

Understanding Asia: Religion and Society

The Religious Factor in the Belt and Road



(Scan for registration)

David A. Palmer
(The University of Hong Kong)

07. July 2025
12:15 – 13:45

Zoom event

The Belt and Road runs through or around countries in Asia, Africa and elsewhere that have strong religious identities, and sometimes incorporate religion into the ideology of the state or of ruling political parties. China, on the other hand, is an officially atheist state. To what extent is religion a factor in China's deepening engagement with countries of the Global South? In this talk, I will outline a conceptual framework for answering this question, drawing on insights from an international field-based collaborative research project on the religious entanglements of the BRI. The religious factor presents different dimensions when considered at three different levels and scales: (1) the realm of nation-states and geo-politics; (2) the realm of transnational religious circulations; (3) the realm of localized community responses to Chinese infrastructure and investment projects. While each realm presents its own dynamic, it is at the local level that religious factors are most likely to have an impact on Chinese engagements.

David A. Palmer (Ph.D, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris) is a Professor of anthropology jointly appointed by the Hong Kong Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (HKIHSS) and the Department of Sociology of the University of Hong Kong. His award-winning books include *Qigong Fever: Body, Science and Religion in China* (Columbia University Press), *The Religious Question in Modern China* (University of Chicago Press, co-authored with V. Goossaert) and *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality* (University of Chicago Press, co-authored with E. Siegler). He is the President of the East Asian Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. He currently leads several international collaborative projects on the socio-cultural dimensions of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). He is currently conducting anthropological research on the Lanten Yao ethnic minority in northern Laos, and has conducted field research in several BRI countries including Vietnam, Malaysia, Laos, Pakistan, Nepal, South Africa, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.