

Singapore Management University

Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University

Research Collection School of Social Sciences

School of Social Sciences

10-2016

Chinese Christians for Trump

Justin Kh TSE

Singapore Management University, justintse@smu.edu.sg

Follow this and additional works at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Citation

TSE, Justin Kh, "Chinese Christians for Trump" (2016). *Research Collection School of Social Sciences*. Paper 3353.

https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research/3353

Available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/sooss_research/3353

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Social Sciences at Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Research Collection School of Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of Institutional Knowledge at Singapore Management University. For more information, please email cherylids@smu.edu.sg.

Chinese Christians for Trump

Chinese evangelicals who support Donald Trump come from a particular class of people with wealth to protect, says scholar Justin Tse.

Published in Vancouver Sun, 2016 October 25

<https://vancouversun.com/news/staff-blogs/chinese-christians-for-trump>

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump is getting support from an unusual source – Chinese evangelicals in Canada.

Social media in Canada is ablaze with Chinese Christians coming out in support of the bombastic would-be strongman. Trump’s Chinese supporters see him as a beacon of authoritarian stability in a world that could be headed towards apocalypse.

“Trump ... is (seen as) a dose of strong law-and-order medicine on the world stage,” says Assistant Prof Justin Tse, who studied Metro Vancouver’s more than 400,000 ethnic Chinese while obtaining his PhD in geography at the University of B.C.

Some Chinese evangelicals in Canada are supporting Trump to “ensure the stability of global markets through authoritarian law-and-order regimes,” says Tse, a visiting assistant professor in the Asian American Studies Program of Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences at Northwestern University, Chicago.

At my request, Tse wrote up a short analysis of Trump’s Chinese-evangelical support, in which he refers to the cohort as “Trumplicans.”

It’s quite pithy and, dare I suggest, original and brilliant:

Law and order, stability and prosperity: Chinese evangelical Trumplicans in Metro Vancouver
By Justin K.H. Tse

One of the surprising discoveries of this American election season is how loud on social media Chinese evangelical supporters of Donald Trump in Metro Vancouver can be.

I don’t have the quantitative survey instruments to determine exactly how many Trumplicans there are among Chinese evangelicals in Metro Vancouver, but I’m pretty sure that most of them (an estimated 16% of the 400,000 or so Chinese Canadians counted in Metro Vancouver) can’t vote in the United States.

But what I don’t have in terms of statistics, I do have in social media posts.

Some of the people with whom I’ve interacted among Metro Vancouver’s Chinese evangelical supporters of Trump were in fact my previous research interviewees (I interviewed), although some are not.

Perhaps one of the confusing things about Chinese evangelical support for Trump in Metro Vancouver is that the Trump campaign has by and large run a racist campaign, which on the surface would exclude Chinese people.

Sure, American evangelicals themselves have been divided over the Trump campaign; while some refuse to support Trump, others talk about Trump's promises to appoint Supreme Court justices that would roll back abortion rights.

But none of this explains why Chinese evangelicals in Vancouver would be inclined to support Trump; this has little to do, after all, with right-to-life politics in Canada.

So what is it, then?

One of the key words that keeps coming up in the social media posts that I've seen is stability.

A friend of mine who is a second-generation Chinese Baptist minister shared with me a video from someone to whom he'd ministered. The person has been posting Trump propaganda incessantly on his Facebook for the last four months or so.

In this video, this acquaintance – a Chinese evangelical woman – expounds her pro-Trump political philosophy in Cantonese, expanding on the ideology that is embedded in her social media comments.

For her, Trump must be elected because he is chummy with (Russian President) Vladimir Putin and (Communist Chinese President) Xi Jinping, world leaders that in her mind are ensuring the stability of global markets through authoritarian law-and-order regimes.

These leaders must not be questioned, as that would lead to an apocalyptic war among these militaristic entities.

Instead, a stable world order with strong states would facilitate global market flows, perhaps even leading to the ability to proclaim the Christian Gospel in a much more efficient, if not propagandistic, way.

The end of the world may be coming, but let's get the word out about it first in a well-managed market where ideas and capital can freely circulate.

Law and order in a world of disorder: my Baptist friend's acquaintance is not the only one talking this way.

I am told by both this woman and a financial planner in Richmond – and others still, for that matter – that protests like Euromaidan in Kyiv, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, and Black Lives Matter are signs of disorder because they allegedly endanger the police, the arm of the state enforcing law and order.

Whatever the disorder that Trump's rhetoric may have caused, Trump for these social media commentators is a dose of strong law-and-order medicine on the world stage.

In other words, Chinese evangelical Trumplicans living in Vancouver may not be able to vote, but they need him to win to feel safe even in Canada.

Of course, such comments indicate that these Chinese evangelicals come from a particular class of people with wealth to protect (raising questions, of course, about whether there's room in the religion for Chinese people who don't have wealth to protect).

But for this particular class of ethnic Chinese migrants, stability was why they moved to Canada in the first place.

(They wanted to get) away from, say, the possible political upheavals of the 1997 handover of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty, or the strangely personal dialectical politics of the market socialist mainland.

What all this stability talk amounts to is what the contemporary philosopher Slavoj Žižek calls “‘capitalism with Asian values’ (which, of course, has nothing to do with Asian people and everything to do with the clear and present tendency of contemporary capitalism as such to suspend democracy).”

In the same way, Chinese evangelical Trumpicism in Metro Vancouver may have little to do with either ‘Chinese people’ or ‘evangelical theology,’ and everything to do with an ideology of law-and-order stability on the world stage in order to protect whatever material prosperity they’ve amassed.

What this implies is that the Trump phenomenon is much more than an American one. And perhaps disillusioned Americans thinking that they can simply move to Canada if Trump wins ought to feel more disillusioned still after reading this.

It’s a symptom of our global order, so perhaps it’s no surprise that folks in a city that’s called ‘global’ like Vancouver would be so invested in it.

Douglas Todd dtodd@postmedia.com