumbel’s Holy Trinity Brompton Church in London, Brian Houston’s Hillsong church in Sydney, and Phil Pringle’s C3 Church, also in Sydney. The considerable cultural capital of such hubs (in the form of books, CDs, film, speaking or concert tours and personal appearances, and content via television and the internet) also leads to significant symbolic capital – the “distinction” or markedly higher valuation (in Bourdieu’s terms, 1991, p. 238) that is accorded to such hubs and their leaders by consumers in the global evangelical Protestant market.

While the US (and to a lesser extent, UK and Australian) dominance of the main (Anglophone) global Christian culture industry looks likely to continue, what is interesting is the emergence of other such hubs outside those traditional hubs. In particular, the development of a global influence among some megachurch hubs in Asia – long the receiver rather than giver of cultural capital in the Anglophone global Christian market, handicapped by lower facility in operating in the Anglophone sphere and also by the much smaller cultural capital accorded to Christianity in Asia – is significant. One of the first globally-significant Asian hubs to emerge was South Korea’s Yoido Full Gospel Church with its pastor David Yonggi Cho. Cho attained international fame as the pastor of the world’s largest church; his founding of Church Growth International in 1976 marked the recognition of his reputation and leadership in church growth (Church Growth International, “Ministry”). Cho studied in the US for many years at several Bible colleges (including Oral Roberts University), which helps explain his facility in English as well as in the general culture and methods of American evangelical Protestantism that allowed him to reach out to the global Christian market (Yoido, “Emeritus Pastor Cho”). Although Cho’s reputation has been tarnished slightly in recent years by his conviction in 2014 for tax evasion, and

also contested by younger and more recent entrants to the market, he is still a pioneer in the creation of Asian Christian symbolic capital.

One of the newer voices is Joseph Prince, pastor of the New Creation Church in Singapore. New Creation is one of the three independent (i.e. outside the mainline denominational system) megachurches in Singapore, and with more than 30,000 claimed attendees is comparable in size to many of the well-known American megachurches. Prince (who is a Singaporean of Indian and Chinese descent, and changed his name before he became a pastor) acknowledges pioneering American Pentecostal televangelist Kenneth Hagin as one of his seminal influences (Martinez, 2014). The influence of an American-style megachurch and media evangelical ministry is evident in Prince's professional career, whose highlights include authoring bestselling books such as *The Power of Right Believing* and *Destined to Reign*, speaking regularly at international Christian conferences alongside big names such as Brian Houston and Joel Osteen, and hosting a television show that "reaches millions of homes across North America, Europe, Africa, Australia, and Israel on both secular and Christian networks" (New Creation, "About Pastor Joseph and Wendy Prince").

Prince is thus a significant example of an Asian Christian product or brand that has successfully been marketed in the global Anglophone Christian economy, including in the US itself.² Prince's 2013 preaching tour of America (which included a stop at Osteen's Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas), in conjunction with the promotion of his book *The Power of Right Believing*, constitutes a "reverse mission" in which the original flow of Christian capital from the West to countries in Asia such as Singapore has been effectively reversed (Freston, 2010, cited in Rakow, 2014). New Creation Church proclaims that a "whopping 60,000 participants" turned up to see Prince on his American tour, and that "millions more were impacted" by Prince's appearance on American Christian channel Trinity Broadcasting Network on 30 October 2014 (New Creation, "Announcements"). Although these are statistics provided by the church itself, it is true that Prince's book *The Power of Right Believing* hit the number two spot on the New York Times Best Seller list for the week of 10–17 November 2013, coinciding with his US tour. The US tour, with meetings in large convention halls in Newark, Los Angeles, Houston (Lakewood Church) and Dallas – Prince's ministry website has a photo gallery showing crowds of attendees lining up outside and packed into the meeting venues – is undeniably evidence of a significant impact by an Asian evangelical Christian leader on the US market. Part of the impact is no doubt due to the fact that Prince's book and teachings (by his own admission) appeal not just to Christians but also to a "secular" audience interested in what is broadly known as (psychological or "spiritual") "self-help". Some of his sermons are mounted on YouTube, with some attracting more than 300,000 views. In response to his message "Hear Jesus Only and Be Uplifted", mounted on YouTube on 11 May 2014, some posted comments include "I really hope he comes to Illinois", "Come to Fresno", "Hope to see [sic] one day in Mauritius", "Come to Chicago", "Come back to Dallas", and others that support Prince's claims to have a wide impact that crosses national boundaries (YouTube, 2014).

Prince and his digital and material products distributed through his Joseph Prince Ministries and New Creation Church have emerged as probably the most globally-known and actively-exported Singaporean Christian brand, but it is not the only one. Kong Hee, pastor of City Harvest Church – another Singapore megachurch that has also claimed more than 30,000 attendees – is, like Prince, a media-savvy and popular pastor with a vision of a global ministry. Both Prince and Kong have a strong Facebook presence, each with more

than 100,000 viewers; both have sermons mounted on YouTube, although in general Prince's sermons have considerably more viewers than Kong's; and both sell their products (books, CDs of their sermons and other material) worldwide through online stores (Poon et al., 2012, pp. 1978–1979). Kong (and his church) differs from Prince (and his) principally in that Kong has a wife who is a singer (known as Sun Ho) whose CDs and performances form an integral part of the Kong Hee and City Harvest brand and marketing. Also, since 2010, Kong and some of his church leaders have been the subject of police investigations into alleged misuse of funds, which has cast a pall on (among other things) the promotion and sale of his books and CDs (Poon et al., 2012, p. 1979).

Kong and his church are also producers of considerable Christian capital and influence. At its peak (before the start of the police investigations), City Harvest had a total attendance of more than 30,000, although this has recently fallen to just under 20,000. However, on special occasions such as Easter and Christmas (when the church draws many visitors because of its brand of teaching and polished musical and dramatic presentations) as many as 40,000 people attend (City Harvest, 2011/12, p. 10). This influence is not confined to Singapore itself: City Harvest Church Singapore has 49 “affiliate churches” (34 of which come under the “direct supervision” of the Singapore church, the rest coming under the umbrella of the Church's Malaysian partner Harvest Christian Fellowship) in various countries in the Asia-Pacific region (City Harvest, 2011/12, p. 20). The Church also has a School of Theology (SOT) which enrolls around 500 students each year, more than half of them from Singapore, but the rest from a variety of countries including the UK, the US, Switzerland, Canada and the Asia-Pacific region (City Harvest, 2011/12, p. 21). City Harvest also has television programming (its 30-minute “Harvest Time” show) which has eight weekly time slots shown on various channels in South Korea, Australia and the US, giving the Church “2.7 billion potential viewers” (City Harvest, 2011/12, p. 26). It also webcasts its regular Church services, and claims more than 450,000 viewers, spread out over more than 100 countries (City Harvest, 2011/12, p. 27).

Prince and Kong are the clearest examples of a Singapore-grown brand of Christianity that has an indisputable impact well beyond the borders of the nation. While the exact overseas impact (measured in simple quantitative data such as sales figures, actual viewership of their programs as opposed to subscribed viewers of the channels on which their programming is aired, genuine versus phantom web viewers and visitors, and so on) may be hard to pin-point, certainly the overt strategies and scope of their overseas ambitions are clear. The mechanisms and media – books placed on the New York Times Best Seller list, US tours, programming aired on US and other television channels, YouTube and internet content – are a form of cultural capital that not only generates revenue for the pastors and their churches but also establishes symbolic capital in Bourdieu's sense of “distinction” or a higher “rank” in symbolic hierarchies. The symbolic capital is in turn capitalised (and evident) in overseas consumers of their content, foreign visitors and students at their churches, conferences and theological schools, and other such transactions. This symbolic capital inevitably carries over beyond the two churches, into a wider symbolic capital for Singapore as a Christian hub, the “Antioch of Asia” which “God has prospered [sic] ... so that the Gospel of Jesus can go forth from this tiny island” (Joseph Prince, quoted in Thomas, 2008). The Christian capital of Prince and Kong, City Harvest and New Creation, is consumed in the context of Singapore as a significant emerging Christian capital, viewed by Christian consumers as a country which “God has prospered” because He has a plan and a use for it; the appropriate

response on the part of Christian consumers who subscribe to this view, then, is to accord symbolic capital to these and other capital-producing churches in Singapore, consuming their products in a variety of forms and media. The knock-on effect is to raise Singapore's symbolic position as a regional or international headquarters for Christian organisations, and as a venue for international Christian conferences.

Conclusion: New Christian Capitals and Geographies of Capital Flows

The “symbolic geographies” of religious investment (Garbin, 2010, p. 145; Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004, p. 21), dealing with the faith systems, values, priorities, inner convictions and emotive attachments and loyalties of believers, are not as easily mapped as other human geographies with more concrete and quantitative indicators. While the financial and material aspects of religious commodification on the part of individual religious organisations are more easily accounted for, this does not take into account religious capital (in the form of “distinction” or branding, goodwill and trust, intellectual capital and its influence, and so on) that is not usually quantifiable, and moreover is not attributable to religious organisations alone, but also ensues from contextual advantages and resources. This does not mean that spiritual geographies must be inchoate and indeterminate, but rather that they must broaden their object of study to include the environmental resources and parameters that contextualise and contribute to the religious capital and flows of specific religious organisations. The case of evangelical Protestantism in Singapore is instructive in this regard, pointing to an “excess” of Christian capital that not only flows outward, often aligned with the other capital of the city-state, but that in turn returns to enhance Singapore's Christian branding as the “Antioch of Asia”, predicting a continuing development of a new Christian hub in Asia.

Notes

1. A search of the religious charities on the Charity Portal (https://www.charities.gov.sg/_layouts/MCYSCPSearch/MCYSCPSearchCriteriaPage.aspx) conducted on 6 November 2014 revealed 253 Christian, 182 Taoist, 176 Buddhist, 44 Hindu, 15 Muslim and 31 “Other” organisations.
2. My analysis of Prince in this context was sparked by listening to Katja Rakow's paper, “Bringing the Gospel Revolution from Singapore to the Ends of the World”.

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