



The Growth of Pentecostalism in French Polynesia: A Hakka History

Migration, cultural identity and Christianity

Yannick Fer



Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/1118>

DOI : 10.4000/chinaperspectives.1118

ISSN : 1996-4617

Éditeur

Centre d'étude français sur la Chine contemporaine

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 15 février 2005

ISSN : 2070-3449

Référence électronique

Yannick Fer, « The Growth of Pentecostalism in French Polynesia: A Hakka History », *China Perspectives* [En ligne], 57 | January - February 2005, mis en ligne le 20 mars 2008, consulté le 28 octobre 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/chinaperspectives/1118> ; DOI : 10.4000/chinaperspectives.1118

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 28 octobre 2019.

© All rights reserved

The Growth of Pentecostalism in French Polynesia: A Hakka History

Migration, cultural identity and Christianity

Yannick Fer

- 1 Pentecostalism first appeared in the Pacific in the 1920s, with the arrival of an American mission in Fiji, and subsequently established itself in most Oceanic societies, mainly during the 1960s. This expansion has only recently attracted the attention of sociologists and anthropologists, who have often considered these kinds of religious movements from a point of view which is “at best indifferent—but often rather hostile”¹, accusing them of contributing to the Westernisation and to the denaturing of societies defined as “traditional”. And yet an analysis of the conditions and effects of the growth of Pentecostalism in this region of the world now opens particularly interesting perspectives in at least two areas: the relationship between religious belonging and (social or geographic) mobility, with Pentecostalism emerging clearly as “a religious ‘movement’ which accompanies and facilitates the movement of people”², and the encounter with contemporary cultures which, as in French Polynesia, now include (usually Protestant) Christianity in the definition of their “traditional” identity.
- 2 Pentecostalism in French Polynesia has followed a singular path, which has led it from the Chinese community of Hakka (WW, keija) culture to a transcultural religious identity. It has thus found itself at the heart of the tensions connected with the emergence of a Polynesian multicultural society: for Hakka immigrants, conversion to charismatic Protestantism was inseparable from the crucial question of integration; to native Polynesians, the emergence of a Chinese Protestantism called into question an ethnic-religious definition of Polynesian identity. It is the unusual—and little-known—history of Hakka Protestantism in French Polynesia which this article seeks to explore, with as its main theme the complex relationships between migration, cultural identity and Christianity³.

Hakka in French Polynesia
- 3 Hakka immigration to French Polynesia began in 1865, with the arrival in Tahiti of 1,018 men from the province of Guangdong, recruited as coolies by the Tahitian Cotton

and Coffee Plantation Company belonging to the Briton William Stewart⁴. Sorely tried by the exhausting working conditions, and then victims of the company's bankruptcy in 1873 (which deprived them of any possibility of returning to China), many of the approximately three hundred workers still surviving at the end of the nineteenth century turned to craft industries or trade, and in some cases married Polynesian women. It was at the beginning of the twentieth century that a Chinese community was really constituted in French Polynesia—overwhelmingly Hakka (85%), but also Cantonese punti (WW, bendi)—, in the course of two great waves of male and female immigration, from 1907 to 1914, and then from 1921 to 1928.

- 4 The gradual structuring of this minority community within a society marked until then by the conflict between the European colonisers and the colonised, its isolation and its relative economic success quickly nurtured converging discourses on the theme of the “Chinese peril”. Colonial circles worried about the “aggressive cupidity” of the Chinese towards the Polynesian people who were considered to be “primitive, childish and naïve”⁵, while many Polynesians soon considered the Chinese to be complicit in French domination. This dual hostility explains to a considerable degree why French citizenship was only belatedly extended to the Chinese in French Polynesia: individually from 1964, and then collectively by a law passed in January 1973⁶.
- 5 On the religious level, the Chinese community remained, until the 1940s, on the sidelines of the Christian churches to which all the Polynesian families belonged. To the Chinese, Christianity—as one elder explained—was then only “the religion of the popa'a” (Europeans) and understanding of the differences between Catholicism and Protestantism remained very superficial: “We called the Catholics the church of the long robes, those worn by the priests and the brothers. And for the Protestants we said the church of the English, since it was the London Missionary Society⁷. That was all we knew”⁸. Hakka migrants to French Polynesia were not influenced—apart from a few very marginal cases—by the Protestant missionaries of the Mission society of Basel, who were very active among the Hakka population in mainland China during the nineteenth century⁹. Attendance at the Buddhist temple of Kan Ti, which was constructed in 1876 in Papeete, is evidence of the maintenance of popular religious practices, motivated by the duty of fidelity to the ancestral lineage. This ancestor worship was expressed in particular on the occasions of the ceremonies of Qingming and of the Double Nine (WW, Chongyang), called Ka San¹⁰ in French Polynesia, during which offerings were laid on the tombs.
- 6 From the 1940s, Hakka children came to know the Christian churches, when many of them entered Catholic or Protestant schools, which their parents considered most likely to guarantee social advancement. In 1951, out of 1,321 Chinese pupils, only 23% attended the Chinese schools managed by sociopolitical or philanthropic associations: the Kuo Min Tang (Guomindang), the National Chinese Union of Tahiti (established in 1921 with Sun Yat-sen as patron, it opened its first school in 1922), the Philanthropic Association (or Chung Fa Fui Kon) and the Koo Men Tong (Free China Friendly Association of Tahiti, a secession, in 1942, from the Kuo Min Tang)¹¹. Of them 10% attended public schools, 53% Catholic schools and 13% the Viénot Protestant school¹². The 1962 census showed a clear increase in the number of Chinese Christians (28% Catholic, 22% Protestant)—but among the 9,577 persons declaring themselves to be Chinese (10.8% of the total population), those with “no religion” still represented 45%, while 185 people declared that they practised “ancestor worship”. In 1986, 60% of

Polynesians of Chinese origin were Catholic, between 19% and 25% Protestant and only between 12% and 15% still declared themselves to be “without religious faith”¹³.

- 7 This spectacular reversal, and the clear dominance of Catholicism—in contrast with preponderance of the historic Protestant church, the *Eglise évangélique de Polynésie française* (EPPF) [Evangelical Church of French Polynesia], among native Polynesians (ma’ohi)—is a result both of slow evolution and of specific circumstances. It is undoubtedly an expression of the gradual and permanent integration of the Chinese community, through the connections established between the Catholic church and a new Chinese Polynesian elite trained in its schools, as well as, more broadly, by the integration of a Christian culture which is a component of contemporary Polynesian identity. Moreover, while it may have seemed desirable to many, integration became a genuine necessity when the prospect of returning to mainland communist China was abandoned.
- 8 Finally, it can also be explained by transformations internal to the Catholic church, accentuated in Tahiti by the ordination of several Chinese priests. Encouraged by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) which advocated “respect for cultures and the use of local languages”¹⁴, the Catholic church has displayed a benevolent understanding of Chinese culture. Inspired by the approach followed by the Jesuits in China, the Chinese priests in French Polynesia exhort the faithful to be “100% Chinese” and reclassify the practices connected with ancestor worship or even attendance at the Kan Ti temple as “cultural” practices, which therefore are not religious and are compatible with adherence to Catholicism¹⁵.

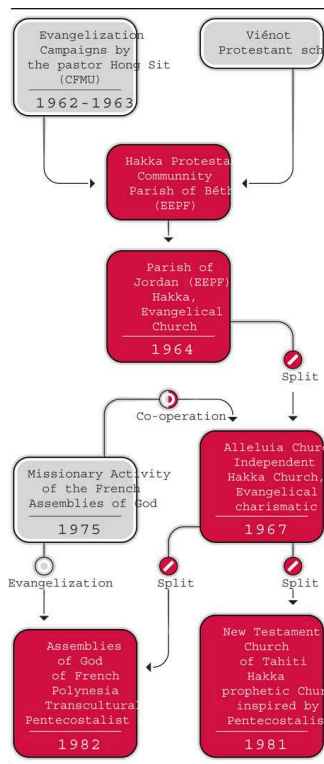
The Hakka “Reawakening”: the birth of a different Protestantism

- 9 While the excellence of its schools, and its benevolence towards Hakka popular religiosity favoured adherence to Catholicism by the Hakka of French Polynesia, there has nonetheless been a Hakka Protestant minority since the 1940s, centred on the Viénot school and the francophone parish of Béthel (Papeete). These Hakka pupils, from more modest social backgrounds than the pupils in the Catholic schools, joined the Polynesian Protestant Church (which was to become the EPPF in 1963, when the supervision of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society came to an end) through Sunday school—which was obligatory—and within a parish which, since its creation by English missionaries in 1820, has always been considered as that of “the foreigners” (anglophone, and later francophone). With a limited command of the French language (in contrast with the few children of the great punti families, whose adherence to Protestantism dates back further), they did not participate fully in parish life, and were taught by young Chinese instructors (a Chinese Sunday school was established in 1946). The pastor of Béthel stated in 1962 that “They join in with the Tahitians during the major feasts: Christmas in the years before 1961, offerings, and the examinations of the Sunday schools”¹⁶.
- 10 In 1961, this small community was visited by the pastor Leland Wang, president of an international Baptist and Revivalist mission which he had founded in 1928, the Chinese Foreign Missionary Union (CFMU). Evangelical Protestantism, as Sébastien Fath has emphasised, tends towards a “deterritorialisation of denominational belonging” by basing an individual’s religious belonging on a personal choice of conversion rather than on his place of birth or on his cultural origins. Thus it gives the appearance of being a globalised religion, made up of an “archipelago of Churches and of Evangelical institutions spread around the whole world”¹⁷. However this organisation into

transnational networks does not contribute as clearly as one might think to a “euphemisation of cultural frontiers”¹⁸. It is indeed entirely compatible with the geographical dispersion of many cultural communities, which find in the combination of religious identity with cultural identity a connection which is both flexible and powerful, and able to symbolically bring together diasporas which are highly diverse. The Chinese Evangelical Protestant organisations are one of the best examples of this, striving, as the CFMU does in Tahiti, to reach even the most isolated local communities in the name of a cultural solidarity which is experienced as a sort of sacred duty.

- 11 The visit of Pastor Leland Wang and his wife to Tahiti was an opportunity for several young Protestant Hakka to discover that they belonged to a Chinese Protestantism which was much less marginal than its Polynesian isolation might lead one to believe. “It was then, an elder remembers, that I realised that there were Chinese pastors, I thought there were no Chinese Christians in the world. [...] He immediately gave me a Bible in Chinese, my first Bible in Chinese”¹⁹. In the course of Evangelical meetings organised under the aegis of the Polynesian Protestant Church, pastor Leland Wang carried out 50 baptisms, and, after his departure, a weekly service in Mandarin (translated into Hakka) was instituted in Béthel. However, the real birth of Hakka Protestantism in French Polynesia took place in the following year, during a visit, in July 1962, from Leland Wang’s son-in-law, pastor Hong Sit.
- 12 Originally a Baptist, like his father-in-law, with whom he worked in the CFMU, Hong Sit had experienced a charismatic revelation in 1956, and the “Reawakening” which he came to preach in Tahiti focused resolutely on the manifestations of the Spirit: glossolalia, and especially, miraculous cures. His preaching met with rapid and spectacular success, attracting Hakka families which had remained unfamiliar with Christianity, older people who thus joined their children in the Protestant church. 72 people were baptised in the first week, by immersion in a river on the west coast of Tahiti, 154 in July and August 1962, and close to 300 in 1962 and 1963²⁰.
- 13 Between these converts, the parish of Béthel, and the leadership of the Protestant church which in 1963 became the EEPF—independent from the French missionaries and led by Polynesian pastors—relations were fraught with incomprehension and misunderstanding. The pastor of Béthel wrote in January 1963: “There prevails a great uncertainty in the minds of the Chinese concerning their relations with the parish of Béthel, and also concerning the practice and the doctrine of baptism”. Suspecting Hong Sit of seeking to create an independent Chinese church, he assigned to the EEPF a duty of “essential testimony”: “to affirm its unity in a country which is becoming more and more diversified in terms of races, religious denominations, nationalities and social classes”²¹. The Polynesian pastors at the head of the EEPF also saw in the charismatic orientation of the Hakka converts a ferment of divisiveness and confusion, and above all the expression of an irreducible cultural otherness: a sort of “Chinese-style” Protestantism. Lastly, most of the converts, who did not consider themselves members of the EEPF but a Protestant Hakka community temporarily established in the premises of Béthel, saw as illegitimate calls to order from the Tahitians whom they perceived as being incapable of putting their own lives in order: “They were making comparisons, the faith of the church, it’s not like that, the Tahitians go to church, but they also drink”²².

1. Genealogy of the Churches which emerged from the « Hakka Reawakening » of 1962-1963



- 14 The emergence of a charismatic Protestantism within the Hakka community in fact opened the way to a plural Protestantism, which broke with the unifying project of the EEPF, based on the historic alliance between a people (ma’ohi) and a Church. This movement towards pluralism, which has become steadily more pronounced, passed relatively unnoticed, as theological pluralism—Protestantism was henceforth to be “historical”, Evangelical or Pentecostalist—was initially masked by cultural pluralism: the emergence of a Chinese Protestantism. Within the Protestant Hakka community itself, the combination of Protestant faith and of Hakka cultural identity gave birth to various Churches, all of them answers to the difficult question: how to be Hakka and Protestant in French Polynesia?

From one Church to another: the dispersion of Hakka Polynesian Protestantism
The Alleluia Church: Protestant, but Chinese

- 15 Tensions between the Hakka Protestant community—mostly made up of the converts of the “Reawakening” of 1962 to 1963—and the leadership of the EEPF, led in 1967 to the creation of an independent Church, which was both Chinese and charismatic: the Alleluia Church. Yet the EEPF had managed to obtain in December 1963 the sending by the Basel Mission of Pastor Emile Bach, a former missionary to China who spoke Hakka; it had also agreed, in 1964, to the creation of a Chinese-speaking parish for which the faithful had chosen the name of Jordan, in memory of the baptisms by immersion. All that was lacking was a site on which to erect a church (which was not built until 1969). The vast majority of the Chinese Protestants nevertheless chose to leave the EEPF, above all to assert their rejection of any subordination, whether on a theological or on a material level, to a Tahitian Church which they deemed to be untrustworthy.
- 16 On the theological level, Pastor Bach sought to bring the converts back to a noncharismatic Protestantism, by opposing the community leaders established by

Hong Sit. However, in November 1964, he died in a traffic accident, and it was Pastor Vinhuba, a military chaplain of Vietnamese origin, who took over the parish of Jordan, and restored a Pentecostalist orientation. In 1967, the EEPF refused to renew his mandate and, after the split, he became the first Pastor of the Alleluia Church.

- 17 On the material level, the leaders of the Chinese community, merchants made considerably more prosperous by the emergence of a consumer society (connected with the establishment of an atomic testing facility in 1963, which brought a large number of civil servants and inward investments), refused to depend on the goodwill of the EEPF, which was slow to keep its promises: to acquire a site and to build a church. “The elders” explained Albert Coux, former president of Alleluia, “had capital, they had money, they were willing to build a church for everyone. We made offerings, millions and millions. But the EEPF did nothing, what did they take us for?”²³ The capital, which allowed the community to be supported by its own resources, was therefore invested in a religious undertaking and contributed explicitly to the legitimacy of the leaders of the new church: “You have money, talk more loudly. You don’t have money, talk less loudly” as Albert Coux abruptly summed it up.
- 18 This visibility of financial capital—never considered by the Alleluia faithful to be “impure” or essentially foreign to the religious world—, when added to the withdrawal into the community and the charismatic manifestations, which were perceived as “exotic”, are the three characteristics which, in the eyes of many Polynesian Protestants, were to make the Alleluia Church for many years an archetype of a sect: *fa’aro’o ‘e’e* in Tahitian, literally “foreign belief”. Yet the creation of this Church marked the desire of the Chinese faithful to assert their belonging to Protestantism—which called for an often painful break from fidelity to ancestor worship—while maintaining communitarian autonomy and independence. They were going to be Protestant, but Chinese.

The parish of Jordan: Protestant and Chinese

- 19 Those who, in 1967, chose to remain within the EEPF, in the parish of Jordan, were only a small handful, most of them from the same family. They did so for the sake of hopes which one can now consider to have been comprehensively disappointed: that the EEPF would not be only the Church of the Ma’ohi, but the evangelical ferment of a Polynesian unity which went beyond cultural belonging. Many of them, such as the deacon Pierre Chant, were baptised before Hong Sit’s visit and did not consider the gift of the Spirit to be an essential element of Protestantism. On the other hand, they were attached to a more evangelical message than that of the EEPF, if one takes “evangelical” to mean a “Protestant theology of an orthodox type which emphasizes the authority of Scripture [...], the central character of piety and the importance of conversion”²⁴. This doctrinal divergence continued to grow as the EEPF moved increasingly towards ma’ohi cultural militancy.
- 20 In the continuation of the cultural renewal begun in the 1970s, which made possible a rehabilitation of local culture, the EEPF did indeed develop a theology centred on the destiny of the ma’ohi people, their language and their land, in the historical perspective of the liberation (both spiritual and political) of the Ma’ohi. This ethnicisation of Protestant discourse left little room for such a minority cultural identity as that of the Hakka, “strangers” in ma’ohi land, who, within the Church, demanded that their linguistic specificity and their Evangelical orientation be respected. Several times the parish had to function without a Hakka-speaking pastor, a

situation it has found itself in again since 1998. It has suffered, on the one hand from the disaffection of the younger generation with Protestantism and with the Hakka language (simultaneous translation into French had to be established), and on the other from the increased legitimacy conferred by ecumenical discourse on the cultural practices of Chinese Catholics: “Ecumenism—a deacon explained—parishioners will say ‘we are the same thing as the Catholics, therefore we can do as they do’. We were told not to do that [ancestor worship], and yet, over there, they believe in Jesus Christ and they can do it. There is a risk of confusion, and of attraction towards that”²⁵.

The New Testament Church of Tahiti: God and His Chinese prophets

- 21 Far from having been definitively settled by the schism between the parish of Jordan and the supporters of the Alleluia Church, the question of relations between Hakka cultural identity and adherence to Protestantism gave rise, from the first years of the Alleluia Church, to intense confrontations. A narrow majority of the administrative council, no doubt considering that the Chinese identity of the Church was more solidly guaranteed than its moorings in a rigorous charismatic Protestantism, decided—on the advice of Pastor Vinhuba—to call on missionaries from the French Assemblies of God. In August 1975, the Pentecostal Pastor Roger Albert was recruited and entrusted with the spiritual direction of the Church, under the control of the administrative council, which was the only authority vested with communal legitimacy. A sizeable minority, both on the council and among the faithful, demanded instead a Hakka-speaking Pastor, and, more generally, favoured an absolutely Chinese Protestantism. Taking up, as if in a mirror-image, the perception of the leaders of the EEPF—who saw in charismatic Protestantism the expression of a cultural otherness—, this group raised Chinese identity to the highest rank of Christianity, by embracing, in the beginning of the 1970s, the doctrine of the Church of the New Testament which was founded in 1963 by Kong Duen Yee.
- 22 A former actress from Hong Kong converted to Pentecostalism, considered by the faithful of her Church to be a prophetess who had made possible the restoration of the primitive Church, Kong Duen Yee wrote down between 1963 and 1966—the year she died—a number of “revelations” which were completed after 1973 by the present director of the Church, Elie Hong, “chief of the apostles” and “prophet of all the nations” who has been established since 1976 on Mount Shuanlien Ku in Taiwan. While Pentecostal in its inspiration, the Church of the New Testament diverges from it in regarding its leaders as sacred, in the simplification of its rituals (baptism by water and by the Holy Spirit, notably, do not require any preliminary study of the Bible), as well as in the specific innovations added to the Bible (grouped together under the name of the “perfect Gospel of Jesus Christ”). Local Churches abide by a strict discipline and are subject to a highly centralised hierarchy, which guarantees scrupulous application of the successive orientations given by the prophet Elie Hong—the most recent being the “return to Eden”, which led the Church to develop organic farming activities.
- 23 After several years of internal opposition, close to half of the faithful of the Alleluia Church left it in 1981, to found the Polynesian branch of the Church of the New Testament, called the Church of Tahiti. Exclusively Chinese, it has been quite successful and now numbers over 300 members, many of whom are young. It has also developed business activities through several companies, the best-known of which is Araka Fish, renowned in the Chinese community for its dried and salted fish. One can perceive in this Church a partially paradoxical resolution of the tension between maintenance of a

Hakka identity and conversion to Christianity, since to some extent it is Christianity which here becomes Chinese.

The Assemblies of God of French Polynesia: a transcultural Pentecostalism

- 24 The Hakka “Reawakening” also gave birth to a fourth Church, which is both Pentecostal and transcultural: the Assemblies of God of French Polynesia. The circumstances which carried, by a succession of shifts, the converts of 1962-1963 (or their children) from the EEPF to Alleluia and then to the Assemblies of God highlight a series of tensions and dynamics, all of which are situated at the intersection between cultural identity and religious identity.
- 25 In October 1978, Pastor Roger Albert had registered the statutes of the Assemblies of God, without however giving them any visible existence. In 1979, he undertook evangelisation campaigns in a room in a restaurant in Papeete and then on the peninsula of Tahiti, activities which went beyond the framework of the Chinese community alone and brought to the Alleluia Church a few European (popa’a), and above all Tahitian (ma’ohi) converts, thus noticeably altering the physiognomy of the Church.
- 26 Another missionary from the Assemblies of God, Louis Levant (a New Caledonian of Vietnamese extraction), who came in the same year to assist Roger Albert and succeeded him as pastor of the Alleluia Church, intensified the evangelisation, without it being clear at the time whether the new converts belonged to the Assemblies of God or to the Alleluia Church²⁶. As was to be expected, some of the faithful and a majority of the members of the administration council were sufficiently worried by this as to decide, in 1982, to dismiss the French pastor. What was more surprising was that the great majority of the Hakka faithful then decided to follow the pastor in order to establish a Church which was no longer Chinese but transcultural.
- 27 The main tension, linked to the reappearance within the Church, of the Tahitians from whom they had separated in 1967, brought into conflict, on cultural and religious grounds, two virtually irreconcilable conceptions of identity and responsibility. The first conception is communitarian and prevailed at the creation of the Alleluia Church: it perceives in communitarian unity the means of maintaining Hakka cultural identity and the path to personal salvation. It very closely follows the logic of the sect as defined by Max Weber, nourishing the ideal of the *ecclesia pura*, which is to say “an association of people who are fully religiously qualified, and only those people”²⁷, collective qualification (or sanctification) being a guarantee of the salvation of each of its members. Moreover, the criterion of religious qualification merges with that of cultural belonging since the Tahitians are a priori disqualified, insofar as they are deemed to be incapable of experiencing a real conversion (which takes place via an imposition of order in one’s personal life). It is therefore the responsibility of the community leaders to put an end to a “mixture” which compromises not only the maintenance of a cultural identity, but also individual salvation.
- 28 The second conception, which prevailed in the end, shows the gradual acceptance, by the faithful of Alleluia, of the values common to the Pentecostal movement as a whole, as well as the Pauline (or Universalist) orientation of the French mission—which in this differentiates itself clearly from the American mission. First of all, the Assemblies of God maintain a strictly individual conception of salvation, with conversion understood as a movement of the heart, personal and voluntary, through which the individual agrees to enter into a personal relationship with God. It is in the framework of this

relationship that each person's responsibility is assessed and, although pastoral guidance and community control come to bear as "invisible" mediations between God and the believer, the latter does not link his personal fate to that of his co-religionists. The president of the Polynesian Assemblies put it thus: "There is a personal responsibility, of the person. It is his, which does not necessarily mean that it will be visited on everyone, no"²⁸. This individualisation of religious experience contributes to the emancipation of the believer from his original cultural community, and also relativises the necessity of belonging to an *ecclesia pura*.

- 29 Now it is precisely the second characteristic of the Assemblies that they are a missionary enterprise making new "converts" every week, whose lives and behaviour (despite the discourse on the miraculous effects of conversion) are not put in order instantaneously, but gradually. These constant evangelisation drives, such as those undertaken at the end of the 1970s by the French missionaries in charge of the Alleluia Church, are an essential source of attraction and motivation, which make it possible to better understand why most of the faithful of Alleluia chose, in 1983, the Assemblies of God. For the success of the evangelisation testifies to the fact that "God is with us" and gives the faithful the feeling of belonging to a victorious group, thus forecasting other, more personal successes.
- 30 Lastly, if these former members of the Alleluia Church now belong to a transcultural Church, it is because the French missionaries resolutely opposed any form of communitarian segmentation in the name of a punctilious universalism—rooted in Pauline doctrine, but also, no doubt, in French Republican culture. Taking into account the composition of the Polynesian Assemblies of God—the great majority of whose members are of Polynesian, not Chinese, origin—, this rejection of communitarian particularism can today be interpreted by the Chinese faithful as a form of benevolent neutrality towards them. Indeed, this attitude of the French missionaries contrasts with the cultural militantism of the EEPF, but also with the attitude of the first missionaries from the American Assemblies of God who established, in 1982, a competing church in Faa'a (a district in the urban area of Papeete)²⁹. To this American mission, it was more a question of contributing to the spiritual salvation of the ma'ohi people, who were the victims of French colonial domination—in which the French missionaries were suspected of participating, since they were, to their American colleagues, French before being Pentecostal.
- 31 These three components—the individualisation of salvation, missionary dynamism and the transcultural option—thus make it possible to better understand the progression by which the Hakka faithful influenced by the "Reawakening" of 1962-1963 became members of the Assemblies of God. These are now the principal Pentecostal institution in French Polynesia, with close to 1,500 baptised adult members, and churches established on almost all the Society Islands and in some Marquesas Islands. Since the 1980s, they have above all expanded in the urban areas of Tahiti, among Protestants of Polynesian origin. The Assemblies of God are thus more in competition with the EEPF than with the Catholic Church and have not, up to now, really challenged the latter's dominant position among the Hakka in French Polynesia. As for the Alleluia Church, it now numbers only about thirty ageing members.
- 32 One of the frequently used angles in Western analysis of non-Western Christianity consists of positing an ontological otherness, which is irreducible, between Christianity and the cultures in which it takes root, in such a way as neither one nor the other can

emerge unscathed: Christianity because it would lose its authenticity by incorporating local cultural elements, and the local culture because it would be signing its own death warrant by accepting a “foreign” religion. In fact, the history of Hakka Protestantism in French Polynesia clearly demonstrates the difficulty of reconciling Christian identity and cultural identity, but it also shows how these two identities can sometimes evolve, partake in dialogue, and thus give birth to varied combinations which are not necessarily incoherent or “inauthentic”.

NOTES

1. John Barker, “Afterword”, *Journal of Ritual Studies*, special edition: “Charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in Oceania”, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2001, pp. 105-108.
2. David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*, Oxford, Blackwell, 2002, p. 23.
3. The data set out in this article come from research carried out from 2000 to 2002 in the context of a doctoral thesis in sociology presented in 2004 at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales: *Pentecôtisme en Polynésie française : sociabilité, travail institutionnel et recompositions identitaires* (Pentecostalism in French Polynesia: sociability, institutional work and the reconstitution of identity).
4. Cf. Pierre-Yves Toullellan, *Tahiti colonial (1860-1914)* (Colonial Tahiti from 1860 to 1914), Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 1987, pp. 99 and following.
5. G. Guennou, F. Merceron, M. Lextreyt and P.-Y. Toullellan, *Terres et civilisations polynésiennes* (Polynesian lands and civilisations), Paris, Nathan, 1987, p. 161.
6. With France having officially recognised the PRC in 1964, the Chinese in French Polynesia, most of whom held passports issued by the Consulate in Taiwan, then had to choose between communist China and France. (Cf. Bruno Saura, *Tinito. La communauté chinoise de Tahiti : installation, structuration, intégration* [Tinito. The Chinese community in Tahiti: settlement, structuring and integration], Papeete, Au Vent des îles, 2002).
7. The missionaries of the London Missionary Society reached Tahiti in 1797 and contributed to the foundation of the first Polynesian Christian Church, which, since 1963 (when it became autonomous) has been called Eglise évangélique de Polynésie française (EPPF).
8. Interview with Pierre Chant, April 2nd 2001, in Papeete.
9. Jessie G. and Rolland R. Lutz, *Hakka Chinese Confront Christianity, 1850-1900*, Armonk, M.E. Sharpe, 1998.
10. “A typical Hakka term which means literally ‘to visit the mountain’ where the dead are buried”. (Jimmy M. Ly, *Hakka en Polynésie*, Papeete, association Wen Fa, 1996, p. 75). The Chinese cemetery of Tahiti is situated on a hill in Arue, to the East of Papeete.
11. Bruno Saura, *Tinito, op. cit.*, pp. 127 and following.
12. Gérard Coppenrath, *Les Chinois à Tahiti : de l’aversion à l’assimilation, 1865-1966* (The Chinese in Tahiti : from aversion to assimilation, 1865-1966), Paris, Société des océanistes, No. 21, 1967, p. 99.
13. Survey of 1,000 adults in the Society islands, carried out by B.R. Consultants.

14. Wen Fa (association), *Histoire et portrait de la communauté chinoise de Tahiti* (A History and a Portrait of the Chinese Community in Tahiti), Papeete, ed. C. Gleizal, 1979, p. 79.
15. Yannick Fer and Gwendoline Malogne-Fer, "Christianisme, identités culturelles et communautés en Polynésie française" (Christianity, cultural identities and communities in French Polynesia), *Hermès*, No. 32-33, 2002, pp. 355-365.
16. Pasteur Stussi, report of activities, 1962 (archives of the EEPF, Papeete).
17. Sébastien Fath, *Billy Graham, pape protestant ?* (Billy Graham, a Protestant Pope?), Paris, Albin Michel, p. 154.
18. *Ibid*, p. 155.
19. Interview with Pierre Chant.
20. In his autobiography, Hong Sit gives an account of the Hakka "Reawakening" and of his visits to Tahiti. (*My View from a Bridge, the Autobiography of Hong Sit*, Houston, Blessing Books, 1999).
21. Letter of January 7th 1963 to M. Dumarteray, Basel Mission (archives of the EEPF, Papeete).
22. Interview with Henri Chang on December 5th 2000 in Papeete.
23. Interview on May 15th 2000 in Mahina.
24. Louis Schweitzer, "Églises évangéliques" (Evangelical Churches), in André Birmelé (ed.), *Eglise, dossiers de l'encyclopédie du protestantisme* (*Church, files of the Encyclopedia of Protestantism*), No. 10, Geneva, Labor et Fides, 2001, pp. 69-70.
25. Interview with Gérard Chan in Papeete, January 20th 2001.
26. Witnesses of this period remember "baptism cards" stamped "Assemblies of God": "Our baptism, the baptism card, said 'baptised at the Assembly of God'" said one woman. "It was then that the Chinese realised, they hadn't seen the baptismal certificates in the notebooks [of the Alleluia Church]". (Interview on June 17th 2001)
27. Max Weber, *Sociologie des religions* (Sociology of Religions), Paris, Gallimard, 1996, p. 318.
28. Interview with Louis Levant in Papeete, August 23rd 2002.
29. En 2000, this Church (le Centre chrétien de la Bonne Nouvelle [The Good News Christian Centre]) was finally integrated with the Assemblies of God of French Polynesia.

RÉSUMÉS

While Pentecostalism exists today in French Polynesia, as in all the South Pacific States, it has followed an unusual path there, taking root initially (during the 1960s) within the Hakka Chinese immigrant community. Long perceived by the historic Protestant Church as "Chinese-style Protestantism", it initially gave birth to several Hakka Churches, each of which combined cultural identity, integration into Polynesian society and adherence to Christianity in different ways. However, after a series of secessions, a significant number of Hakka converts and their children are to be found in a transcultural Church, the Assemblies of God of French Polynesia. The intersecting histories of Pentecostalism and of the Hakka community in French Polynesia thus bear witness, in an exemplary fashion, to the gradual construction of a plural society (both

multicultural and multi-confessional), which is in tension with the adherence of (almost) all the population to Christianity, as well as with individual cultural identities.