ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Organizing Transnational Moral Conservatism: How U.S. Christian and Taiwanese “Pro-Family” Movements Converge, Diverge, and Collide

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Since the 1990s, sexual rights, including marriage equality and LGBT education, have become the subject of global cultural conflicts. My research tracks the birth and growth of Christian conservative activism against the sexual citizenship of “tongzhi” (LGBT+) people in Taiwan. A young democracy, Taiwan is often viewed as “the beacon for Asian gays” because it is friendly to sexual minorities, recently becoming the first Asian society to legislate same-sex marriage. However, such images understate Western Christian conservatives’ global expansion into East Asia, and their influence upon the anti-gay agenda of Taiwanese pro-family activists.

In this dissertation, I analyze Taiwanese pro-family Christian activists’ mobilization, focusing upon their relationship with Euro-American conservative organizations, and examining the transnational networks they have developed. What social factors, in addition to religion, transformed these Christian conservatives’ homophobic attitudes into heterosexual hegemonic protests against tongzhi people’s sexual citizenship? How did they gain power and hegemony in a majority Buddhist/Taoist country? How have they influenced social policies and popular attitudes toward sexual minorities, reinforcing patriarchy and heteronormativity?

This dissertation is based on 18 months of ethnographic research, along with 62 in-depth interviews with informants across the political spectrum, content analyses of multi-media
publications, and more than 200 Christian books related to family, marriage, and sexuality. Cross-national data and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) were also used to examine whether Christian conservatives’ attitudes toward homosexuality represent the voice of the “silent majority,” as they claim.

This study shows that Christian conservatives in the Global South are not passive recipients of Western culture. Rather, they reassemble transnational anti-gay knowledge and resources strategically, mixing American conservatism with local traditions in order to oppose marriage equality and tongzhi education. Faced with the closure of Exodus International (an ex-gay organization) and the legalization of same-sex marriage in Christian-majority countries, Taiwanese conservatives have deliberately sought a path that is relatively autonomous from the Western. At times, they portray themselves as the guardians of Chinese culture and indigenous traditions, condemning American LGBT-affirmative policies as Western invasion and moral corruption that will lead to societal collapse. These various approaches show the convergence, divergence, and collision among Taiwanese Christian conservatives and their Western counterparts.

Institutionally, Taiwanese Christian conservatives have achieved power from their alliances with the former authoritarian government and from what I call the “transnational sex-religious network.” This network consists of global flows of religious leaders, gospel commodities, pro-family organizations, anti-gay ideas, and conservative repertoires that center sex-negative morality and fundamentalist theology at its core. Ultimately, the transnational sex-religious network seeks to “spiritualize” heteronormativity and evangelize the world with Christian fundamentalist doctrines of marriage and sexuality.

My research bridges sociological research on religion, sexualities, and transnationalism. It analyzes sexualities in relation to the growth of global Christianity, revealing transnational networks of moral conservatism, and critically examining the growth of global social inequalities.

**Keywords:** transnational sexualities, global Christian conservatism, pro-family movement, gender equity education, marriage equality