

Reverse Missionaries: Migration, Theology and Cultural Change in the British Methodist Church

British Methodism is a complex story of migration and mobility, inextricably entwined with the history of British imperialism. As the British empire expanded, so did the reach of the missionaries who carried Methodism around the world. Today, the Methodist Church in Britain is (in numerical terms) a denomination in decline, yet Methodism thrives in many parts of Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. One intriguing aspect of 21st century globalization is the phenomenon of 'reverse missionaries', as Christians from other countries migrate to Britain – sometimes with the explicit aim of reviving the ailing 'Mother Church.' This is as true for Methodism as it is for other denominations. From Fijian Methodists serving on British army bases, to Ghanaian Methodists worshipping in inner-city London, the congregations of the Methodist Church in Britain have never been more multicultural. These patterns of migration, and the encounters they produce, are changing the diverse cultural practices of British Methodism and re-shaping the denomination in dramatic ways.

This project, to be carried out by Dr Lia Dong Shimada, emerges from a book chapter that Christopher Stephens and Lia wrote for the *Changing Atlas of World Religions* (Springer, 2014), on mapping and Methodist ecclesiology. We explore further the shifting theologies and geographies of cultural change in British Methodism, in relation to migration and mission. The case study for this project will involve Methodist ministers who have migrated from the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, and whose conceptualizations of 'spiritual community' are creating new expressions of Methodist culture, theology and practice in Britain. Research will begin in late-autumn 2016.

Through this project we seek to foster dialogue between theology, sociology and cultural geography, and to explore the under-studied terrain between these academic disciplines. Through these research findings, the Susanna Wesley Foundation also intends to produce practical learning resources on migration, diversity and cultural change for use in congregations, religious organisations and other faith communities.