THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

REFORM AND RECTIFICATION:

CHINESE CHRISTIANITIES AND THE POLITICS OF FLOURISHING

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

BY

XIAOBO YUAN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of the Reform and Opening Up period, Protestant Christianity in Mainland China has grown rapidly, comprising a denominationally diverse array of both state-registered churches (regulated by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement) and "underground" communities (often referred to as "house churches"). Despite continued crackdowns on Christian activity by the state, the past decade has seen Christianity being increasingly recruited to conversations about national flourishing, and religion's role in the production of "quality" Chinese citizens in a context of national growth. Based on fieldwork among both state-authorized and underground Christian churches in Nanjing, along with several other sites in the Yangtze River Delta's aspirational "global city cluster," this dissertation examines the imbrications between state projects of population reform and Christian practices of conversion, church-building, and community-making. I argue that the congruity between state discourses of citizen "quality" and Christian projects of conversion conceals the ways religious life internally produces the potential for critique and counter-conduct, even when mobilizing the same grammars of reform. I show this by analyzing how the discourse of "quality" animates particular labors of reformation in everyday contexts of Christian community building. These contexts range from urban house churches that develop ways of "making families" that are noncompliant with population-management policies; to clandestine Christian schools that reject nationalized regimes of evaluation; to Christian public works projects that deploy discourses of "quality" while simultaneously laboring to differentiate spiritual health from the language of material prosperity. Across these sites, I show the different ways in which Christian communities reflect and refract state discourses on aspiration, mobility, class, and the cultivation of global citizens.

Keywords: China, global Christianity, anthropology of the state, ethics, conduct and counter-conduct, publicity and exposure

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The debts I have accrued in the writing of this dissertation are many. First, I thank my committee members at the University of Chicago for guiding me through an at-times turbulent process with patience, grace, and unwavering support. My chair Judith Farquhar has been a formidable intellectual model; I thank her for the many formative conversations on this project and on ethnography and life in China more broadly. Julie Chu's advice — both on writing and in practical matters of being and becoming an anthropologist — has never failed to hit the nail on the head. Hussein Agrama has challenged, provoked, and taught me ever since my undergraduate days. I am grateful for the opportunity to have this committee at my back. Thanks as well to Susan Gal, John Kelly, Alireza Doostdar, and Angie Heo for their invaluable feedback. Like all graduate students who pass through the University of Chicago, I owe all my thanks to Anne Chi'en, the engine that makes the department run.

Many thanks to the organizations and fellowships that made this dissertation possible. FLAS, University of Chicago Center for East Asian Studies, Fulbright-IIE, and the Wenner-Gren Foundation supported the fieldwork research. Many thanks to the Nanjing University Institute of Anthropology for hosting me, and to Professors Yang Der-Ruey, Shao Jing, and Fan Ke for their hospitality and support. I am deeply grateful to the Martin Marty Center for providing an outlet and forum for fellowship and collegial discussion at the Divinity School after my return from the field. Finally, thanks to the Charlotte W. Newcombe Foundation for funding an invaluable year of writing. Thanks, as well, to those who have read and commented on pieces of this dissertation at the following workshops at the University of Chicago: Semiotics, Global Christianities, Religion and the Human Sciences, and the East Asia Workshop.

I am deeply indebted to my many interlocutors in Nanjing. While I cannot thank many of them here by name, their generosity to me will never be forgotten — nor will the many meals, bus rides, walks, park visits, and conversations we shared. A special thanks to Xia Laoshi, He Mushi, Weijie, and Jiang Laoshi, as well as to all the teachers, elders, pastors, and fellow travelers in Nanjing's Christian circles that gave their time and energies to answering my questions. I am grateful to the Amity Foundation for the opportunity to volunteer as an English teacher in Sichuan; I thank all my friends and students in Suining for their hospitality and good cheer. Spending time with my family in Nanjing – grandmother, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, and nephews—was a gift. I thank my uncle Wang Ji-ping for lending me his apartment, and for putting up with the mess.

Nowhere has the vital importance of conversation and collaboration for any kind of scholarly production been made more visible to me than in my interactions with friends and colleagues throughout the making of this work. This dissertation would not have existed without the input of my cohort of fellow writers: thank you to Shefali Jha, Chris Sheklian, Geneviève Godbout, Yaqub Hilal, and Natalja Czarnecki for the most supportive and gloriously well-fed writing group in the land. Thanks to Shirley Yeung, Joey Weiss, Zebulon Dingley, and Anna Weischelbraun for generous discussions of work and even more generous friendship. I would not have survived any of it without my forever-comrade Britta Ingebretson, who was an unending source of levity, insight, and motivation during our overlapping fieldwork times.

Finally, I thank Daniel Schultz for traveling the final steps of this path alongside me, and for providing sustenance in so many ways. This work is dedicated to my parents, Wang Ji-an and Yuan Fang. Their unstinting belief in me, and their lessons of compassion, inform everything I do.

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

At a Bible-study small group (*xiaozu)* in Nanjing, an informal ensemble of young people were contending with the question: "What is a real church?" The *xiaozu* was run on a weekly basis in a bookstore-turned-meeting-space blocks from the old campus grounds of Nanjing University. A dozen or so Christian "brothers and sisters" (*dixiong zimei*) — mostly current college students, recent graduates, and a few white-collar professionals — gathered there each Tuesday night to sing hymns, read Scripture together, and discuss the events of their lives in relation to faith. This particular week, a new contingent of students joined the gathering, encouraged by word of mouth. After the main Scripture reading, all the attendees introduced themselves and their "faith backgrounds" (*xinyang beijing).* Most had converted to Protestantism while studying at Nanjing-area universities,[1] but their itineraries in the Christian communities of Nanjing were varied. Some attended officially-sanctioned "Three-Self" churches; others met in an unregistered "meeting spot" (*jvhui dian*), temporarily hosted by a visiting South Korean minister; and yet others belonged to a large underground "house church" of several hundred congregants. And, of course, they were joined by one anthropologist from the U.S.

The question at stake — "What is a real church?" (*shenme shi zhen jiaohiu*) — had been raised by one of the newcomers, a brother who was baptized just last year in St. Paul's Church, one of the largest Three-Self churches in Nanjing. Moments before, an underground church-goer had asserted that Three-Self churches could not be considered "real churches" because they were

[1] Rates of conversion at colleges and universities had grown rapidly in recent years, despite the illegality of proselytization at institutions of higher education. This pattern of proselytization had prompted CCP Central Committee officials to release an internal circular in 2011 advising government departments and institutions of higher education to crack down on on-campus evangelizing activities to "resist foreign use of religion to infiltrate institutes of higher education." See Central Committee General Office 2011.

"controlled by the government." The first brother objected: "We believe in the same Christ, we recite the same Lord's Prayer! We never feel like we're watched by the Party."

At first, the "realness" at stake in their discussion seemed to be that of the "authenticity" of Christian churches as measured by their distance or proximity to the state, the assumption being that government oversight made the church less a place of worship and more an apparatus of state power. But as the conversation went on, this quality of "realness" also took on other dimensions not framed by this dichotomy between state and church. Other participants jumped in with an assortment of observations about their own spaces of worship. Three-Self churches, for all their faults, could be "hot and noisy" (*renao*) sites, full of energy — their "realness" was exemplified in the effervescent of a bursting church body. On the other hand, the city-wide shortage of trained clergy also meant that there was little possibility of one-on-one pastoral care (*mudao*). One woman added that it wasn't the Three-Self association she minded, but the "sea of white hair," referring to the common criticism that registered churches attracted mostly retirees while failing to cater to the young. Others praised the tendency for house churches to be more intimate spaces — yet some of the best preachers held services so far-flung on the outer bounds of Nanjing, they claimed, that transportation was a pain. "Our church is like a family," one sister supplied. Another countered that families could be dysfunctional, as her own worship group had disintegrated recently due to infighting. And so on.

There was no consensus, at the end, about what made a "real church" — only that all kinds of churches seemed to be flourishing in Nanjing, registered and unregistered, large and small. This spontaneous confluence of young worshippers at the *xiaozu* attested to the dynamic, heterogeneous landscape of Protestant Christianity in the city, propelled by the rising interest in Christianity among university students. Yet, as I would later find, such an assemblage could also

be exceedingly rare in the at-times circumscribed worlds of church communities, which might have vastly different or antagonistic orientations to publicity and secrecy, state recognition and institutionality, styles of worship and theological thinking, and contending standards of authenticity. The question of what made a Christian church "real" was generative rather than decidable; what it generated was disassociation among Christian groups as well as solidarity.

* * * *

This dissertation follows practices of church-building and world-making in both above- and underground Christian communities in contemporary Nanjing. In particular, I examine how Chinese Christians contend with the diverse possibilities for church membership and styles of communion in urban areas, and how Christianity is mobilized in practices of self-fashioning, as well as in emergent forms of communal life built around spiritual practices. My dissertation keeps the question that inspired the outpouring of discussion at the *xiaozu* in view; in my ethnographic work, I attend to “real churches” not just in their material or institutional dimensions, but as different imaginaries produced around Christianity’s possibilities for reshaping urban life in China.

Based on eighteen months of fieldwork among both state-authorized and underground Christian churches in Nanjing, along with several other sites in the Yangtze River Delta’s aspirational “global city cluster," this dissertation examines the imbrications between state projects of population reform and Christian practices of conversion, church-building, and community-making. In particular, my research is guided by the following questions: How does the Christian church in contemporary China — in its myriad state-authorized, semi-public, and clandestine forms — become imagined as a site for transforming selves and the nation? What

ethical and political practices are activated by Christian projects of reform? More broadly speaking, how do "religious" forms of life become frameworks for the critique and contestation of the state structures that govern them?

This dissertation makes two overarching arguments: First, I suggest that the congruity between state discourses of citizen "quality" and Christian projects of conversion conceals the ways religious life internally produces the potential for critique and counter-conduct, even when mobilizing the same grammars of reform. I show this by analyzing how the discourse of "quality" animates particular labors of reformation in everyday contexts of Christian community building. These contexts range from urban house churches that develop ways of "making families" that are noncompliant with population-management policies; to clandestine Christian schools that reject nationalized regimes of evaluation; to Christian public works projects that deploy discourses of "quality" while simultaneously laboring to differentiate spiritual health from the language of material prosperity. Across these sites, I show the different ways in which Christian communities reflect and refract state discourses on aspiration, mobility, class, and the cultivation of global citizens.

Secondly, through an analysis of these processes of translation and transformation between state discourse and multiple Christian reformist imaginations, my dissertation argues against a view that state governance acts *upon* religious spheres, as either enabler or constraint. Rather than seeing forms of the Chinese Christian church as being constituted by state regimes of recognition, I argue that the church's projects also in turn produce the Chinese state and nation as sites of religious intervention. I characterize these labors of materializing the state as practices of "exposure" — a concept I employ capaciously to explore how Christian communities and

institutions seek degrees of public recognition and, in doing so, make visible certain relations of power.

The politics of Christian flourishing in the post-Reform era

Since the end of the Cultural Revolution and the beginning of Reform and Opening Up, Protestant Christianity in Mainland China has grown rapidly, comprising both state-authorized churches regulated by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and a denominationally diverse array of "underground" churches (also referred to as "house churches"). In the last decade, Christianity has also been increasingly recruited to national discourses on China's post-millennial "moral crisis" and the necessity for producing "quality" citizens. Chinese President Xi Jinping, for instance, declared religion a potential ally in his anti-corruption campaign, and state projects promoting "spiritual civilization" alongside material development, for instance, insist that public religions like Christianity offer ethical principles that apply to all Chinese citizens.[2] And, as my ethnographic research shows, Chinese Christians have concomitantly taken up the broad trope of reform in processes of "theological reconstruction" — targeting superstition, cults, and heterodoxy within the church — and in the institutionalization of moral instruction. These practices in turn inform multiple imaginations of how Christianity might transform a nation-state in which "corruption" (*fubai*) is understood as a fundamental social ill.[3]

Yet a paradox emerges in the constitution of a Christian ethical sphere "for the nation": despite the seeming coherences between state and church discourses on China's "corruption

[2] For background, see Keck 2014.

[3] Anti-corruption has become President Xi Jinping's banner issue, and his anti-graft campaign has so far targeted 182,000 party officials and resulted in dozens of high-level arrests (including, in 2013, the mayor of Nanjing). The campaign has also affected routinized ways of "doing business" for ordinary Chinese, cutting down on banqueting and gift exchange, making suspect the consumption of luxury goods, and emphasizing the negative connotations of *guanxi,* loosely translated as "connections."

problem," clashes between Christians and the Chinese state have increased, not diminished, in recent months. In early 2014, the Zhejiang provincial government initiated a spate of crackdowns on Protestant churches in southeastern China, most of which were registered Three-Self churches — actions that were part of a campaign of "rectification" meant to curb "religious excess."[4] By mid-year 2014, demolitions had occurred at over two hundred sites, and dozens of pastors had been arrested; thousands of Christians protested what they saw as unlawful breaches of their rights to religious freedom. At the same time, fierce debates in underground churches arose as to whether state-controlled churches were churches in the true sense at all, with some clergy calling for Christians to *champion* the demolition of registered churches that had, in accruing too much conspicuous wealth and influence, become "corrupt."

These clashes show the complex affiliations and antagonisms that form between state institutions, Three-Self churches, and underground Christian communities. Indeed, the debates around the Zhejiang crackdowns are paradigmatic of the "problem-space" (Scott 2004; Agrama 2012) of secularism in China today. That is, the demolitions make visible the assemblage of stakes and the context of dispute around which recurrent questions about religion and politics form: What are the proper and improper sites for Christianity? What are the ethics of its legibility and authorization by the state? And how are Christian subjects to be interpolated as both vehicles for and objects of national reform?

My dissertation unfolds this ethical problem-space and examines how Christians work in both exemplary and quotidian ways to negotiate the place of "religious ethics" within national reform campaigns. Working with both underground and Three-Self congregations, I follow

[4] The Zhejiang government's full name for the campaign is "Three Rectifications and One Demolition" (*san gai yi chai*). The three rectifications refer to the remodeling of "old residential areas," "old commercial areas," and "urban villages," while the one demolition refers to the tearing down of "illegal structures," a category that includes the targeted churches.

diverse projects of "reform" (*gaige*) and "rectification" (*jiuzheng)* in which clergy and laypeople alike seek to discipline moral "disorder" (*hunluan*) inside and outside the Chinese Protestant sphere. I focus particularly on several such projects: an underground Christian school run by a Reformed Protestant house church, which removes children from state-run schools in order to "bring them before God"; a Three-Self church's pastoral counseling of migrants and "lost-land farmers" (*shidi nongmin)* in city development zones, in efforts to treat "moral dangers" that arise from radical social displacement; and theological training sessions for educators and church staff that instruct Christians on techniques of self-cultivation. Cutting across these sites, I draw attention to the multiple ethical and theological horizons that condition these projects, thus presenting an ethnography of Chinese Christianities in the plural.

As such, this dissertation works against common narratives of (state) power and (religious) resistance in China. By focusing on Christian "flourishing," I draw attention to the issues that have emerged for Christian communities now decades after the CCP re-opened and restored public spaces and institutions of worship. While these issues are deeply imbricated with state regimes of religious governance, they are not limited to encounters with the state. Rather, Christian communities, as I will show, engage thoroughly with problematics *internal* to their own histories of development and change over the last thirty years since Reform and Opening Up began. These issues emerge within religion-state relations, but are not over-determined by them.

Global Christianity, secularism, and China's "Christianity fever"

Literatures on Christianity's growth and development in recent Chinese history are expanding rapidly. Many narratives describe a burgeoning "Christianity Fever" over the last two

decades, and emphasize the expansive, "explosive" resurgence of religious activity in the 1980s that saw Protestant Christianity growing at markedly faster rates than other religion (Hunter and Chan 1993; Chao and Chong 1997; Lambert 1992). Interpretations of this trend feature a few notable orientations. Broadly functionalist narratives posit Christianity as a response to a moral crisis resulting from an evacuation of the state from everyday life — what journalist David Aikman termed a "massive ideological vacuum left in society by the nationwide collapse of belief in Marxism-Leninism" (2005: 15). Sociologist Fenggang Yang (2005) has argued, for instance, that in view of changing market conditions, Protestant Christianity in particular has become a privileged marker of a liberal, cosmopolitan Chinese subjectivity, one that is presumably best able to negotiate the vicissitudes of capitalism expansion (425). This explanatory tendency invokes the Weberian notion of an affinity between Protestantism and capitalist modernity, understanding churches bursting at the seams to be evidence of a Chinese-ized Protestant ethic that valorizes enlightened individualism over Maoist collectivity.

In one important extended study, Nanlai Cao's (2010) monograph on Christian entrepreneurs in the city of Wenzhou, dubbed "China's Jerusalem," attends to this analysis by understanding the Christian church as a resource for cultural capital — furnishing businessmen with symbolic distinctions of good manners and morals — that can be strategically and creatively deployed by the upwardly mobile. In showing how everyday actors draw upon regulatory mechanisms for their own ends, Cao argues persuasively that the dynamics between "official" and "unofficial" forms of Christianity cannot be easily calibrated to a domination-resistance model. Cao warns that the taken-for-granted bifurcation of Chinese Christianity into "official" and "unofficial" sectors not only ill reflects the empirical reality of hybridities in practice, but assumes that an antagonism between the Chinese state and Western-imported

Christianity must naturally exist. Rather, Cao focuses on local particularities and the creative potential for discourses of the "Protestant ethic" to be recruited to identity-constructing ends.

By treating Wenzhou Christianity as a "cultural fact deeply rooted in local society," Cao joins other anthropologists of Christianity in championing studies of the Christian experience as a "subject in its own right" (2010, 9-10). This subfield has emerged, according to Fenella Cannell in her introduction to the anthology *Anthropology of Christianity* (2006), in response to deficiencies in the ways Christianity has been studied previously in anthropology. The first deficiency is that of sheer neglect, brought on by anthropology's attempts, as a social science, to reject its own underlying Judeo-Christian premises (see also Sahlins 1996). A second lack is perceived in anthropology's analytic tendencies to treat Christianity as a secondary phenomenon to world-historical economic and political changes, focusing on how the uptake of Christianity (particularly in non-Western contexts) reflects the power struggles of colonialism and capitalism (e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 2001).

In response, a subfield emerged around the goal of studying Christianity as a "coherent tradition that can be compared across diverse local manifestations" (McDougall 2009) — a coherence that centers around several animating features: transcendence, rupture, and the interiority of truth (Robbins 2003, 2004; Keane 2007). The highly diverse works that examine this tradition coalesce in their foregrounding of *meaning* and distinctive ideologies of meaning-making as a common ground for studying Christianity. For instance, scholars have conceptualized a particularly Christian language ideology that stresses the importance of sincerity and truth-telling in speech, and have explored the ways in which this approach to language clashes with other non-Christian semiotic understandings (Harding 2000; Keane 2003, 2007; Engelke 2007). Others hone in on ideologies of personhood — for instance, the privileging

of inner belief — as a distinctively Christian approach to meaning (Tomlinson 2009). And yet others show how non-Western Christianities are deeply saturated and modified by indigenous understandings of meaning, value, and materialtiy (Rutherford 2003).

As a critical rejoinder to these efforts to distill Christianity's cultural form, Talal Asad and his influential works on secularism point us toward the importance of keeping the category of Christianity in tension. Asad, in seminal works like *Genealogies of Religion* (1994) and *Formations of the Secular* (2003), points out that the category of "religion" emerges as a consequence of historical transformations in organizations of state power and modes of governance. Asad argues that Christianity and secularism, and the "political" and "religious" more broadly, were mutually constituted in complex historical encounters. As a consequence, the coherence of a "religious" tradition such as Christianity cannot be separated from that which generates and mediates distinctions between the religious and the secular/political — that is, state sovereignty. This insight is further developed in Hussein Agrama's recent work (2012), which argues that the indeterminacy of categorical separations between the "religious" and the "political" in fact reinforces the power of the state sovereignty that adjudicates between those distinctions. Agrama suggests that, instead of definitively deciding on the boundaries between religion and politics, state sovereignty in fact produces a proliferation of gaps (or "problem-spaces" [Scott 2004]) that demand further deciding via law. Indeed, the performative authority of the state in defining what is properly "religion" may in fact indicate the continuous precarity of the categories in question.

This dissertation sits at the productively ambivalent intersection of these two anthropological orientations — one toward the specificities of Christian form, the other toward its political structuring. As an ethnography of Chinese Christian communities, this dissertation

contributes to a diversifying portrait of the local forms of Christianity that emerge under particular socio-political conditions — but also brackets the need to attribute these forms either to religious structure or to political determinism. Rather, I take anthropologies of Christianity and secularity as prompts for certain kinds of *attunements.* These attunements are aimed toward specifying how local imaginations of the arrangements between Christian forms of life and their political determination — such as the aforementioned students' continued contestation over what a "real Chinese church" constitutes — generate the impetus and possibility to live otherwise.

A study of the Chinese state, fragmented

Against theories that reify the state by its institutional and bureaucratic functions, anthropological scholarship has argued that the state is not outside of but in fact emergent in social life, made legible through its invocation in everyday linguistic, embodied, and material practices (Abrams 1989; Mitchell 1991; Gupta 1995). Since the 1980s, intensifying conditions of globalization, transnational capitalism and neoliberalization have seemed to render radical transformations of the traditionally conceived "state apparatus" (Althusser 1970), displacing state power to corporations, private institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and other bodies that challenged states' holds on borders, economies, and social control. In response, theorists have variously pronounced the "death" or "continuing relevance" of the nation-state, or have tried to come to terms with how states come to assume, through cultural mediations and representations, its seemingly vertical position of supreme authority (Sharma and Gupta 2008, 8). James Scott (1998), for instance, has noted how techniques of mapping, planning, and surveying shape how states see and govern, and in turn how populations view states. And even as the former centrality of the state apparatus seems to recede on some fronts, scholars have noted

its powerful persistence as an "imaginary." As Aretxaga (2003) writes, the state's identity with modern power continues to wield "meta-capital" (Bourdieu 1999). Where once state technologies were considered, in a Weberian manner, to be rational and disinterested, others now argue that the state is animated by fantasy, affect, and magic (Taussig 2007). In this vein, Wendy Brown's insights into the "post-Westphalian" political order of the nation-state are also revealing (2010). While Brown suggests that the absolute political authority of the nation-state has always been an "aspiration" rather than an attained fulfillment, nation-state sovereignty nonetheless remains a "potent material fiction" that suffuses the ways nation-states organizes themselves internally and externally.

Where does the Chinese state stand in relation to these theoretical insights? With its particular situation as a formerly semi-colonized nation and now not-quite-*post*-Socialist state, is the contemporary Chinese state another iteration of these patterns, a "neoliberal state with Chinese characteristics" (Wang 2003)? Or does the post-Mao reorganization of the state pose different sets of questions and challenges to theories of the state?

On the one hand, China's post-Reform-era state has been folded into overarching narratives of the state's "withdrawal" in the neoliberal era, resulting in patterns of "depoliticization" and decreased state intervention into the everyday and intimate lives of citizens. On the other hand, the realities of centralized state control over economic enterprises, land ownership, citizen mobility through strict residential (*hukou*) policies, and other domains persist despite the increase in private initiatives and private lives. Public declarations of party-state policies declare "entrepreneurship" a virtue, while also maintaining that the aims of the state are to progress toward socialist aims like the elimination of rural poverty. The co-existences of state regulation and neoliberal logics of individual freedom are, as Li Zhang and Aihwa Ong

(2008) have suggested, not contradictory but indications that the socialist state "is not disabled but reanimated by the infusion of neoliberal values" (4). They go on to name this formation "socialism at a distance" — a variety of governmentality that capitalizes on strategies of social control to induce citizens to be self-enterprising subjects (see also Rose 1999). This form of political control is exercised through a universalization of individual responsibility and initiative; the problematization of the quality of the population (*renkou suzhi)* and its ethical fashioning*;* and the dispossession of groups thought to pose a challenge to state power. Thus, the state in contemporary China might be seen to articulate a particular form of Foucault's notion of biopolitical governmentality — an "absent present" socialist state that regulates, at a distance, the conditions of possibility for self-interest and individual action.

Ong and Zhang's intervention has several important implications for my ethnography. First, I find crucial their suggestion that the "situated interplay of sovereign politics and self-governing practices … configure new *milieus* at multiple *scales"* (3). That is, the "distance" of the state is configured differently at various scales, and its presence or absence contingently mediated by diverse semiotic and institutional processes. Secondly, where political control makes the life of populations their object, then politics is also articulated through the assemblages and spaces of everyday life, where "sovereign power merges into personal effectiveness" (Farquhar and Zhang 2012, 19). It is with these contingent, multi-scalar sites of power in mind that we might begin to locate the specificities of post-Mao state arrangements. This dissertation draws out the ways in which the Chinese state fragments, appearing and disappearing, in spaces where religious governance (both of selves and others) is at stake.

Ethnographic trajectories

The ethnographic work in this dissertation concentrates on the city of Nanjing. Historically, Nanjing has been the fulcrum of the Three-Self Church's theological development in its "patriotic" form, as well as a thriving home of urban underground churches that attract the city's legions of students and migrants. Along with metropolitan areas like Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu, the city's churches are host to Christian intellectuals and urban middle-to-upper class congregations, who consciously differentiate themselves from "backwards" rural churches. Many of my interlocutors identified themselves as part of the vanguard of Chinese Christianity who are responsible for ridding the church of the remaining vestiges of traditional popular religion, folk mysticism, and fundamentalisms. Importantly, their reformational projects are embedded in the social and economic hierarchies attendant in urban development, the redistribution of rural land, and the disintegrating borders between city and village in China.

Discourses around the organization of Protestant Christianity in contemporary China often begin with a distinction between churches and communities that are "aboveground" and those that are "underground." The former category of churches are officially registered with the Bureau of Religious Affairs, through affiliation with the state-authorized Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the Chinese Christian Council (CCC), while the latter operate independently from state regulatory structures, frequently in the form of "house churches" (*jiating jiaohui*). Intermediary institutional forms have also been described by scholars and observers variously as "third churches" (elite, urban, high-profile organizations, such as Shouwang in Beijing), and as occupying "gray markets" of semi-legality in an economy of religious regulation. While these boundaries are shaded more finely than the binarized ways they are often seen, the distinction between "above"- and "underground" continues to produce salient imaginations of the public, private, and secret religious spheres in China. Perhaps more

importantly, the distinction animates imaginations of the ideological apparatuses of the Chinese party-state; variously, the state's tolerance for Christian organizations, investment in their flourishing, or crackdown on religious activities seems to mark the extents (or limits) of the Chinese nation-state's status as secular, liberal, and modern.

My first entrance into fieldwork was through official channels, as I planned to do the bulk of my work at the Jinling Union Theological Seminary (JUTS), the only national Protestant seminary in China and the center of what might be called official Chinese theology. Soon after meeting with several helpful and friendly teachers there, I submitted an official application to the Seminary administration to be allowed to study at the institution as a researcher. This request was promptly, and firmly, denied. It turned out that I was the only one surprised; my interlocutors at the Seminary told me afterwards that they were sure the request would not pass muster with the academic administration, which answered directly to the national State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) in Beijing.

With my naive belief in taking "official," and transparent, routes thwarted, my ethnographic routes thereafter were largely improvisional — a path that in fact led me into a far wider and more diverse world than I had expected. My failure to gain access to the national seminary was, in fact, crucial to my seeing the many contradictions in the structure of publicity and concealment that shaped Christian spheres. Subsequently, I found my way (at times accidentally) into other pockets of the city's Christian world, most intensively at a large underground urban house-church, and to recently founded institutions associated with it, including an underground primary school at which I taught English for six months. At the same time, I sustained my contacts with pastors and congregants at Three-Self Churches in the city,

through which I regularly circulated. Without an official institutional status at JUTS, I became far more mobile than I could have imagined.

My experiences as an ethnographer were also shaped, of course, by the fact of my own emplacement in Nanjing, where I was born but left to live abroad at the age of five. For my interlocutors, my marking-out as an "overseas Chinese" (*haiwai huaren*) was perhaps even secondary to my lack of a Christian background. With various intensities, many of my interlocutors evangelized to me, and hoped that I would become baptized by the end of my research trip. It was not only that they were concerned for the state of my soul — they were worried about my scholarship as well. For, as one pastor said to me once, I could not possibly understand what I was studying without *sharing* in their faith; it would be as if I was walking half-blind. Perhaps he was right. This dissertation, then, is a kind of inevitable distortion, emerging from my outsider glimpses into lives I did not fully share. To that end, and because of the political sensitivity of some of my materials, I have made an effort to anonymize my subjects (unless otherwise noted in cases of public profile) so that they are not immediately and wholly recognizable as specific individuals.

Organization of dissertation

The structure of chapters in this dissertation aims to reproduce my own sense of oscillation between different Christian spheres in Nanjing. The ethnographic chapters alternate between "public" and "underground church" spaces.

In Chapter 1, I trace the emergence of the category *zongjiao* (a neologism for "religion") and its consequences for the modernizing project of the Chinese state beginning at the turn of the last century. I track the circulation of this concept on two fronts: 1) following how the

introduction of “religion” (and religious difference) provided an impetus for the redrawing of public and private spheres in China, spurring the development of a secular model of governmentality; and 2) showing how the national reforms that followed this secular governmentality have in turn reproduced *zongjiao* as both an object and instrument of reform. I follow this two-pronged line of questioning through three major periods of modern Chinese history — the late-Qing/Republican period (1860s to 1949); the Maoist era (1949-1976); and the post-Maoist era beginning with Reform and Opening Up (1978-present). The historical trajectory of *zongjiao* in China not only illuminates the particularities of the separation between religion and politics in China — a distinction crucial to secularism around the world — but also helps us understand the ways in which religion and politics have continuously been brought back together.

In Chapter 2, I examine a large urban underground church, which I refer to as the Grace Alone Church (GAC), and its communal practices of revelation and concealment. By examining both quotidian and exceptional instances in which the church faces the threat of “exposure” as an illegal organization by state entities, I analyze how GAC members calibrate the relative value of enclosure in living with these risks and the kinds of intimacies forged within the specter of state surveillance. I argue that for "underground" Chinese Christians, degrees of concealment and publicity are not only a matter of choosing to resist state regimes of registration and regulation, but comprise on-going contestations about how and by whom Christians wish to be seen -- that is, through an ethical negotiation of visibility. By unpacking these debates around the implications of “opening up” or remaining "underground,” I demonstrate how becoming the object of repressive state surveillance might be imagined as a critical performative and ethical

identity for many Christians who choose to remain “underground” — one that demands certain ethical labors to sustain.

In Chapter 3, I explore how urban economies of demolition-and-construction shape the spaces of the city’s public churches, and attend to the production of urban Christianity (*chengshi jidujiao)* as a site of transformative potential and of meaningful “cultural value” within these economies. In particular, I examine a newly-constructed “global” church in a commercial development zone in Nanjing, and its efforts to constitute a church body (*jiaohui*) at the intersections of urban and rural populations. Chapter 4 engages in an ethnographic case study of the Covenant School, an underground Christian primary school, this chapter explores a community’s refusal to participate in Chinese state education and attempts to establish alternate modes of care, self-cultivation, discipline, and instruction. I address the movement’s ambivalent rejection of what Andrew Kipnis has called China’s ubiquitous affective structure of “educational desire,” and the tensions that arise as Christian schools explore alternative horizons of aspiration. Here, I explore the constitution of futures marked by *insecurity* and *risk* as constitutive elements of a shared striving among Covenant community members.

Finally, Chapter 5 examines ways of representing the intimate threat of heterodoxy and cult behavior within Chinese churches, and how such representations are most frequently wedded to images of the “rural woman.” In discourses on the contemporary development of Chinese Christianity, "heterodox" (*yiduan*) and "cult" (*xiejiao*) religious forms have been seen as perennial threats; not only do state and church authorities warn against the popularization of millenarian sects like Eastern Lightning/Church of Almighty God, but ordinary church-goers are also frequently exhorted to police each other (and themselves) against heterodox thoughts and actions. This chapter explores the constitution of the "heterodox cult" as an external *and* internal

danger that requires special techniques of measurement and self-assessment. Using objects such as instructional posters, pamphlets, cartoons, and online "heterodoxy tests," I analyze the ways in which suspicion of heterodoxy within Christian communities has become part of moral practices of self-cultivation, as well as intimately connected to discourses of religious difference.

CHAPTER ONE
Trajectories of *zongjiao:* religion, secularism, and the governing of China

Introduction

In the private study of Chen Zemin, a prominent Chinese theologian, several thick and handsome volumes of twentieth-century Chinese history occupy the same shelves as his collections of theological writing. In particular, a 1000-page compendium — published in 2011 by the CCP's Central History Research Office in honor of the party's 90th anniversary, and charting the party's history from 1949 to 1978[1] — had the place of honor. Chen pointed them out to me when he spoke about the daily routine of reading and writing that he, at nearly 94, still maintained. "I read a chapter of the compendium every day," he said, "and it's a little like reading my own journal." For him, these books materialize the irrevocable interweaving of three historical threads — that of the Chinese party-state, the Chinese Christian church, and of his own life as a Christian.

When I was taken by a seminary teacher to visit Chen Zemin in Nanjing in 2013, he was one of the most prominent members of the Chinese Christian literati still living. Although long retired, he was referred to as *Chen Yuanzhang,* referring to his years serving as dean of the Jinling Union Theological Seminary (JUTS) in Nanjing during the 1980s and 1990s. Midway into his nineties, his memory was robust, if his speech less clear. His eyesight was now too poor to play the piano sitting in his study, on which he had previously composed hymns for the Three-Self songbook. The apartment he shared with his family was just a few short blocks away from the old grounds of the JUTS. But the landscape of the city had changed drastically since the days

when he could stroll to the seminary grounds each morning. The old neighborhood was constantly being demolished and rebuilt, and there were no longer any seminary students and few teachers left in the vicinity; the entire campus had been moved to a new, more sprawling plot in the suburban development called "University City," where a somewhat nondescript JUTS campus sat at the tail-end of a neat line of higher-educational institutions that stretched into what was previously farmland. The old campus, with its distinctive Republican-era architecture, was now being rented as office buildings by the provincial government, walled off to the general public as well as to seminarians themselves.

This co-option of historical Christian spaces by new state bureaucracy made living figures like Chen even more venerated among seminarians. Professor Ma, who introduced me to Chen, urged me to set up weekly conversations with him: "No one's life has as much history as his does." Indeed, in my talks with Chen, my polite inquiries into his personal experiences inevitably led him to circle back to the history of the nation, embodied by those books on the shelf. The connections he found in official historical accounts, as well as televised history documentaries, in turn spurred on his own reflective, autobiographical writing exercises. His largely affirmative attitude toward the years covered by the historical compendium might be considered surprising considering that they cover ten long years during which he, along with other Christian leaders at the time, was conscribed to forced labor and re-education during the Cultural Revolution. When I ask him about how these years are described in the book, he tracks back to his own memories of working as a manual laborer on a rural commune: "I carried water up and down a hill for ten years … Now, I think it made me very strong."

---

[1] The CPC Central Committee's Party Literature Research Office. 2011. *Zhongguo Gong Ghan Dang Li Shi [History of the Communist Party of China] (1949-78).* Beijing: Central Party School Press.

Chen's life trajectory as a Three-Self theologian and academic administrator is both singular in its prominence, and exemplary as embodying what is deemed a "patriotic" Christian life. Of course, for those suspicious of this mode of attachment to the nation-state, Chen's intimate embrace of both state and church history is precisely what marks him a "fake Christian" — or, if put more generously, a Christian living under significant ideological constraints. I encountered, for instance, several interlocutors within Chinese Christian circles in Nanjing, some of whom were associated with the Three-Self Church through work or family, who were privately dismissive of Chen's theological bonafides and considered him a mouthpiece for the state. But I think such a dismissal obscures some important forms of historical subjectivity. Chen's deeply imbedded and active engagement with history — in which *reading* national history provided a kind of access to his own memories, and in which consuming such histories could be allowed to *work* on those memories — might be thought of as a practice or "technique of the self." Foucault's famous explication of such techniques poses them as a "number of operations on [individuals'] own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1997: 225). Such practices that an individual exercises upon himself, Foucault goes on to suggest, illuminates an "encounter between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self"— in short, a relationship he calls "governmentality." Following this, one could say that Chen's largely affirmative relationship with state history was at once a historical *product* of certain regimes of governmentality, and a site at which the effects of governmentality— the interaction between forces of domination and self-formation — were being produced. In reading state histories, he was also writing himself as a particular kind of Christian subject.

* * * *

As the subsequent chapters in this dissertation will explore through ethnographic encounters in various sites and communities, the many possibilities for becoming a legible "religious subject" in China are structured and indeed produced by modes of governmentality — dispersed practices of power that manifest not only in constraint but also in the exercise of freedom. In short, what it means to be "religious" in China has a very specific history. In this chapter, I take a long look at the history of "being religious" in modern China, and ask: what are the conditions of governmentality under which certain kinds of religious subjects could emerge? Rather than framing my ethnographic examination of Christian communities within the often-narrated post-Maoist "religious revival," as many authors of contemporary religious practice do, I attempt to draw together a genealogy of religious governance that threads through the development of the modern Chinese state. Specifically, this chapter traces out ways in which projects of disciplining "religion" were entangled with regimes of national reform that have sought to produce "modern" Chinese subjects. In this, I follow the insights that scholars like Prasenjit Duara (1996), Ann Anagnost (1994), Angelo Zito (1997), Rebecca Nedostup (2009), and Vincent Goossaert and David Palmer (2011) among others, have lent to considering how the governance of religion, ritual, and superstition have been centrally implicated in the formation of modern statehood in China. Drawing on a rich vein of secondary historical scholarship, as well as analysis of primary texts (mainly official statements and writings), I trace an account of how *zongjiao* 宗教— a neologism introduced to China in the nineteenth century as a unifying term for "religion" — has been formulated, disciplined, and imbricated in projects of national reform (and revolution) in modern China.

While far from providing a comprehensive history of *zongjiao,* my goal is to track the circulation of this concept on two fronts: 1) following how the introduction of "religion" (and religious difference) provided an impetus for the redrawing of public and private spheres in China, spurring the development of a secular model of governmentality; and 2) showing how the national reforms that followed this secular governmentality have in turn reproduced *zongjiao* as both an object and instrument of reform. I follow this two-pronged line of questioning through three major periods of modern Chinese history — the late-Qing/Republican period (1860s to 1949); the Maoist era (1949-1976); and the post-Maoist era beginning with Reform and Opening Up (1978-present). The historical trajectory of *zongjiao* in China not only illuminates the particularities of the separation between religion and politics in China — a distinction crucial to secularism around the world — but also helps us understand the ways in which religion and politics have continuously been brought back together. Thus, this history grounds the various ways *zongjiao,* including Protestant Christianity, is imagined and deployed as a site for the transformation of the contemporary Chinese nation-state.

Secularism with Chinese characteristics?

In this chapter, I use "secularism" to index the historical structuring of relationships between religion and politics, private and public, modernity and tradition, and the accompanying production of "problem-spaces" around those very distinctions (Scott 2004; Agrama 2012). As Talal Asad writes about and exemplifies methodologically in *Formations of the Secular,* an inquiry into the emergence of a particular regime of secularism requires not merely an event history but a genealogy — an examination of the shifts in categories and concepts that "make secularism thinkable as a practical proposition" (2003, 209). The history I am interested in

outlining in the Chinese context is precisely this shifting of "categories and concepts" that renders *zongjiao* legible and governable. That is, what are the particular epistemic shifts that make secularism in China take the form that it does? Here, I find Saba Mahmood's capacious yet precise conception of political secularism useful, both in thinking about continuities and distinctions in the Chinese context. Mahmood defines political secularism as the

> modern state's sovereign power to reorganize substantive features of religious life, stipulating what religion is or ought to be, assigning its proper content, and disseminating concomitant subjectivities, ethical frameworks, and quotidian practices. Secularism, in this understanding, is not simply the organizing structure for what are regularly taken to be a priori elements of social organization—public, private, political, religious—but a *discursive operation of power* that generates these very spheres, establishes their boundaries, and suffuses the with content, such that they come to acquire a natural quality for those living within its terms (2016, 3; emphasis mine).

Taken not only as a description of a political project, but as a "discursive operation of power" that naturalizes the very boundaries it itself generates, secularism intertwines two dimensions that seem to be at odds — "its regulatory impulse and its promise of freedom" (Mahmood 2016: 21). This seeming contradiction at the heart of secularism is incredibly regenerative of its own mode of governmentality: the maintenance of "religious freedom" must be assured by the intervention of state regulatory mechanisms into many aspects of religious life, such that the separation between religion and politics becomes an on-going labor that continuously undermines itself. This grammar of secular power, Mahmood argues, is shared across Western and non-Western spheres, liberal-democratic and authoritarian states, and manifests itself globally as the predicate of modern state sovereignty.

Because of these global manifestations, it is all the more imperative, as Mahmood suggests, to consider the "historically specific forms of life into which secular concepts and

institutions [are] inserted" (2016, 9). In much of the scholarly discourse on secularism, China has been conspicuous in its absence. Historian Wang Gungwu observes that the word "secular" was rarely used in historiography in reference to China, perhaps because "the connotations of the separation of church and state obviously did not apply" (2003, 309). In Wang's view, this lack signified an essential difference between China and Europe, in which Chinese civilization had a foundationally "worldly" outlook, and never went through processes of "departing" from major religious institutions as happened in European history. This outlook, of course, oversimplifies and reifies a cultural distinction between China and the West, and neglects the deep imbrication of the premises of political secularism in the emergence of the modern Chinese state. On this, historian Rebecca Nedostup (2009) has perhaps written the definitive work, describing how the separation between "religion" and "superstition" underpinned the construction of modernity and political power during the period of Nationalist rule in China. Nedostup's periodization is instructive in another way: accounts of the constitution of modern secularism in China appears to be disrupted by the Maoist period, during which the party-state saw religion not as something to be depoliticized but as an aberrant social force to be *overcome* precisely through mass political activity. Historians of religion and secularism are skittish around the Maoist period, and narratives usually take up the story in the post-Reform period, in which state policies toward religion are restored to what is legible as secular governmentality — the regulation of "religious freedom" and the maintenance of religion as a distinct sphere of life. Perhaps this neglect of the Maoist period in treatments of secularism marks a blind spot in scholarship — a distrust of the kind of historical engagement embodied by Chen Zemin, in which the Maoist years were not only considered the site of chaos and disruption but taken to be constitutive in certain ways of the life integral to Chinese religiosity today.

My aim in tracking the category of *zongjiao* is neither to make China an "exception" — to suggest that secularism does not apply to China — nor to argue for its sameness, that Chinese secularism is a mere variation on a consistent global theme. Rather, following Mahmood, it is to consider what the categories of secularism have done within the particular forms of life and governance in twentieth-century China, and how those forms of life and governance have in turn acted on secular categories. If we are to approach secularism through a genealogical lens, it is not enough to bound off political regimes and epochs as discreet periods — we must track categories and concepts as they move across time and accrue additional meanings, usages, and modes of deployment.

My argument in this chapter suggests that the contemporary governance of religion in China emerges from three interwoven historical trajectories of the concept of *zongjiao:* one, the deployment of the secular premises of a separation between "religion" and other spheres in the late imperial/early Republican period, which installed mechanisms for the continual disciplining of religion based on a model of Protestant Christianity; two, the re-politicization of religion during the Maoist period, in which religion as a form of social practice was understood to be counter-revolutionary and counter-productive to the nation's advancement; and three, the development of regulations in the post-Reform period that treated religion as a feature of the *population*. These trajectories of *zongjiao* did not transition one to the next seamlessly. Rather, aspects of each period clung on, shaping the ways in which *zongjiao* would be linked to projects of national reform in the twenty-first century, as both an instrument of civilizational and disciplinary labors and as an object of those labors itself. As I follow the historical trajectory of *zongjiao* into the early twenty-first century, I will argue that, in many important ways, the disciplinary regimes brought to bear on "religion" in China have been critical in the development

of contemporary forms of population management and the cultivation of national "quality" in the post-Reform era.

Rectifying *zongjiao*: religion and national reform in the late Qing and Republican period

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Chinese term *zongjiao* 宗教 (Shūkyō*)* was first adopted by officials in Meiji Japan in order to translate the term "religion" during international treaty and territorial negotiations with European states (Josephson 2012). Until then, no commensurate word for "religion" existed in the Chinese or Japanese lexicon. When, for instance, American warships dropped off letters to the Japanese emperor in 1853 promising (falsely) to respect the country's prohibition against Western missionaries, the word "religion" was mentioned twice in reference to Christianity. Translators struggled to find equivalents, producing multiple variants that denoted a variety of things. Out of many options, in the 1870s Japanese officials, using *kanji* (Chinese characters) in their translations, adopted the two-character compound *zongjiao* as a gloss for the Euro-American use of "religion." Thus, *zongjiao* began its career in Japan and China as largely a diplomatic and legal category. Subsequently, the term came back to China as what Lydia Liu calls a "return graphic loan" (Liu 1995, 33). *Zongjiao* was among many such neologisms traveling along Sino-Japanese-European routes, including terms like *geming* (revolution), *wenhua* (culture), and *kexue* (science). Like *zongjiao,* these terms emerged from and were mediated by encounters between China and European colonial powers. Taken up by nationalist reformers and critics of the Qing imperial government, they would be hugely consequential in the discursive production of China's self-image as an embattled nation in need of "modernity" (Nedostup 2009).

In classical Chinese, *zongjiao* referred narrowly to the Buddhist teachings of a particular sect; *zong* 宗, derived from an ancient pictogram of an ancestral altar, denotes "sect" or "lineage," while the more commonly-used *jiao* 教 refers broadly to "teachings."[2] Although its new signification laid claim to a universal category of "religion," *zongjiao's* primary referent was Protestant Christianity. This association would mark *zongjiao* with the qualitative distinctions — doctrinal coherence, an emphasis on internal belief, and the separation of "religion" from politics, science, and other forms of learning — that characterized the post-Reformation secularist category of "religion" in the European context. *Zongjiao* was further distinguished from earlier imperial-era categories like "orthodoxy" (*zhengjiao*), and was from the start paired with the opposing concept of "superstition" (*mixin*), also a neologism that circulated back to China from Japan (Nedostup 2009: 8-9).[3] In short, the category *zongjiao* — largely brought into being by the necessity to render international treaties intelligible — introduced new parameters of legibility to existing ritual and spiritual practices in China. As a result, many of these practices were subjected to structures of recognition associated with Christianity. This had vast consequences for nationalist projects in China, beginning in the late Qing period. As Nedostup puts it:

> With the rise of revolution and republicanism and the fall of the Qing, the link beween cosmos and ruler was severed. Sovereignty was meant to originate not from the balance of Heaven, Earth, and Man but from human agency alone. But in

[2] While *jiao* referred to traditions of thought in Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism, in the imperial context it was not counter-posed to government, politics, or science the way "religion" has been. See Feutchwang 1992; Kipnis 2001.
[3] *Mixin* also had its antecedents in much earlier epochs, most prominently glossed in the compound *yinsi* ("licentious sacrifices"), an ascription applied by dynastic officials to a range of religious practices outside the state cult. Historian T.H. Barrett points out that these state condemnations of *yinsi* as both "unlicensed" and "morally excessive" practices were often taken as signs — by 19th-century sinologists like J.J.M. De Groot — that the Chinese state had an unchanging antagonism toward popular superstition. But the historical interaction between the centralized imperial state and the religious practices of geographically-marginalized subjects is far more complex than this common assumption. (See Barrett 2008).

> essence, even before the events of 1911, the rise of the concept of religion had already initiated the break between political and numinous power. Although *zongjiao* laid claim to a universal definition, it actually carried the shadow of Protestant Christianity with it as the ultimate model of religion … To have *zongjiao* — or reforming whatever went on in the country's temples, monasteries, and shrines to *look* more like *zongjiao* — meant to become modern (2009, 9).

In this section, I focus on several interrelated shifts that followed this historical break. First, accompanying the introduction of *zongjiao* was a reform and re-organization of sovereign power in China in an effort to transform China into a modern secular nation-state; this involved the continuous effort to separate, and purify the separations between, religious and political spheres. Secondly, this process of re-ordering also produced new mechanisms, both state and non-state, to discipline local religious communities in the image of *zongjiao* properly construed. Partly under the influence of Christian ideals in education and social welfare, "traditional" Chinese bodies became a site of civilizational and modernizing labors. Third, I'll outline the formation of the architecture of religious governance, under which religious practitioners became one of many "sectors" (*jie)* in a newly-emergent conception of society (*shehui*). This architecture, as I will show in later sections, remains both continuous through the history of the PRC and experiences some crucial shifts.

Re-ordering gong *(public) and* si *(private)*

Classical Confucian ideologies of public (*gong* 公) and private (*si* 私) are frequently contrasted to an Aristotelian conception of public/private domains, which presents a contrast between distinct spheres of the *polis* (that of political activity, the arena of citizens) and the *oikos* (the domestic sphere, the arena of particular persons*)*. Rather than dividing between two domains, the Confucian ideal of *gong* comprises a moral economy between public-mindedness,

on the one hand, and the selfishness of *si* (in opposition to the public good), on the other. "The character for 'si' is a state of considering only oneself, not thinking of others, a state in which everything takes the self as its center, everything circles around the self. The form of this word is directly counterposed to 'gong'… the public is precisely not what circles in on itself" (Farquhar and Zhang 2012: 191). The "public" of Confucian ideals would be embodied in the state and the emperor, in the arenas of *guan* (bureaucratic engagement or officialdom) as well as in the orderly domestic sphere. The "private," or *si,* by contrast connotes an element of secrecy in its evasion of the public domain, as indicating that which was "private, personal, selfish, partial, unfair; secret, contraband, underhand, illict; the private procreational parts" (Wakeman 1998, 167). As the embodiment of *gong,* the emperor's authority over the public — the communal and collective life of his subjects — derived from cosmic authority and was maintained through proper rites.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, Qing imperial authority was collapsing, exacerbated by confrontations with Western colonial powers as well as by the mass destruction of the Taiping Rebellion. At the turn of the twentieth century, the Qing state instigated political reforms known as the New Policies (*Xinzheng)* that sought to address the crises of imperial administration. As a part of these reforms, a contingent of China's political elites pushed for revising the ideal of *gong*, untethering it from an identification with the emperor. Along with the emergence of the category of "citizen," the new *gong* was counterposed to the monopolization of power by the sovereign. These modernist reforms, emergent from within but also ironically forecasting the demise of the Manchu Qing Empire, took on *zongjiao* as an important object of rectification; it was thought that in order to bolster China's strength in the face of Western power, the nation would have to combat its internal disarray, beginning with eradicating the threat of insurgent groups (like the Taiping millenarians and the Boxers) and confining spiritual

practices to an orderly category of *zongjiao* (Palmer 2011; Goossaert 2006; Kuo 2008). Efforts to rectify *zongjiao* took on several dimensions. First, *Xinzheng* reformers sought to consolidate Confucianism as a symbol of the Chinese nation by elevating the worship of Confucius from "middle sacrifice" (*zhongsi*) to "grand sacrifice" (*dasi)*. As historian Ya-Pei Kuo (2008) has aptly illustrated, this "worship of Confucius after 1906 synchronized the emperor's and the nation's ritual bodies in front of the icon of Confucius" (2). These reforms foregrounded the *nation* as the primary object of devotion, and Chinese learning from the Confucian classics became conceptualized as a way of strengthening the nation and its citizens.[4] Concomittantly, attacks on local religion began. In 1901, a vast program of temple confiscation was initiated, in which local officials seized temple lands to build state-mandated structures like schools and administration bureaus, police stations, post offices, and other public institutions (Goossaert 2006, 308).

The embryonic secular nationalism that began in the late Qing took full fruition after the Revolution of 1911 and the establishment of the Republic of China (ROC). When the Kuomintang government came to full power in Nanjing in 1929 — after more than a decade of warlordism and factional fighting — its assertion of authority over a fractured country relied upon their creation of what Nedostup calls a new "affective regime" to succeed imperial sovereignty. That meant the creation of new institutions, bureaucratic arrangements, and political practices that displaced customary religious ceremonies with civic ones, and which newly circumscribed religious people and spaces. The normative conception of *zongjiao* played a

[4] Later, struggles over how to categorize Confucianism during Republican period would throw into relief the particular quandries of secular nationalism in China. As the Republican regime and allied modernist reformers removed aspects of Confucianism that was tied to cosmological sovereignty — spring and autumn sacrifices and other rites — they also continued to rely on the symbolics of Confucian rites and ceremonies to unite the national body. Consequently, the

significant role in the KMT's fierce crackdown on "superstiton" (*mixin),* a category of religious, spiritual, and ritual practices that could not be consolidated into a formal *zongjiao* and were understood to be a threat to the nation's capacity to become modern. This anti-superstition movement was heavily influenced by Western Christian missionary attacks on Chinese popular religion earlier in the nineteenth century (Tiedeman 2010, 653). In the anti-superstition campaigns of the early Republican period, "idol-smashing rallies, led by Christian converts and other agents of the new modern order — cadres and school teachers — became public, forcible acts of conversion to a secularized nationalism and to the Nationalist revolution" (Nedostup 2009, 68-69).

This "conversion" to secular nationalism was also premised on the establishment of "freedom of religion" as a key tenet of the Nationalist regime. But the specific language through which this freedom was legally framed would also have long-lasting consequences — essentially, "freedom of religion" was translated directly from a Japanese phrase that meant "freedom to *believe* in religion" (*xinyang zongjiao zi you).* That is, *zongjiao* remained defined by a set of doctrines and beliefs, on the model of Protestant Christianity. One of the first defining documents for the Nationalist government's stance on religion was released in June 1912, and announced plans to "respect each religion's *basic doctrines* while rectifying its later derivations such as rituals and customs" (cited in Goossaert 2008; emphasis mine).

Crucially, this understanding of religion sees doctrine as always *prior* to rituals and customs. Subsequent versions of the Nationalist constitution also reflected this emphasis on doctrine and belief as the sites of protection, and as a result, created a "gray zone in governance"

---

party-state was perpetually involved in formulating and disputing the proper classification of Confucianism, which always resisted being rendered legible as a *zongjiao.*

(Nedostup 2008, 33) when it came to religious groups' property, lands, and rights to community formation. If "freedom to believe religion" was understood to be essential to installing a modern, secular, constitutional state in China, it also necessitated a cultural conversion that pushed traditional folk religion — particularly local temple life — to the realm of *si,* the private sphere. In a contradiction that is certainly not unfamiliar in studies of secularism, the protection of "belief" as the proper domain of religion, separated from the domain of politics, paradoxically generated increased state interventions into religious communities, in efforts to purge them of "superstition" and to redistribute material property for other civic uses.

The ways in which Christianity figured into this mode of governance is telling: it was both the implicit standard by which other religions became legible to the state, and itself exempt from certain aspects of bureaucratic management. Under the KMT, "matters pertaining to Christians," for instance, fell under the purview of the National Ministries of Education (*jiaoyu bu*) and Foreign Affairs (*Waijiao bu*), whereas Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Confucianism, and other recognized religions were regulated by the Ministry of the Interior (*neizheng bu),* particularly the Office of Ritual and Customs (*lisu si*). As Nedostup writes, "Christianity's identity as a 'religion' was so automatic that this no longer held as its most pertinent identifying factor in an administrative sense. Rather, schools (and raising the profile of the party and Chinese Christians therein) and diplomacy (with missionaries and their sponsor countries) came to be the most important state concerns regarding Christianity" (2008, 36). As we can discern in Christianity's exceptionalism, its governance provided a model for how a properly-defined *zongjiao* could be governed without any particular administrative or bureaucratic acknowledgment of its "religious" character. This possibility of separating out religious *content* from administrative control meant that state power over religion could be seen as purely

bureaucratic — a distinction that presages the emergence of corporate religious associations (such as the Republican-era institutions for the "five major religions," as well as the "patriotic" associations that followed the Communist takeover) that indirectly exercised state power while still maintaining "freedom of religion."

Disciplining gods, disciplining communities

During Nationalist rule, *zongjiao* became incorporated into the schematization of "sectors" (*jie)* in Chinese society, along with other categories like laborers, farmers, women, merchants, and students (Tsin 1997, 214). In other words, a social segment emerged called the *zongjiao jie,* which could further be atomized into the "Christian *jie,"* the "Buddhist *jie,"* etc.[5] These were each to be regulated via a corporate hierarchy of state-sanctioned religious organizations. The conduct of the *zongjiao jie* was premised on the exclusion of "superstitious" and "heterodox" elements from "modern" institutional modes of organizing clerics and lay followers into (implicitly Christian) church-like structures (Goossaert 2008; Kuo 2013). Consequently, the young Republican government's constitutional stipulation of "freedom of religion" abutted the electic and dispersed assemblage of religious practices it encountered that did not fit neatly into the norms of a *jie.* This called for the proliferation of disciplinary labors — undertaken by state institutions, religious associations, educational institutions, missionary groups, and other organs of reform — that attempted to purge supposedly non-modern practices and sensibilities from the *zongjiao jie,* while also standardizing "Chinese religion" in ways that more resembled the doctrinal coherence attributed to Christianity.

[5] The "religious sector" (*zongjiao jie)* remains, in my fieldwork conversations with interlocutors, a common way for Chinese Christians to talk about the bracketed nature of religious life — and a term on which evangelically-minded Christians pushed back, in their hopes of transcending a social sector determined and authorized by the state.

As scholars of Chinese religion have written at length, Chinese folk practices at the turn of the twentieth century had a plethora of non-institutionalized forms. Historian Vincent Goossaert argues that "the whole of China's religious organization" in the late nineteenth century "may be seen as a coherent system," but was nonetheless distinctive in its capaciousness: "all-encompassing, not exclusive."

> It embraces all forms of religious practice, whether personal (meditation, salvation techniques, body techniques including martial arts, access to knowledge and revelation through possession and spirit-writing) or group (worship of local saints or ancestors, death rituals), which are all grounded in Chinese cosmology. It includes ancient sacrificial religion, Confucianism which continued it, Taoism and Buddhism, as well as the sectarian movements that were formed later. The most common form was the worshipping community with a temple, dedicated to a local saint: this kind of community was not Confucian, Buddhist or Taoist but linked to all three. Chinese religion existed but did not have a name because it did not have an overarching church structure or dogmatic authority (2005, 13).

These multifaceted practices of Chinese popular religion had long been subjected to processes of sorting out and authorization by the state. While in theory the state was supposed to administer and authorize all local sacrifices to deities and ancestors, in fact it was faced with an uncontainable realm of "unofficial" practices constituted within local cults — practices that Daniel Overmyer broadly defines as those "ritual transactions between non-human spiritual entities [and] direct attempts to renew reciprocal relationships with superhuman and natural powers" (1989, 193). Lacking sufficient resources to administer these proliferations of ritual sites, the state "turned instead to recognizing the cults of certain popular deities by giving them imperial name plaques and listing them in official registers" (Overmeyer 1989, 192). That is, it was not so much the imperial state's actual *success* at regulating the ever-shifting forms of local spiritual economies, but its post-hoc attempts to incorporate diverse religious forms into the state's structures of legitimation that seemed to have defined imperial sovereignty.

The Republican state's disciplining of the "unruly gods" (Shahar and Weller 1996) also applied techniques of official recognition, such as registration and the institution of religious associations that could standardize worship. Besides the aforementioned dispossession of temple lands, there were also movements to dismantle pre-existing structures of religious leadership. Nanjing, capital of the KMT government, was central to these first experiments in on-the-ground implementation of anti-superstition policies. Often, these involved the re-ordering of local religious communities. Here, particularly in Nedostup's detailed account of government clashes with temples and local cults in Jiangsu Province, we can discern the "problem-space" of secularism emerging in cases in which local religious communities had to carefully (and sometimes unsuccessfully) calibrate their orientation to Nationalist projects: the degree to which religious communities should involve themselves in public affairs, no matter how sympathetic to party doctrine, was always a matter of contestation. The vulnerability of Nationalist sovereignty demanded public performances of its strength. Soldiers, ordered to confiscate temple lands, at times theatrically lopped off cult deities' heads, for instance, subjecting them to a kind of summary execution (Nedostup 2008, 75-77).

Disciplining gods meant disciplining people — and in particular, Chinese bodies that were considered impediments to the nation's modernization. Many of these disciplinary mechanisms came in the form of social-welfare institutions established by missionaries in the late nineteenth century: hospitals, dispensaries, orphanages, and schools (including China's first formal medical schools). Early village schools focused on increasing literacy among Chinese people as a means of enabling converts to read the Bible. After the abolition of the Confucian examination system in 1905, Western educational methods were further boosted by state discourses as the critical means of Chinese advancement in the world. Missionary discourses on

everything from hygiene to footbinding to marriage customs constituted the "traditional" Chinese body as an object of reform. As Angela Zito (2005) puts it: "the Christian discovery of Chinese bodies attached to souls marked those bodies as terrain for civilizing labors" (27). While Western Christianity itself may have been attacked by a wave of revolutionary actions following the May Fourth Incident of 1919 — with an onslaught of anti-Christian campaigns from 1920-1925 — the civilizational rhetoric of missionary discourses continued to retain importance in KMT national reform projects, such as the New Life Movement and rural reconstruction. At the same time, Chinese modernizing reformers sought to scientize traditional repertoires of bodily practices — including exercise regimens and therapeutic techniques of Chinese medicine — by expurgating "spiritual" content, and making claims for their coherence with Western science. Such reform movements had a similar telos: to produce, through disciplinary techniques at the national and local levels, a secularized Chinese national body (Palmer 2011). In these projects, the concept of *zongjiao* acted as a roaming index — a model *of* religion as standardized doctrine, and, insofar as the maintenance of that category called for certain disciplinary strategies, a model *for* the persistent labor of modernizing China.

Constitutive failures and the architecture of secular governance

The Republican national project to disentangle religion from politics paradoxically made it necessary for the state to get involved in many aspects of religious life and social organization. State institutions schematized *zongjiao* and *mixin* within classificatory systems of cultural and civilizational evolution, and tried to reform existing religious communities by adopting a hierarchized system of state-sanctioned religious organizations as well as disciplinary techniques meant to purge "superstitious" behaviors. Together, these strategies of governance sound very

much like what Mahmood calls the "secular political praxis" of modern statehood, which "secures the prerogative of the modern state to serve as an arbiter of religious differences, to remake and regulate religious life while proclaiming its sanctity, in the process fundamentally transforming how people perceive and negotiate religious identity and communal relations" (2016: 32).

Yet, in the estimation of most historians, the KMT's efforts to purge "superstition" and to constitute a discreet religious *jie* in the orderly image of Protestant Christianity were ultimately unsuccessful. For one thing, widespread anti-superstition campaigns in fact were an impetus for the emergence of what Prasenjit Duara (2003) has called "redemptive societies" — a wide range of spiritual coalitions, such as *Tongshanshe* (Fellowship of Goodness) and *Zailijiao* (Teaching of the Abiding Principle), that synthesized folk practices, a mixture of religious doctrines, and social endeavors and took over some of the functions once held by local temples (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). Practices like spirit-writing (*fuji*), officially legally prohibited, had a renewed life in these salvationist groups, which resisted the distinction between religious and political organization demanded by secular governing logics. The KMT's failure to suppress — or surpass — these highly influential redemptive societies signals, for some historians, the incomplete or inadequate institution of secular governance. Nedostup, for instance, concludes in her account of the KMT's creation of an "affective regime" that their failure to do so "reveals the ultimate poverty of symbolic nationalism" (291).

While the KMT's secular disciplinary regime seemed to be undercut by these failures to re-order Chinese society entirely, Mahmood and other scholars of secularism also remind us that the seeming totality of secular governance works through, and not in spite of, frictions and incompleteness (see also Agrama 2012). That is, it is precisely at those crisis points at which the

premises of secularism seem on the verge of collapse that their urgent necessity is also reasserted. In the case of redemptive societies in the early Republic, we can see the burgeoning of strategies that sought to be at least partially legible to the state as "religion." For instance, redemptive societies undertook practices of "masking" (or effectively pushing "underground") their religious practices and identities, while tactically foregrounding "patriotic" elements; the Nationalist government also strategically legitimated certain societies, while suppressing others, in order to corral social forces as needed in the second Sino-Japanese war and civil conflict with the Communists (Nedostup 2009, 288). It was precisely the push-and-pull between religious/spiritual organizations and the state's structures of recognition and authorization that made *zongjiao* a term in need of continuous definition and national sovereignty in need of continual renewal.

Such constitutive crises of secular governmentality would intensify and take on a different order after the establishment of the People's Republic of China. While the bureaucratic *structure* for conducting religion was largely inherited by the Chinese Communist Party when it gained control of the country in 1949, the concept of "religious freedom" and the concomittant premises of secular government would undergo important revisions during the Maoist era. If, as Nedostup writes, the Nationalists' policies regarding religion were largely about "maintaining categories and claiming territory as an act of power and an expression of how the modern world should look" (2009, 287), we will see that in the Maoist era, religion becomes a problem of the "masses" that exists in an active struggle against the nation's revolutionary potential.

On the religion problem: *zongjiao* and revolutionary praxis during the Maoist era

> It is the peasants who made the idols, and when the time comes they will cast the idols aside with their own hands; there is no need for anyone else

> to do it for them prematurely. The Communist Party's propaganda policy in such matter should be, "Draw the bow without shooting; just indicate the motions." — Mao Zedong, 1927, *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan* (1953, 35)

Prior to 1949's establishment of the People's Republic of China (an event commonly referred to as Liberation), the Chinese Communist Party's policies and commentaries regarding *zongjiao* were variable, some denouncing *zongjiao* as backwards superstition and an ideological obfuscation, while others affirmed the utility of working with religious communities in creating a revolutionary "united front." On the one hand, the CCP adopted a similar outlook as the Nationalists did -- "freedom *to believe* religion" was regarded as the right of every citizen. In the 1927 Outline of the Constitution of the Chinese Soviety Republic, while church and temple land was allocated to peasant control, freedom of *belief* was understood as universally permissible *if* those beliefs were not antagonistic to Party doctrine. While Party stalwarts attacked Christianity and Catholicism for their associations with foreign imperialism (as did the KMT during the early Republican years), this hostility was not one-sided nor necessarily a principle hostility against "religion" writ large -- it was exacerbated by anti-Communist sentiments commonly espoused among Anglo-American missionaries, some of whom called the CCP a "manifestation of the devil." Within these attacks on the imperialist elements of religions affiliated with the West, the concept of *zongjiao* as essentially a matter of belief -- which could be deployed to justify actions for or against the nation's interests -- did not much depart from Republican understandings.

On the other hand, a more radical critique of religion as "opiate of the masses" also circulated in CCP discourse. *Zongjiao* adherence, in this more foundational critique, was not only characteristic of a "sector" of society but marked a particular *species* of practical consciousness, in the category dubbed "feudal superstition" (Kipnis 2001). Conducting *zongjiao,*

then, was not a matter of partitioning a distinct realm for its existence but of eradicating and transcending a particular form of consciousness so that "scientific socialism" might take its place. This tension between the secular structures of governing religion as a distinct sector, on the one hand, and the revolutionary aim of eradicating religion, on the other, created the internal conditions for intensive debates among CCP members over the meaning and place of *zongjiao.* If the Nationalists had prioritized “modernizing” China by pursuing an institutionalized division between religion and politics, these debates within the CCP *re-politicized* religion. The "religion problem" (*zongjiao wenti)* was constituted as a central blockage to the evolution toward socialism: to produce a “new China” through the production of “new man,” the social function of religion must be overcome and allowed to atrophy out of society. Yet, what should be done with masses who still believed and practiced religion at any given time?

In Mao Zedong's early writings — including his above-quoted report on folk religious practices and what he called "theocratic authority" in rural Hunan Province — he largely considered religion to be a "non-antagonistic contradiction *among* the masses." Non-antagonistic contradictions were those to be resolved without force, as he writes in “On Contradiction”: “We cannot abolish religion by administrative decree nor force people not to believe… The only way to settle questions of an ideological nature … is by the democratic method, the method of discussion, criticism, persuasion, and education, and not by the method of coercion or repression” (317) In this imagination, *zongjiao* can essentially be undone by reason; the atrophying of religion would happen on its own accord through the struggle against other antagonistic contradictions, such as the overthrowing of "feudal theocracy" by the peasant organizations of Hunan. High-level party members in the first decade of the PRC echoed this vision of religion's inevitable decline. In 1952, Premier Zhou Enlai met with an assembly of

Christian leaders in Shanghai, and announced that their mission was to “restore religion to its true features":

> We are going to let you go on trying to convert people, provided you also continue your social services. After all, we both believe that truth will prevail. We think your beliefs untrue and false; therefore if we are right, the people will reject them and your church will decay. If you are right, then the people will believe you; but as we are sure that you are wrong, we are prepared for that risk (quoted in Kinnear 2017, Appendix A).

Both Zhou and Mao gambled on the fact that “truth will prevail.” This gamble was a crucial one in the projection of a revolutionary futurity — the “new China” was always an entity that was yet to come, and therefore had to be collectively pursued in on-going revolutionary activity. In an essay written after the Cultural Revolution, Luo Zhufeng, a Party leader who has been head of the Religous Affairs Bureau, elaborates on the vision that Zhou Enlai expressed to Christian leaders in 1952 as an imagination of how religious believers would be transformed from the inside-out: “The antagonism between ‘heaven above’ and ‘this world’ that reflects social contradictions has subtly changed in their minds, shortening the gap between the two. In their eyes, religion is truth and socialism is truth as well; the two can coexist. In their words, ‘Love for one’s country is identical to love for one’s religion’” (Luo 1991, 84).

Other statements by Mao and top cadres reflect that, along with reasoned debate and techniques of persuasion, mobilizations of mass political affect — what Michael Dutton (2009) has called the Maoist regime's "passionate governmentality” — were also seen as in effect substituting for religious enthusiasms. As Mao himself said in a 1965 interview with French writer Andre Malraux: "Chinese Marxism is the religion of the people… When we say, 'We are Sons of the People,' China understands it as she understood the phrase 'Son of Heaven.' The people has taken the place of the ancestors” (MacInnis 1972, 12). Concomittantly, in Mao’s

telling of the oft-quoted fable "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains" (*Yugong Yishan*), he characterizes “the masses” (*renmin dazhong*) as the true source of transcendental authority: “Our God is none other than the masses of the Chinese people” (quoted in MacInnis 1972, 15). In Mao's language, which echoes and draws athority from both classical Confucian tradition ("Son of Heaven") and Western monotheism ("Our God is none other than…"), one can see that despite the CCP’s proponence of an anti-theist socialism, the vernacular of *zongjiao* was available to be appropriated as revolutionary language.

This appropriation of religious language in revolutionary discourses, as well as the mobilization of charisma and mass affect during the Maoist era have led many scholars to consider Maoism itself as a kind of "political religion," dominated by the "Mao cult" and the CCP's revolutionary eschatology (Zuo 1991; Duara 2005; Barme 1996; Leese 2011). In this reading of the period after 1949, the Maoist regime is the apotheosis of the ritual displacements of the modern Chinese state, beginning with the KMT regime, that aimed to sacralize the nation-state while simultaneously secularizing its populace (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 168). While these arguments are often insightful, they can at times obscure the ways in which substantive thinking and debate about *zongjiao* and *mixin* were on-going -- and not merely all suppressed as "reactionary" -- during the Maoist regime. Characterizations of Maoism as a “political religion” problematically presuppose a distinction between religion and politics, such that the mass mobilizations of the Maoist period must be considered outside the purview of politics proper and take on the qualifier of the *religious.* While this assessment might capture some of the charismatic and ritual features of Maoism, it misses the specific ways in which Maoist thinkers themselves theorized the relationship between revolution and religion, and the ways in which internal debates about religion and superstition had consequences for the understanding of

political praxis. In the following section, I look closely at such a debate among Party cadres that took place in state newspapers during the period preceding the Cultural Revolution, focusing on the ways the "religion problem" (*zongjiao wenti*) was substantively constituted.

Public debate over the "religion problem"[6]

The main voices in the debate are several CCP intellectuals who, drawing on Marxist-Leninist language and the statements of Mao Zedong, published a series of back-and-forth articles about religion and state policy. These pieces ran between the years of 1963 and 1965,[7] in journals and newspapers such as *People's Daily* (*Renmin Ribao*), *Red Flag (Hong Qi),* and *New Construction (Xin Jianshe).* These cadre-intellectuals' writings center on several critical themes that together constituted the contours of the "religion problem." First, there is the underlying question of the *definitional* difference between *zongjiao* and *mixin,* and whether a dichotomy of religion/superstition should have particular implications for the *tactics of* emancipating the masses. Second, they express a concern with the objective reality of the "religious masses," and their place in the pursuit of a united front that incorporated heterogeneous sectors of the population in the project of socialism. And third is the question of religious freedom: how was such a freedom to be conceived and enacted? While all the participants in these published essays and responses strongly held the party line — that religion was a social phenomenon that must slowly decay with the advancement of socialist society — their striking differences of opinion on matters of definition, tactics, policy, and the meaning of religious freedom condense some of the stakes around managing religion for the PRC. Moreover, they illuminate the ways in which the

[6] The articles analyzed in this section were collected and translated by Donald MacInnis in his anthology, *Religious Policy and Practice in Communist China: A Documentary History (*1972), my main source of reference. The citations of Maoist cadres' essays that follow all reference page numbers in MacInnis 1972.

secular political praxis of the modern state that the Republican government aspired to underwent some radical revisions in the Maoist era — revisions that themselves would set the stage for the post-Maoist reckoning with "religious revival" in China.

Ya Han-chang's comprehensive 1963 essay "On the Question of Religious Superstition," published on the front page of *People's Daily,* argues primarily against a tendency to conflate "religion" and "superstition." Since before 1949, the Communist Party had been particularly active in denouncing religion and superstition together as instruments of feudal and imperialist domination, and this line of attack continued after Liberation. Ya's essay attempts to make the distinction finer. In the Party's efforts to "conduct education in atheism among the broad masses of the people," Ya writes, it is "impermissible to set the struggle against religious superstition and the policy of freedom of worship against each other"(42). For him, the essence of this separation lies in the observable differences in *practices* of superstition and religion. He asks rhetorically,

> Do those who believe that there are ghosts and are afraid of them, and those who hold such feudal superstitious beliefs as fortune-telling, the casting of horoscopes, physiognomy, geomancy, etc., belong to a 'polytheist' or 'monotheist' religion, to a 'primitive' or 'systematized' religion, to a 'foreign' or 'native' religion?" (46)

The answer, for Ya, was no: religion was not equivalent to "feudal superstition," which must be done away with by force, but belonged to a category of practice against which only "pure ideological weapons" would work. According to Ya, superstitious activities were tactics of "swindling" and "exploiting classes" propagated by "reactionary classes" (38); they are liable to be "spontaneous" responses to pressure or crisis, rather than imbedded in developed ideologies

---

[7] This time period is significant, as it follows the "Second Hundred Flowers" period in 1962, in which there was another period of debate and discussion among intellectuals of competing ideologies after the Anti-Rightist Campaign in 1957.

(39). “Proper religious activities,” on the other hand, was the expression of a *kind* of consciousness, which required transformation on a different order — not just a forceful condemnation of customs and habits, but a “long-term, systematic, positive education in atheism” that would gradually emancipate the masses from “the fetters of theist ideas” (40). To this end, Ya proposed a strict upholding of the “freedom to believe” among religious populations such that their transformation through “atheist education” would be *voluntary* rather than imposed. That is, the transformation of consciousness must come as a force of will, not a force of habit.

In making this argument for the separation of religion and superstition, Ya exposed himself to intense criticism from within the Party. Prominent opponents of his were two cadres named Yu Hsiang and Liu Chun-wang, who rebutted his article by publishing one of their own in *New Construction* in the same year, in which they proclaimed that, “Speaking from scientific definition, religion and superstition are the same concept with completely the same intention and extension. Both of them mean people’s belief in supernatural, mystic forces, and are a reflection of the illusion of the objective world in the mind of man” (44). Ya responded in a rebuttal article by accusing his comrades of participating in a “bourgeois theory of religion” — one that constructs distinctions based on abstract notions rather than the study of historically concrete practices. Thus, Ya sets a new task for the Party’s conduct of religion: the eradication of “bourgeois theory” from within the revolutionary ranks (50).

In 1965, shortly before events leading to the Cultural Revolution began, denunciations of Ya from within Party ranks became more forceful. Ling Hao and Yang Chen, in an essay titled “Religion Has Always Been the Opiate of the People” that was published in *New Construction,* accused Ya of being an apologist for religion when he “arbitrarily separated” religion from

superstition; as a result, they write, Ya "prettifies religion" (82). In Ya's last public response, published in March 1965, he defends his "scientific" categories of distinction as being vital to the tactics of governing religous masses: "If we admit that the deist idea and religion are 'the same thing,' and that all deist ideas are 'religion,' then we must necesarily admit that all those who believe in 'spirits' and 'fate' are 'religious believers.' In this way many who are not religious believers will be counted as such, and this will greatly magnify the forces of religion in our country" (88-89).

Writers on the "religion problem" emphasized the need to engage in revolutionary *work* on and within the religious masses. In these writings, it is notable that the arguments always culminate in a discussion of "tactics"— practical implications for dealing with religion and superstition in on-going class struggles. Ya, for instance, concludes that, given the distinction between feudal superstition and religion, they must be seen as social phenomena that required different tactical responses; the first (which he continuously bounds with lists of specific practices, like geomancy and fortune-telling) calls for forceful suppression, and the second, ideological education and persuasion. Yu Hsiang and Liu Chun-wang, on the other hand, allowed no such substantive distinctions between religion and superstition, and therefore saw the same tactics as applying to both. For them, religion and superstition had co-evolved from a similar illusory source, the paralyzing obfuscation of class struggle and exploitation by a man-made delusion. The gradual extinction of religion required not just ideological education, but a transformation of the material conditions of life. In terms of the class struggle, the religious masses were both part of the working class *and* a force against which the working class must struggle; they contained, therefore, a contradiction that required a constantly dialectical working-

upon on the part of the masses themselves, in a productive process they called "unity-criticism-unity" (60).

Despite their differences on the definition of *zongjiao,* Ya, Yu, and Liu all invoke the "freedom of religious belief" as an indispensable policy for the Party. As Yu and Liu elaborate,

> there must be freedom for belief in religion or non-belief in religion; belief in this religion or that religion; belief in this sect or that sect of the same religion; belief in religion in the past and non-belief now; and non-belief in religion in the past and belief now. Facts have proven that only with the thorough implementation of the policy of the freedom of religious belief, may we, within the ranks of the people, correctly handle the relations between religious adherents and the state … and thereby strengthen the internal unity of the people (66-67).

While it might be tempting to call this emphasis on "freedom of belief" misleading given the reported suppression of religious adherents by the Mao regime, its continuing centrality in the discourse on religion tells us something important about the pervasiveness and persistence of this particular guarantee, no matter what the form of government. As I had previously elaborated in relation to the KMT, this construal of freedom goes hand-in-hand with the state's regulatory impulse. Yet, in this case, Yu and Liu additionally suggest that the "freedom of belief" paradoxically plays a role in the progressive extinction of religion altogether. Why would protecting the "freedom of religious belief" not be contrary to the goal of eradicating religion? This is because, they write, "under the condition of the proletariat holding state power, the weakening of religion is not a vertical drop" but a series of "undulations" (69). They seem to suggest that freedom of belief is required to *train* the masses toward their eventual emancipation, so that people may "self-consciously abandon the concept of religious superstition" (69). That is, unlike the top-down enforcement of regulations that the KMT had undertaken, the state's ideal

intervention into religion is here imagined as a bottom-up *self*-disciplining and *self*-transformation on the part of the people.

The stakes of the discussion, in many ways, continue those of the Republican state that preceded the CCP — questions of what it means to have a modern, rational, scientific relationship with the unruly religious masses. What differentiates, however, these Maoist-era writers' discussions of the "religious problem" is the way in which they constitute a problem-space around which questions of political praxis can be asked. Despite their internal disagreements, these writings of CCP theorists did not distinguish the *political* realm from the religious, nor do they demarcate a religious "sector" from the larger population; rather, the religious masses are figured as an inextricable part of the all-encompassing "people." The eventual extinction of *zongjiao* would only come as a result of its incorporation into a revolutionary praxis.[8]

* * * *

By the beginning of 1966, the public debates between Ya Han-Chang and his critics would by overtaken by a period of intense polarization that preceded the Cultural Revolution. In 1966, Red Guard activists closed down all public religious activity, including the patriotic

[8] The limitations of secularism as understood here are suggested in Marx's 1843 essay "On the Jewish Question" (a title whose resonances with Ya Han-chang's first essay "On the Question of Religious Superstition" we should note). There, Marx makes the distinction between the *political emancipation* of religious communities, through the recognition of rights and property, and *human emancipation,* which abolishes the very terms of difference that constitute religious identity:

> Man emancipates himself *politically* from religion by expelling it from the sphere of public law to that of private law. Religion is no longer the spirit of the *state* … It has become the spirit of *civil society,* of the sphere of egoism and of the *bellum omnium contra omnes.* It is no longer the essence of *community,* but the essence of *differentiation.* … It is now only the abstract avowal of an individual folly, a private whim or caprice. … But one should have no illusions about the scope of political emancipation. The division of man into the *public person* and the *private person,* the *displacement* of religion from the state into civil society—all this is not a stage in political emancipation but its consummation. Thus political emancipation does not abolish, and does not even strive to abolish, man's *real* religiosity (Marx 1978, 35).

religious associations that had formed in the 1950s. Ya's call for distinctions to be made between feudal superstition and religion were largely silenced (MacInnis 1972, 93), as the campaign against the "Four Olds" (old ideas, culture, customs, habits) beginning in 1966 called for the elimination of active religions. Official pronouncements on religion dwindled as well, as the Religious Affairs Bureau was de-activated and institutions like the Jinling Union Theological Seminary, along with other state-authorized religious training centers, shuttered indefinitely. In my interviews with those from the Three-Self Church, like Chen Zemin, this time was sometimes referred to as a "blank time" (*kongbai de qijian),* if not a period of painful and outright suppression. In reading the earlier debates of the 1960s, one can already see signs of how the premises of "freedom of belief" could have been put under increasing pressure. For, if religion was to be abolished through the course of revolutionary activity, it could only come as the efforts of the masses themselves to extinguish what Ya Han-chang called the "deistic idea" from their own consciousness — a process that would have heightened the internal contradictions among people, to use Mao's terminology, to a feverish degree. If the paradox of secular governance is that the state intervenes into religion the more it claims its own separation, perhaps the paradox of revolutionary statehood is that only through a recruitment of religious intensities could "religion" itself be overcome. Might the Cultural Revolution's confounding of secular logics be part of the reason many characterize it, in hindsight and from the perspective of secular-liberal states, as a period of "madness" or "unthinkability"?

As the anthropologist and historian Yiching Wu writes, "the Cultural Revolution serves as the pivotal historiographical category that grounds the historical and political meaning of the post-Mao reform and opening up" (2014, 3). This is no less true for the post-Mao revival of public religious activity. This resurgence of religious activity beginning in the 1980s is

frequently, implicitly or explicitly, placed in contrast to the suppression of religiosity during the Maoist era, particularly during the Cultural Revolution. Moreover, the "excesses" of the Cultural Revolution are often cited by post-Maoist official discourse as the rationale for contemporary religious policies. In the next section, I will examine how the strains placed upon the secular governance of religion during the revolutionary Maoist period have in fact provided the justification for the r*e-constitution* of secular governmentality on an even more pervasive scale in the post-Reform era.

"Religious work" and the politics of population in the post-Reform era

In the decades since the Cultural Revolution ended in 1978 and the Party adopted "Reform and Opening Up" policies, religious institutions in China have been re-instated and public participation in religious activities have experienced a dramatic resurgence. In ways that diverge from the Nationalists' understanding of religion as a "sector" (*jie)* of society, and the Maoist-era discourse of the religious "masses" (*qunzhong*), the primary orientation of the state's post-Reform religious policy posits *zongjiao* as a facet of the national "population" (*renkou*). Consequently, the associated "religious work" (*zongjiao gongzuo*) of the PRC government has also dramatically shifted — from intensifying conditions for religion's atrophying from society, to the work of "mutual adaptation of religion and socialist society" (*yu shehuizhuyi shehui xiang shiyi).* In this formulation, religious governance is not separate from the governance of the population at large, but considered essential to managing the population's conduct and to enacting the state's broader social policies (Cooke 2009, 126).

For Deng Xiaoping, architect of China's Reform and Opening up, controlling the growth of China's large and "low quality" population was a preoccupation in his vision for modernizing

the nation's economy. The emphasis, from the Deng years, on limiting over-population would become, by the Hu Jintao regime in the early 2000s, redefined as population-and-reproduction policy that employed an array of techniques meant to optimize population *quality* — which meant enhancing health, education, and social morality. Both quantity and quality of the population have become dominant problems in what Ann Anagnost calls an "emerging Chinese cultural critique that, in opening out to the world, has turned in on itself, reassigning the onus of underdevelopment from Western imperialism to factors endogenous to Chinese society" (1995, 24). Of course, this reflexive cultural critique is nothing new to the Reform era, as we have seen in the sustained repudiations of tradition and custom during the Republican as well as Maoist years. What *is* different, perhaps, are the dominant terms by which this internal cultural critique takes place. "Population," in a sense, has become metonymic for "nation."

Also notable are the forms of discipline that have emerged as possibilities for shaping the population. As Greenhalgh and Winckler (2005) write, this "dizzying array of developments around population" has included the "proliferation of demographic discourses, the multiplication of population institutions, the commodifcation of childrearing, and the intensification of interventions designed to 'govern' population" (2). Within these national discourses, *zongjiao* has been increasingly invoked as one potential moral technology by which citizens — who have been narrated to undergo a "moral decline" due to a preoccupation with material striving since the market reforms — can cultivate more quality.

The Chinese state's "religious work" is conceived of as harnessing *zongjiao* to the production of a "high quality" population. In some ways, the state has been compelled to make this link by sheer numbers. In the post-Reform years, the publication of statistical surveys of a resurgent religiously identified population showed significant growth, with the official

government count at 100 million religious practitioners in the early twenty-first century. This, many say, was a gross underestimate. Recent non-governmental surveys, like one conducted by an East China Normal University team in 2005, put the number of religious believers at 300 million (Cody 2007). Taking into account religious populations that are not recognized by the state, this number is imagined to be even larger — with estimates of the Christian population, in particular, running the gamut. Official numbers estimate around 23 million Protestants and 5 million Catholics, while unofficial surveys propose anywhere between 67 to 100 million Christians in China. The large number of "underground" or unregistered religious organizations means that the Chinese religious population, particularly Christians, is imagined through rumor and guesswork as much as through expert study. Whatever their empirical source, these politically charged "large numbers" of religious adherents have become particularly fetishized as a description, or diagnosis, of the Chinese populations' yearning for moral order.

Ideological revisions and religious policy since 1982

This sharp turn in the trajectory of governmental attitudes toward *zongjiao* in China after the Maoist era can partially be attributed to critiques of the Cultural Revolution's "excessive" attacks on religion, and partially to the way "religious freedom" is read as an index for a nation's modernity and development. As China began to globalize in the 1980s, the state began to revise its positions vis-a-vis religion, both to repudiate legacies of the Cultural Revolution and for the optics of the global stage. Since Mao's death in 1978, there has been a proliferation of administrative regulations (*xingzheng fagui*) calling for more precise definitions of rights and restrictions on religious bodies, property, sites, and clergy. The most important of the new policies was established in 1982. That year, the Party's Central Committee issued "Document

19" (titled "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question during Our Country's Socialist Period"), calling on Party cadres all over the nation to restore "normal" religious activities and to return confiscated properties to religious groups (MacInnis 1989, 7-26). Document 19 not only marked a decisive turn in state policy on religion but also a revisionist denunciation of "leftist errors" committed by the Gang of Four and a critical re-reading of the Cultural Revolution:

> Since 1957 … leftist errors gradually grew up in our religious work and progressed even further in the mid-sixties. During the "cultural revolution" especially, the antirevolutionary Lin Biao-Jiang Qing clique … wantonly trampled upon the scientific theory of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought concerning the religoius question. … They basically did away with the work the Party had done on the religious question. They forcibly forbade normal religious personages, as well as the mass of ordinary religious believers, as "targets for dictatorship," and fabricated a host of wrongs and injustices which they pinned upon these religious personages. … They used violent measures against religion which forced religious movements underground, with the result that they made some headway because of the disorganized state of affairs (MacInnis 1989, 13).

To correct these "leftist tendencies," Document 19 sought to return to a "scientific" view of *zongjiao,* seeing religion in terms of the concrete realities of "facts" and "practice" rather than as "ideology" (MacInnis 1989, 7). While still ostensibly committed to the Mao-era goal of purging religion from the social body in the course of socialist advancement, Document 19 seems to suggest an indefinite deferral to this aim — religious life must be accepted as present, social fact if the Party were to be successful in "unit[ing] all the people … to construct a modern, powerful socialist state" (MacInnis 1989, 26).[9]

[9] Members of the reinstated patriotic religious associations also participated in this historical revision. Three-Self church leaders, for instance, issued statements shortly after Document 19 expressing remorse for the "ultra-leftist" politicization of Christianity and promising that the official church would henceforth focus on "religious" matters (Wickeri 2007). As Ryan Dunch (2008) writes of the period following "Document 19": "the net result has been a gradual redefinition of the Communist Party's ideology on religion to allow for the possibility that some forms of religion can be compatible with

Since the passage of Document 19, other state policies have echoed this pronouncement of religion as a social fact of the population. Since the 1990s, the CCP has pursued a policy of proactive guidance toward the "adaptation" of officially-recognized religious institutions to the socialist state — what Suzette Cooke (2009) refers to as the state's "religious work." At first, this religious work largely consisted of ordering a national and local bureaucracy of regulatory organizations for religion. The ordering of religion "under law" was explicitly articulated in 1993 by Jiang Zemin, then general Party Secretary, and culminated in the most expansive legal document to date, the 48-article "Regulations on Religious Affairs" issued by the CCP's State Council in 2005. Beyond the expansion of legal definitions and protections, the state has also gradually co-opted religion as a civilizing agent in the Reform era — a movement institutionalized through the formal establishment of the "socialist spiritual civilization" (*shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming)* campaign in 1996 and the formation of the Office for Spiritual Civilization. The purpose of promoting "spiritual civilization" was to conduct the moral habitus of the citizenry away from perceived evils of the Reform era — namely, the worship of money, crass individualism, putting private interests before the public good, and the inability to distinguish between good and evil, among others (Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 196).

This mandate for the expansion and proactive co-option of religion by the state has extended into the era of the "Harmonious Society" doctrine. In a 2006 speech before the Party's Central Committee, President Hu Jintao inaugurated the "Harmonious Society" (*hexie shehui*) as the governing theme of his regime's political doctrine, describing it as a "scientific development concept" that shifts China away from purely economic growth to "social development" that was

---

socialist society … and a corresponding effort at 'theological reconstruction' in Protestant circles to define a Chinese Protestant theology that is compatible with socialism" (164-65).

"people-oriented, comprehensive, balanced and sustainable." The stress on "harmony" (*he*), also translatable as the verb "harmonizing," invokes a central concept in the Chinese traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism — the nondualistic synthesis of differentiated elements. According to Hu, the pillars of such a society are: "democracy and rule of law, justice and equality, trust and trustfulness, amity and vitality, order and stability, and a harmonious relation with nature" (cited in Zheng and Tok 2007). Within the rubric of "harmonization," the key role that the concept of *zongjiao* plays is through the reinforcement of the "normal" versus the "abnormal" — designations of religious practice that still assume the model of Protestant church-like structures as the take-for-granted normal.

To bring us to the present of my ethnographic work, recent statements by the current President Xi Jinping even more explictly reveal the continuing centrality of religious work in conducting the population, with even more emphasis on the state's role in *constructing* spaces for religion to act as a disciplinary technology. In April 2016, President Xi Jinping gave an agenda-setting speech before a national conference on "religious work" (*zongjiao gongzuo)*. In it, he called on the nation to "construct positive and healthy religious relationships," and reinforced religion's place in the "Four Comprehensives" (*sige quanmian*), his signature list of political goals for China.[10] The speech, titled "Comprehensively Improve the Level of Religious Work Under the New Situation (*quanmian tigao xin xingshi xia zongjiao gongzuo shuiping),* both promised to rigorously enforce China's "freedom of religion" policy, and to more aggressively recruit religious communities to "devote themselves to … the realization of the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation" (Xi 2016). In the first instance, Xi said, freedom of religion must be

[10] These include 1) Comprehensively build a moderately prosperous society; 2) Comprehensively deepen reform; 3) Comprehensively govern the nation according to law; 4) Comprehensively strictly govern the Party.

protected through a rigorous separation between religion and politics, ensured by limiting religious groups' interference with government administration; with regard to socialist adaptation, Xi encouraged religious groups to "dig deep into doctrines and canons that are in line with social harmony and progress, and favorable for the building of a healthy and civilized society." It was a call that reflected the kind of work already initiated by a variety of "patriotic" religious associations, like the Three-Self Patriotic Movement's renewed interest in so-called "theological reconstruction," which explicitly sought to frame Christian morality in terms of "spiritual civilization" (Wickeri 2001).

Conclusion

We can, of course, only tell so much about shifts in governmental tactics from official pronouncements. We must follow Chen Zemin, as discussed in the introduction of this chapter, in seeing the history of the state (and the history told by the state) as living works, which are continuously imbricated and re-told in particular forms of life. As the rest of my dissertation will explore, the state's "religious work" manifests itself in both distant and proximate ways to the everyday lives of religious practitioners. That post-Reform discourses of religion have been so consistently enfolded into assessments of the population's health and quality cues us to the shifting ways in which religion itself has become a focus of governmentality.

The argument of this chapter has been that the establishment of religion as a feature of the population's health in the post-Reform era emerges from the specific historical trajectory of the concept of *zongjiao* as it has shaped secular governmentality in twentieth-century China. From the governance of religious communities as sectors of society in the early Republican years to the rhetoric of managing religion as a way of governing life in the post-Reform period,

zongjiao has been variously negotiated in the nation's legal and political institutions to reflect shifting conceptions of the national population itself. The question of how *zongjiao* can be disciplined, reformed, and deployed to enhance the health of the national population underlies, whether implicitly or explicitly, many of the localized projects of Christian communities that I will explore in the subsequent chapters.

INTERLUDE
Economies of Exposure

In April 2013, a series of grainy cellphone photos went viral on the Chinese blogosphere, capturing a young unidentified man carrying a large cross while streaking through Beijing streets. In the background were the streetlights of the Wangjing neighborhood, a high-income area populated by Korean expats and tech companies, stark and empty at 2 am. In the foreground, the young man hoisted a bare cross over his shoulders while dashing across intersections and riding a scooter in the nude.

Figure 1. Beijing Luoben Ge (Beijing Streaking Brother). Image source: Sina Weibo.

Wangming (or Netizens, as Chinese "Internet citizens" are called) quickly dubbed him *Beijing Luoben Ge,* or the "Beijing Streaking Brother"– and for nearly two months, the photos became sites of endless speculation and debate online. Several days after the images appeared, a 28-year-old named Li Binyuan took credit for the performance on his own blog. A graduate of the prestigious China Central Academy of Fine Arts and an occasional associate of the (in)famous Chinese artist/provocateur Ai Weiwei, Li had made a series of ten nighttime sprints in all, occasionally substituting a life-size inflatable sex doll for the cross. His performance art — which also includes another series of viral images of him shaving and brushing his teeth on a crowded subway car — frequently disrupts the normative distinctions between public and private spaces and engages in practices of public self-exposure. Li has denied any overtly political or religious messages in his work (indeed, he attributed the streaking sprints to spontaneous emotion following a breakup with his girlfriend); instead, it seemed that the cross and the sex-doll were signs at play, acting as accessories for Li's bodily and emotive exertions in public spaces.

Rather circuitously, these images also made their way to the web forums of Chinese Christian communities in Nanjing. Its circulation in these spaces took on an entirely different valence. The images were met with disapproval by my Christian interlocutors — not because of its contentious value as "art" but because it signaled the ways Christian signs circulated in unruly in Chinese public space. One of my interlocutors in Nanjing commented with some disdain that this was a prime example of the misappropriation of Christian symbols by "non-Christians" (*feijidutu)*. "Whoever did this," he wrote angrily, "has mental issues" (*gan zhe ge de ren you maobing),* and the other members of the group readily agreed. For them, "Streaking Brother"

was not merely a Beijing provocateur, but a more general indication of how Christianity's increasing visibility in China has also opened it up to misappropriation. Conversations among my interlocutors coalesced around this anxiety: that their minority religion – still considered by the majority of Chinese to be a Western curiosity – was being seen, misread, and at times recklessly deployed. As one Christian sister told me: "The trouble with Christianity's popularity nowadays is that a lot of people think it's just fashionable, just a style." Look at those non-believers, she added, wearing cross necklaces and hiring actors to dress up as preachers to officiate faux-"Christian" weddings. Such displays, she continued, were essentially an affront to the real purpose of displaying the cross: "to represent the Christian faith, not just yourself."

If my interlocutors were anxious that the Streaking Brother's cross, rather than signifying something particularly "religious" in its specificity, gestured instead toward a superficial "style," in order to generate the affect of provocation or deliberate irreverence. And yet, despite the general stand-in quality of the cross, Li's performance also borrowed a specific aura from this Christian icon in its Chinese context: within the history of Christian incursions in China, the cross has been a particularly fraught public symbol, first regarded with great suspicion for its potentially occult qualities and later, during the period of Protestant missionization in the 19th century, made synonymous with Western imperialism. While over the last two decades Christianity has been increasingly public and popular in China, the public exposures of Christian signs remain complexly embedded in this history of contested visibilities.

On the one hand, Christianity has become more incorporated into public terrains of visibility in China than ever before, from growing numbers of large church constructions to widespread proselytization on university campuses and a surge in popular and intellectual interest in "Christian culture" (*jidujiao wenhua*). It is partially this visibility, after all, that makes

the cross a potential symbolic resource for Li Bingyuan in his performance. On the other hand, the public space for Christianity continues to be regulated and monitored by the state; in some cases, as in the recent demolitions of state-authorized churches and crosses in Zhejiang demonstrate, government crackdowns on "excessive" publicity aim to curtail Christianity's expansion into "secular" space. Furthermore, as my interlocutor's disapproving comments about "stylish" expressions of Christianity show, this increased visibility in public life has also produced anxieties over insincerity and dissimulation *within* Christian communities, in which members continuously subject signs of Christianity to suspicious reckoning.

The chapters that follow address the complex dynamics of exposure — of making oneself seen and the socio-historical conditions under which forms of (in)visibility are made. Drawing on fieldwork as well as media sources, I examine several sites in which visibility and its consequences are negotiated for both registered and unregistered churches in China. These sites include the public and private strategies of underground churches as they face police surveillance and negotiate internal "security"; the construction and demolitions of large public churches embedded in the fraught politics of urban expansion schemes; and projects of publicization and discourses of political viability among urban underground churches. Tying these cases together is the question of how *exposure* — both in the sense of degrees of public revelation, and of states of vulnerability — is calibrated by Chinese Christian institutions and individuals. Throughout these chapters I ask: What forms of publicity do churches and individuals aspire to, and what are the implicit risks and opportunities that emerge? What kinds of address are achieved by arrangements of openness and concealment? What sorts of Christian subjects are produced through the labors of exposure?

Exposure: conceptual framings

Questions of exposure have particular valence in the post-Maoist epoch in China, in which accelerated state-led marketization has transformed the nation's social and political landscape. With the adoption of Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms in 1978, the Chinese state undertook a process officially called "Reform and Opening Up" (*gaige kaifang*). The second of these terms used to mark the post-Maoist epoch is worth unpacking. The Chinese term *kaifang*, translated as "opening up," connotes a spatial sense of the expansion of Chinese public spheres and the nation's turning outward to an engagement with global markets and publics. Furthermore, in popular understandings it signifies a concomitant "liberalization" and "modernization," that is, a temporal leap from the insularity and control of the Maoist period to a time of more "freedom" and development. In common usage, *kaifang* also denotes a characteristic mindset of the understood-to-be-modern subject, and is used to index emergent differences in moral or other sensibilities — a member of the post-1980s generation might be deemed more *kaifang* in their attitudes toward, for instance, sex or popular media than a member of the older generation; or, one academic might remark to another that his university is relatively *kaifang*, as in "open" and tolerant of politically sensitive views. Thus, *kaifang* signifies more than the loosening of state controls on economic markets; just as importantly, it designates a qualitative shift in the "opening up" of arenas of public and private life for Chinese citizens.

As many ethnographers of post-Reform China have astutely observed, quotidian life and social ethics in post-Maoist China have been redefined in light of the last decades' "opening up." Post-Reform consumer culture has helped individual interests and appetites eclipse once-collective ones, producing new forms of identity and community that coalesce around the pursuit of desires (Farquhar 2002, Rofel 2007). The state's neoliberalizing configurations have also been

accompanied by a proliferation of self-governing practices driven by logics of "self-optimization," frequently indexed by the politics of "suzhi" (quality) (Kipnis 2006; Ong and Zhang 2008; Jacka 2009; Sigley 2009). Yet, as these scholars have also pointed out, this expansion of the private realm continues to exist in tension with articulations of socialist sovereignty and collective interest, creating ethical ambivalences and the widespread discourse of a Chinese "moral crisis." To become *kaifang* is also to become exposed to an array of risks — from economic precarity without the safety net of state welfare, to the presumed moral endangerment of excessive consumption and corruption, to environmental degradation and pollution from industrial processes.

Here, the polyvalent concept of exposure might do important work — not only in critically assessing the discourse of "moral crisis" that emerges along with the nation's "opening up," but in providing a more robust notion of the practices of self that attend post-Reform transformations. At times when the re-circumscription of public and private produces immense tensions, individual and collective sensibilities toward exposure and concealment also become crucial sites for ethical formation. How *kaifan*g should one become? What is at stake in exposing (or concealing) one's beliefs, capacities, political orientations, or tastes — or in being exposed to those of others'? What is the proper way to calibrate openness or closure within a moral economy in which *kaifang* can easily slip into the excesses of over-consumption, corruption, or amoral self-interest? These ethically-oriented questions about exposure shade into the political when considering both the structures of authority that police the exposed edges of social life, and the ways in which exposure is configured as resistance. Discourses of "exposure," for instance, are alive in the language of petition politics in China, in which activists use social media

platforms and other technological mediations to publicize their causes in particular forms of locally- and globally-directed political address.

In drawing on exposure's resonances with performativity and publicity, I in some ways diverge from recent scholarship that has used "exposure" to highlight conditions of social vulnerability and precarity from which, frequently, novel forms of political potential emerge. In *Life Exposed,* Adriana Petryna (2002) shows the emergence of a "biological citizenship" among survivors of the Chernobyl disaster, in which individuals' exposures to nuclear hazards shape their claims on rights, resources, and state recognition. The political potency of biologically-damaged subjects is also sensitively analyzed by anthropologist Rocío Magaña in her ethnographic work on the tactical deployment of migrant bodies injured or killed by extreme exposure in the Sonoran desert within the politics of border enforcement (Magaña 2008). In the collection *Landscapes of Exposure* (Mitman et al. 2004)*,* sociologists and anthropologists of science and medicine demonstrate the practices of power, calculation, knowledge-making, and risk-management that converge in the exposure of modern populations to ecological endangerment and health crises. In the context of these studies of late-modern biomedical and technological interventions, bodily exposures can illuminate the uneven grounds of risk-distribution as well as the potential for reconfigurations of rights, citizenship, and social reproduction.

While drawing on this range of scholarship's insights into how exposures figure into economies of risk and tactics of political recognition, I also want to push the multivalent notion of exposure in a related but distinct direction — of public performance and revelation, of the cultivation of and aspiration toward certain audiences, of self-exposure and its ethics. These senses draw attention to exposure as a self-conscious labor under particular conditions of

governmentality — as an ethics in the sense of a structured relationship between self-formation and scripts of conduct. Exposure poses both a form of address to certain audiences (disclosure) and a form of *being* addressed and made vulnerable to others (risk). The double-sidedness of exposure (as both acts of revelation/concealments, and the making visible/habitable of certain vulnerabilities) gives us a different vocabulary with which to speak of resistance and agency. Rather than linking agential action necessarily to notions of resistance, exposure signals the potential of action to be simultaneously calibrated for and against forms of authority, as acts of obedience and resistance both. Thus, my account of Christian communities in the chapters that follow supplements questions of how the optics of state power shape Christian life in China by re-focusing on multiple staging of exposures, in order to illuminate how institutions and individuals negotiate those optics of power by acting according to how they wish to be seen, and by whom. Indeed, this chapter argues that these economies of exposure produce distinct configurations and senses of publics and undergrounds that work to destabilize state-mandated structures of recognition for religious groups.

CHAPTER TWO
Publics, underground: enclosure and exposure at an urban house church

Entrances: the Grace Alone Church

It was the worst of the summer in a city dubbed one of China's "Three Furnaces" — the kind of July day in Nanjing that mottled eyeglasses with humidity as soon as you stepped out onto the street. Not sure whether the lull in activity I was experiencing was an early fieldwork hiccup or the product of the stifling weather, I set off one day in search of an air-conditioned coffee shop to work in. I came upon the bookstore by accident, nestled into a barely-trafficked floor of a commercial building, with a row of large windows that looked out onto the plane-tree covered streets near Nanjing University. At first glance, the store was filled with Christian-themed gifts and knick-knacks (cross pendants, ceramic angels, ornamented prayer books), along with translated editions of Christian parenting and marriage self-help books. My interest was piqued, as this was the only Christian store I'd seen outside of a church, and none of the items seemed to bear the officalese of the Three-Self establishment. The merchandise was sparsely curated, many objects imported from Taiwan and Hong Kong; besides the neat display, there was a prominent seating area, with a table surrounded by chairs. No other customers were present.

I browsed idly, and soon, a smiling bespectacled woman in her early twenties approached me. "Are you looking for something?" she asked. After just a few minutes of chatting, it was discovered that we had a mutual acquaintance: a Nanjing university graduate whom I knew to be active in organizing Bible-study groups and cultivating an extended network of Christian students in the old campus district. After establishing a social connection, however tenuous, and

telling her of my research interest in Christian life in Nanjing, I ventured to ask the young shopkeeper: what kind of store was this? In answer, she invited me to join the weekly Bible-study sessions that occurred in the bookstore (which, as it happened, was rented for this express purpose). I did so enthusiastically. These meetings were led by a young man I will call Zhou Qin, a pastor's son and so-called "second-generation Christian" (*ji erdai),*[1] whose deeply-steeped Christian upbringing was brought to bear in guiding the new converts (mostly university students) who came to the Bible group.

After attending the reading group for a few weeks, Zhou Qin invited me to join their regular Sunday worship service. I was not given an address, but told to meet with Zhou Qin and his girlfriend Yu Xia outside a subway stop near the southern city wall, where they would lead me to the assembly site. On the agreed-upon Sunday morning, I followed Zhou Qin and Yu Xia as they made their way past a cluttered construction site and into a commercial high-rise building. The security guard at the front desk barely looked up as we joined the steady stream of congregants — most in their twenties and thirties, arriving in pairs and foursomes — crammed into the elevator, where we were soon immersed in friendly chatter.

The doors opened to a dark corridor (no businesses were operating on a Sunday), and my guides led me to the door. The assembly was held in a large rented office space, with an attached kitchen and room that had been turned into a nursery. Congregants were gathering, milling about in the large space and seating themselves in plastic chairs in the makeshift aisles. Before entering, we were each handed sign-in sheets affixed to a clipboard by a church sister who "stood guard" by the door. The sheets were printed with the names of regular assembly

[1] This informal moniker explicitly references other such "second-generation" designations, such as "second-generation cadre" (*guan erdai)* and "second-generation wealthy" *(fu erdai*), which are often used to refer pejoratively to social elites whose privilege derives from previous generations.

members; any new attendees were instructed to write their names and contact information by hand at the end of the list. At the end of the service, new members were invited to approach the microphone at the front of the room and introduce themselves, as well as indicate who had brought them to the assembly.

As spectator, I listened to the introductions of the other newcomers that day — two university students who had been introduced by friends; an older woman who had been encouraged to come by her niece. Their introductions testified to the ways they had been drawn towards Christianity, by witnessing the force faith exerted in the lives of their friends, family, and acquaintances. Eventually someone, perhaps Zhou Qin, handed me the microphone. Holding it at the front of the room, standing before the assembly of perhaps 150 people, I suddenly felt exposed — by my Americanness, by my identity as an anthropologist, and by the stumbling I knew would reveal my still-apparent lack of fluency with a Christian register of speech. It felt like a moment of truth. I took a deep breath, and spoke.

* * * *

This would be the first in a series of entrances I experienced into various spaces of the underground Christian community I will call the Grace Alone Church (GAC). The initial anxiety I felt about my presence was triggered, in some ways, by those procedures of entrance: attendance taking, record keeping, and the formal acknowledgment of newcomers that also doubled as a confessional space, an opportunity to render oneself legible to the community. While I soon felt welcome in the church, it was always with a sense of the exigencies of entrance. “It’s a good thing you *look* Chinese,” said one of my friends in the church. His

implication was that having a recognizable foreigner in their midst would be endangering — I could, thankfully, "blend."

The awareness of concealment was striking after my previous experiences in public Three-Self churches in Nanjing. There, the cramped spaces, large Sunday crowds, and highly visible locations on busy thoroughfares cultivated a sense of stranger sociality and, for new members, anonymity. It was possible to slip in and out of Three-Self churches. Like other public religious spaces, they were available for all kinds of spectatorship and participation, from committed daily devotion to petitionary pilgrimages to weekend tourists seeking to slake their curiosity. Neither did Grace Alone exactly square with descriptions of traditional "house churches" I had heard or seen before — that is, the kind of intimate gathering of house church assemblies, often enclosed within domestic spaces, in which "preachers" were informal monikers rather than ordained clergy.

At the GAC, one experienced entrance into a kind of expansive underground public. Comprised of nearly 300 members ministered to by ordained church elders, this public was also importantly constituted by an imagination of its outside. Members' movements were highly mediated by a sense of enclosure and the necessity to police its boundaries; presences within the community were made to account for themselves, often by establishing social credentials through pre-existing interpersonal relationships. For those accustomed to thinking about the Three-Self institution as the site of regulated movements, and of house churches as informal spaces that resisted such regulations, this reversal might be counter-intuitive. In practice, I found this curious juxtaposition to be a highly generative one — the more consciously resistant to state recognition a church was, the more proximate it seemed to feel to practices of registration and surveillance. To enter into an "underground" space, marginalized from the state's regimes of

visibility and recognition, was also to accede to and expose oneself to an altogether different kind of governance.

This chapter delves into an underground church's navigation of its terms of concealment. I ask: how does Grace Alone Church's *enclosure* against certain forms of visibility and recognition — specifically, registration and authorization by the Three-Self institution — also produce concomittant forms of *exposure?* That is, what sorts of public lives and public visibilities are enabled by practices of concealment and secrecy? What modes of power and authority are mobilized through claims for the necessity of concealment or revelation, through projects of "remaining underground" and "opening up"? Rather than seeing non-compliance with the state as their defining feature, this chapter focuses on the internal forms of spiritual experience, communal life, authority, and governmentality that shape underground Christian publics. My goal in this chapter is to write against the grain of accounts of underground churches that assume the conditions of concealment are a constraint to be overcome. I will argue that the GAC's distinction from other models of publicized underground churches is their commitment to an aspirational *enclosure* — one in which an idealized interweaving of private and public are performatively enacted through practices of collective life.

The chapter will unfold as follows. The first section situates the GAC in relation to the emergence of the urban "third church" in China, and draws out the main contours of how such churches, led by public intellectuals critical of the Chinese state, are seeking to re-signify what it means to be a part of the "underground" church in China. In the next part, I examine how the GAC is imagined by its members as a kind of "home/land." To this end, I explore practices of collective living that both close off the church to a secular outside, and allow church members to collectively re-inscribe aspects of that secular outside within the church community. The final

section explores the affective response of church-goers to the threat of being exposed to state surveillance. In particular, I examine the quotidian practices through which the subject position of the "surveilled" may be performed, and examine how the GAC community responds to a "real event" of exposure: the detainment and interrogation of a church elder by state authorities.

Reformational aspirations in the "third church"

> "House church" is a Chinese phenomenon. I have more than once encountered Christians in the United States (both white and Chinese) who deem their own churches "house churches," yet with more careful scrutiny, the reason they name it as such is because their churches assemble in homes. In fact, the essence of house churches do not require the external form of "home assembly." The house church is a *spiritual phenomenon* [*lingxing shengming xianxiang*] that is produced under certain social and cultural conditions in China.— Pastor Liu Tongsu

This passage, quoted from Pastor Liu Tongsu's essay "The Definition of Chinese Urban House Churches" (Liu 2010) captures the contours of a particular contemporary imagination of the Chinese urban underground church movement, in which Nanjing's Grace Alone Church is complexly situated. Liu, an expat pastor based in the U.S., is a widely-read commentator on theological and social issues among underground communities in China,[2] and one of the most active advocates for the "urban house church" (*chengshi jiating jiaohui)* sphere. In this essay, he carefully parses out an aesthetic romanticism and nostalgia for the *form* of the house church from what he calls its spiritual essence.[3] Instead of being defined by its spatial enclosure, the house

[2] Born and educated in Nanjing, Liu studied law at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Yale Law School, during which he "came to God"; he graduated from the seminary of Yale Divinity School in 1997 and went on to establish Chinese-American churches in Connecticut, New York, and California.

[3] Images of the "humble" Chinese house church, with its rural roots, has long been active in Western imaginations of Christianity in China— imaginations that situate China as the latent horizon of Chrisitanity's next developmental stage. The late American evangelist Billy, for instance, devotes an entire chapter of his autobiography *Just As I Am* to the "Pacific Giant," recounting parts of China as an embryonic image of a pre-Christian world. This particular affect comes through in Graham's description of the trip to his wife's childhood home in Huaiyin (she had grown up the child of missionaries): "we passed through miles and miles of what Ruth called 'old China,' with little villages, mud farmhouses

church is primarily a "spiritual phenomenon" that emerges within a specific relationship to state control, which supplies both its constraints and its conditions of possibility. These conditions are what Liu refers to as the "Chinese" specificity of the house church — which, contrary to first appearances, does not indicate an essentialization of a Chinese cultural heritage, but rather the particular socio-historical premises of Chinese forms of governance and sovereignty that have shaped the development of Christianity.

In the same essay, Liu describes "the social and cultural conditions" of China in stark terms: "the ideological government that uses state coercion to exert comprehensive control over public life, or more precisely, that the government uses state coercive force over the whole of society to implement their ideology." This tautological imbrication of state ideology and society constitute the "Chineseness" of the house church: an isomorphic mapping-on of state and society. A "home assembly" that accepts this "ideological conditioning," Liu Tongsu goes on, is no more a true "house church" than a Three-Self Christian edifice. In the urban landscapes of the "public life of faith," house churches are more likely to assemble in "office buildings and companies" than in cramped city apartments. For Liu the "house church" signifies more than a spatial or structural determination. "House church," in fact, names a spiritual state of perpetual resistance*;* it has a theologico-ethical content that is inextricably linked to the ways in which it is internally governed and externally constrained.

Liu's approach to house church Christianity highlights the ways in which a generation of Chinese Christian urban elites has sought to transform and re-signify traditional house churches. Since the late 1990s, a new category of Chinese Christians has emerged in sociological

---

with thatched roofs, ducks, a small pond, water buffalo, and a few chickens" (Graham 2007). This vivid imagination of an idealized past also appears in a description of a visit to a church in Guangzhou. The heat and crowdedness, Ruth

scholarship on Chinese religion, conducted both by researchers based on the mainland and abroad: the "intellectual elite Christians" (*zhishi jingying jidutu*). Liu Tongsu, along with Pastor Wang Yi of the Early Rain Church in Chengdu,[4] are active representatives of this cohort of public intellectuals on social media, as well as online and print publications. Though a small minority of Chinese Christians at large, they have an outsize influence over the direction of public discourse, spurring responses from even state-run media like *China Daily.* Sociologist Chen Cunfu of Zhejiang University, who first coined the term, describes the *zhishi jingying jidutu* as such:

> [T]here are the 'intellectual elite' Christians from major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Guangzhou. They are no longer like the past urban [Christians] who were 'petty bourgeois' housewives, depending on the support of husbands and children, uncultured, and chiefly engaged with housework. These 'intellectual elite' Christians today, though small in number, are primarily in universities and secondarily in hospitals, research institutes, and Sino-foreign joint enterprises (Chen 2005, 51).

Chen's characterization of a gendered shift — from 'petty bourgeois' housewives to a presumably largely male class of intellectuals — is not incidental. The emergence of this intellectual elite class of Christians into public visibility has been accompanied by undertones of a masculinist class discourse. Members of the educated elite identify Protestant Christianity as a source of cosmopolitan modernity for China — but particularly in its male-dominated "theologically rigorous" form, which is explicitly opposed to the popular Christianity embraced by women, the rural poor, and marginalized communities. As I will elaborate later in the chapter and elsewhere in the dissertation, this association of particular styles of pietistic Christian

---

Graham remarked in her diary, made her feel as if she "had been to the catacombs and back," reference to early churches in Rome.

[4] Together, Liu Tongsu and Wang Yi co-authored a collection of essays titled *Observation on the China's House Churches in Cities [Guan kan zhong guo cheng shi jia ting jiao hui]* (Taipei: Christian Arts Press, 2012). Wang Yi is also profiled in depth in Ian Johnson, *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion after Mao (*2017).

practice with the "feminine," and intellectualized styles with the "masculine," has important consequences for the reassertion of a patriarchal division of labor in Chinese Christian communities.

In other popular and scholarly literatures, this stratum of Christian organization, located in major cities, have been known by monikers like "third church" (*disan jiaohui*) or "third way" (*disan daolu)* — a kind of *tertium quid* between the common bifurcation of Three-Self and underground churches.[5] In addition to the state-sanctioned churches, they are frequently set off against "boss Christians" (*laoban jidutu),* the other urban class of economic elites and the *nouveau riche* about whom Nanlai Cai's (2011) ethnography of Wenzhou churches provides a careful study. Boss Christians tend to be characterized as executives and private business owners who have linked their financial success with Christian belief, in a self-conscious but largely depoliticized enactment of Weber's Protestant ethic thesis; in general, boss Christians, in Cai and others' accounts, frequently collaborate with state actors and institutions to establish wealthy churches and contribute to urban development. Even analyses that de-emphasize "boss Christians" tend to highlight urban Christianity's imbrication with economic development in cities. Jie Kang (2016), for instance, writes: "house churches in town encourage Christians to grasp rather than reject the new urban aspirations for material goods and entrepreneurial success" (17).

The "third church," by contrast, is not only identified through its sociological characteristics but by a set of theological and political commitments. Perhaps unexpectedly, Reform Calvinist theology — which has long been receding on the horizons of global

[5] Public theologians like Wang Yi and Liu Tongsu have also criticized the terminology of "thirdness" as being overly divisive; they would prefer to think of the "house church," including urban and rural forms, as united against the state-sanctioned Three-Self church (Liu and Yi 2012).

Christianity — has made a major comeback in the Chinese "third church." The recent work of Fredrik Fällman (2013), Alexander Chow (2015), and Chloe Starr (2016a, 2016b) all elaborate on this growing interest in reviving and implanting the theology of John Calvin and the Reformed Protestant tradition in China. Chow traces the strong identification of urban intellectuals with Calvinism to several roots: interest in the post-1980s Chinese academy in debating Weber's thesis about the role of Calvinism in shaping capitalism and modernity in the West; the intensification of anti-state sentiments that coalesced among witnesses to the Tiananmen Square massacre; and an interest, particularly forwarded by the law-professor-turned-pastor Wang Yi, in how Reform theology and Protestant culture at large has shaped Western forms of constitutionalism.

These different paths to Calvinism share a deeply seated critique of the contemporary Chinese nation-state. In this aspect, too, the politics of the "third church" diverge from other sectors. Third-church thinkers are frequently hostile to *sinicization,* to attempts at conceiving of an indigenized "Chinese" house church. Instead, the strategic mission of the urban church is to, as Starr (2016b) writes, "renew the whole of mainstream Chinese culture through the urban house church" (142). Leaders of this movement seek to "open up" (*gongkai hua*) house churches, bringing them "aboveground" as both an audible voice of critique of the Chinese state and an instrument with which to "evangelize culture" (*wenhua fuyin hua*). As Liu Tongsu writes, the process of "opening up" involves the internal transformation of Christian communities in preparation for a confrontation with mainstream Chinese society.

This vision seemed to reach a culminating articulation in August 2015, when Wang Yi and members of the pastorate at his home church signed and circulated an online document titled, "Reaffirming our Stance on the House Churches: 95 theses" (Qiuyu zhifu Jiaotang 2015).

This invocation of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses, which kicked off the Protestant Reformation in Europe, gives the document an authoritative stance, and positions the "new urban house churches" as a prophetic development in Chinese as well as Christian history. The document sets forth a vision for the Chinese church's "post-apostolic" age, in which urban house churches will overtake rural house churches as the center of the Chinese mission, in opposition to the "anti-Christ movement" of the Three-Self churches. As Starr notes, the statement's explicit connection to Luther's attack on the Roman church, and its emboldened resonances between Luther and leaders like Wang Yi, makes it "difficult to read the document as anything other than a call to a new Reformation" (2016b: 142). Not only was the house church no longer to remain hidden; it was being called to become a major player in China's public stage.

* * * *

The emergence of the "third church" as an aspirational model for urban house churches in China has reoriented concepts of publicity and secrecy, while introducing new questions about the ethics of exposure and enclosure in individual underground churches. On the face of it, the GAC would seem to be a model paradigm for the urban house church named as the prophetic vanguard by Wang Yi and Liu Tongsu. Writings by "third church" leaders like Wang and Liu, as well as recordings of their sermons and lectures, frequently made the rounds of my acquaintances at Nanjing's Grace Alone Church — and were enthusiastically pressed into my hands in my first weeks at the church. These materials circulated in print copies shared among friends, some of whom obtained books from Taiwan, as well as on bootlegged CDs and downloaded file shares. Wang Yi's lecture series on the Book of Romans, for instance, became a must-read for the theologically inclined members of the church; and occasionally, there were

individuals who funded their own trips to study with Wang Yi at his house church seminary. The GAC's congregation of nearly 300 (and steadily growing) was comprised of young urbanites, well-educated and mostly mid-income white-collar workers, with a smattering of lawyers, businessmen, and academics — fitting of the "third church" demographic.

Yet, as I would find more and more during my time with the GAC, the programmatic of "evangelizing culture" and "opening up" was met with a considerable amount of ambivalence and internal resistance. Depending on whom I was conversing with, names like Wang Yi were met with either enthusiastic avowal or sardonic dismissal, his public volubility interpreted as both moral courage and megalomaniacal posturing (or a little of both). Sustained contact with the GAC revealed multiple and divergent stances taken to the proposition of "opening up." As the GAC negotiated ways to accommodate its expanding congregation, the continuing value of *enclosure* — of remaining semi-clandestine in the environs of Nanjing — was as alive as the demand for further exposure. It turned out that what Liu Tongsu had written about "opening up" (*gongkai hua*) — that it had "already become a concept inextricably linked to urban house churches" — was less a description of social reality than a statement of an aspirational horizon.

In the next sections, I will examine the ways in which people at the GAC oriented to this aspirational horizon. In the quotidian life of church members, the question was often not the existential one of Early Rain's "95 Theses" — a choice between "satanic" state-controlled churches and house churches that did the will of God — but an array of pragmatic concerns: what were the possibilities and closures afforded by the church's arrangements? What kind of life did belonging to a "third church" make it possible to live? By drawing out the tensions in the lives of urban Christians, I hope to lend some ethnographic flesh to the pronouncements by their most highly-visible spokespeople.

Ordering and truth: internal reformation at the GAC

The Grace Alone Church was founded in the early 2000s by a group of university and vocational school professors in Nanjing.[6] It began as a reading group with a dozen or so members, with hardly enough organization to be called a church. These intellectuals-turned-preachers had each converted to Christianity in their university or graduate school years, and had together developed affinities for the New Calvinism of the urban "third churches."

One day, after a few months attending GAC services, I met Lin Wanfang for a low-key interview at a McDonalds to speak about the origins of the church. One of the founders and ordained elders of the GAC, he told me that this cohort of church leaders identified with the "post-70s" generation (*qiling hou dai*), one that he characterized in these terms: "We remember the Cultural Revolution but were too young to have truly lived through it." Elder Lin told me that, as adults, his cohort of Christian converts came of age with the events of 6/1 — the Tiananmen Massacre — which had shaped the sensibilities of many leaders of the "third church" (Chow 2015). But, from the beginning, the GAC had a different orientation toward publicity than urban churches like Shouwang Church in Beijing (which famously held worship services on the street after their facilities were confiscated) and Early Rain in Chengdu (who had successfully sued the city of Chengdu after a raid on their premises). If Shouwang and Early Rain seemed to welcome chances to become known as religious dissidents to national and global audiences, Elder Lin recounted that, as the GAC grew in size, its leaders mainly aspired to order the internal

[6] As elsewhere in the dissertation, to protect my interlocutors' identities I have anonymized identifying information and in some cases present individuals as amalgamations of several people.

structure of the church. This process was in response to what they considered to be the foremost danger for the GAC: the theological and liturgical disarray of traditional Chinese house churches.

This anxiety over disorder stemmed from clergy's impressions of the house church tradition in China as leaning towards popular and charismatic, rather than theologically "rigorous," religious forms. Anthropologist Jie Kang, in a recent study of house church Christianity at urban-rural transitional zones, notes a pattern of "rationalization" in the movement from traditional rural Christianity to urban forms, which she describes as the shift from "an emphasis on miracle healing, revelations, and spiritual giftedness to that of doctrine" (2016:22). At the GAC, this imagination of a rationalizing Christianity could be discerned in the instrumental relationship between two critical concepts: *zhengli* (ordering, or sorting out) and *zhenli* (truth). Elder Lin played on these near-homophones when he remarked to me, "If we want to transmit the truth, we must order the church" (*women ruguo xiang tranbo zhenli, women yi ding yao zhengli jiaohui).*

This ordering constituted processes of learning how to be Christian and had implications for the development of Christian education and theological training (which I will address in more detail in Chapter 4). What is notable about the GAC was its connection with a particular American denomination. For them, "sorting out" came in the form of an intensive study of the structure, beliefs, and practices of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), a denomination in the conservative wing of Protestant churches that has historical roots in the Scottish Reformation.[7] Why the RPCNA? On this point, Elder Lin and others in the church were somewhat evasive in clarifying the origins of the GAC's relationship to this

[7] The first Reformed Presbytery seems to have been instituted in the U.S. in 1774, and since the early 1800s, records show they have been involved in overseas missions work, including in China (Steele 1901). I have not found any official records of the RPCNA's involvement in Chinese missions in the 20th century.

particular denomination, for fear of indirectly exposing sensitive contacts with overseas congregations to which state monitors are particularly sensitive. Through conversations with others I was able to discern, however, that the relationship to the RPCNA had significant implications for parishioners at the church.

Over time, church governance, liturgy, and doctrine hewed ever more closely to those of the RPCNA, which had distributed official copies of its constitution in Mandarin translation. These doctrinal distinctions included adherence to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, drawn up and adopted by the Church of Scotland in the 17th century. Worship services at the GAC are modeled closely on the liturgy of the RPCNA, and the temporality of the church — except for minor concessions to Chinese holidays — stick closely to the same liturgical calendar. Sunday services are followed directly afterwards by readings from the Westminster Catechisms. These, in turn, lead to a communal meal — lunch prepared by a rotating group of volunteers — and, finally, the splitting of the congregation into *xiaozu* (small groups) for *fansi* (self-reflection).

The GAC's adoption of other RPCNA practices, rooted in a literalist reading of the Bible, included a commitment to "exclusive psalmody," or the practice of singing only a cappella Psalms during worship services; requirements that all ordained elders be male, while women could serve as deacons; and a general prohibition against attending services by ministers of other denominations (although this latter rule did not seem to be much enforced). These practices — particularly the ban on traditional Chinese Christian hymns, which had been a formative part of some parishioners' Christian upbringings — required a reorientation of many congregants' customs and habits. It also had the effect, some parishioners told me, of driving away large portions of the church's original membership to other house churches in Nanjing during the

GAC's transitional period. Those who remained identified strongly with Reform Christianity (*gaige jidujiao*).

Crucially, the adoption of RPCNA rules also installed the imperative to follow a distinctive political stance — namely, a disavowal of any government that rejects Christ or whose laws contain no reference to Christ and the Covenants. In North America, this refusal has historically led Reformed Presbyterians to abstain from voting, running for office, or swearing any official oaths to the governments of the U.S. or Canada. However, at Nanjing's GAC, what exactly this refusal consisted of remained under contestation. While refusing to register with the State Administration of Religious Affairs was a matter of strong consensus, there were other areas of contact with the Chinese state that were more difficult to adjudicate. Should, for instance, congregants refuse membership in the Chinese Communist Party even if their jobs required party membership? Should parishioners allow their children to attend state-administered public schools, where they would be required to undergo "atheistic" political and civic education? Or should they take the leap of faith, withdrawing their children entirely from such institutions, while abstaining from the nationwide university entrance exams (*gaokao*) and from formal educational accreditation?

GAC members grappled with these issues in the immediacy of their individual lives — but this internal struggle was also carried out on a collective level. That is, the formation and ordering of the GAC *as a collective* worked in various ways to re-train congregants in their mode of engaging with larger social and political spheres. This not only took place through encouraging parishioners to disengage with outside state and public institutions — in some cases causing members to quit their jobs in favor of less lucrative employment — but also through processes that drew all spheres of life *inside* the church itself. In other words, as the GAC

became a space of social enclosure through its adoption of the RPCNA constitution, this enclosure also grew more and more capacious, allowing the church to embody an expansive collective life. This process, as I will go on to elaborate, involved the creation of private (domestic) spheres and public (political) spheres within the enclosure of the church — practices that depended importantly on producing and reinforcing a gendered division of labor. In the next section, I unpack some of the labors that produced a sense of the church as a collective.

Constituting *jiayuan*: the making of a home/land

In my first conversations with members of the GAC, I was struck by their affectionate references to the church by its informal moniker of *jiayuan* 家园. These characters literally refer to a garden enclosed within a home, but are also used to indicate "native land" or "family." To reflect this multi-dimensionality of *jiayuan,* I gloss it as "home/land" — an evocation of its double sense of inside and outside. The polyvalence of *jiayuan* — joining together a general sense of the domicile with images of private enclosure (the courtyard garden) and the public space of the polity (homeland) — seemed both revelatory and performative, illuminating the ways in which members thought of the church as both closed off from the world at large, and as an expansive world in itself. More than just an image of the church as family structure, their imagination of *jiayuan* worked to "produce locality," in Arjun Appadurai's words (1996), by installing a kind of church collective specific to its localization in Nanjing. Elder Lin Wanfang, for instance, frequently reminded me that Nanjing was not like Beijing or Chengdu, two major metropolitan areas where the "third church" had expanded its visibility and audibility, and where churches like Showwang and Early Rain had asserted their legal standing in public battles with government officials. Nanjingers, Elder Lin said, were still socially conservative, and

comparatively reticent to change; thus, the emphasis on an inner-looking urban house church indexed a Nanjing *style* of the New Calvinist third church — one that was more broadly introspective, and focused on cultivating a limited community rather than engaging in evangelistic activism.

Many GAC members had not been participants in house churches their entire lives; their own entrances into and exits from various Christian assemblies were frequently narrated to culminate with *jiayuan* as the telos of mobility, the endpoint in a process of searching. This discourse recalls Wang Yi and others' prophetic pronouncements about the urban house church, but on a more local and personal scale of transformation. The reflexive circulation of these stories produced a public in Michael Warner's (2002) sense of a poetic world-making: the discourse that "[characterizes] the world in which it attempts to circulate, projecting for that world a concrete and livable space, and attempting to realize the world through address" (82). The performative dimension of nicknaming the GAC *jiayuan* resides in this creative calling-forth of an audience that recognizes, affirms, and works further in the circulation of discourse to realize the features of this "home/land."

Home-making

One of the ways in which this articulated *jiayuan* came to be experienced as real was through the projection of kinship terms onto the social structures of the church, which in turn reshaped community life in substantial ways. As in many other Christian communities in China, regular congregants addressed others in the assembly by sibling terms: *zimei* for sisters, *dixiong* for brothers.[8] Becoming accustomed to inhabiting the subject positions of *zimei* and *dixiong* was

[8] See also Dunch (2012, 276).

an important aspect of individual conversion, and a signal that one had learned how to "speak like a Christian" (Harding 2000). At the GAC, as at other Chinese churches, the assumption of the titles *dixiong* and *zimei* allowed Christians to enter into a kin-like intimacy with strangers or to affect that possibility (for instance, I was addressed as *Xiaobo zimei* even though I had not converted to Christianity — my inhabiting the same social space was warrant enough).

These are not the kinship terms generally used to address siblings or socially-marked sibling equivalents, which in Chinese indicate age difference as well as the gender of those addressed. And this linguistic shift is consequential for a number of reasons. As Nicholas Harkness (2015) as written regarding analogous terms of address in South Korean churches, the term *dixiong* and *zimei* collapse age distinctions into the universal gendered category of "brother" and "sister," thus flattening the hierarchical markings of the more commonly used kinship terms. This mode of address, as Courtney Handman (2011) notes in the case of Christian conversion in Papua New Guinea, expresses an aspiration to live by the "principle that 'God has no grandchildren.' That is, by becoming Christian one becomes enmeshed in a universal kinship grid in which there can only ever be one degree of separation" (659).

Such terms of address not only have the effect of making Christians recognizable to one another (acting as a shibboleth), but also work metadiscursively to mark Christian speech as "sincere" (Robbins 2003; Handman 2010). The sincerity at stake in this case is, as Webb Keane (2007) has argued, the ideological effacement of a social order; by rendering "sisters" and "brothers" universal categories, Chinese Christians reject the social hierarchies that mark age distinctions and seek to perform an alignment of *inner* and *outer* selves. This emphasis on the universalizability of kinship relations operates, too, as an explicit critique of so-called traditional Chinese social ethics, rooted in what Fei Xiaotong (1992) has characterized as a "differential

mode of association" in which moral rights and duties are assigned to subjects based on their place in a hierarchy of relations, using the image of concentric circles emanating out from the individual. At the GAC, members often explicitly contrasted the "sincere" relationships between *dixiong/zimei* against a negative conception of *guanxi,* the emic idiom of Chinese social reciprocity (Kipnis 1997). At the same time, for many church members entering into *jiayuan* caused a break in their previous filial relations, in some cases decentering "filial piety" and installing a new set of familial connections.

There were material effects to this shift. Making *jiayuan* into a "home" oriented around Christian kinship produced possibilities for collective life, in an urban context where individual alienation could be acute. This was particularly evident for those in the church for whom Nanjing was a *second* home — a city to which they had migrated for education and job opportunities. With a majority of the congregants in this situation, GAC members' lives were remarkably intertwined: they frequently lived together, worked together, and often established households with one another.

The "Brothers' Home" (*dixiong zhi jia*), for instance, was such a hub for young men. I first visited there with my friend Zhang Zhiwei, a 28-year-old former law student whose voracious thirst for reading philosophy and theology rivaled that of anyone in the church. Originally from Hunan Province, Zhiwei had received what he called a typical "intellectual conversion" — similar to Pastor Wang Yi, to whom he looked as a role model, he came around to Christianity through "rational consideration" rather than a spiritual experience. In Nanjing, he had also begun submitting himself to practices of self-transformation that discomfited his non-religious family members back home. Rather than working for a company or continuing his studies in law, Zhiwei preferred to work for low wages at a snack stand in the sprawling

underground market at Xinjiekou station. Between customers, he said, there was plenty of time to read and think.

Zhiwei wanted me to see the Brothers' Home not as a stop-gap for young men on their way to better places, but as a space of crucial self-cultivation. Located on the first floor of a crumbling walk-up apartment building, it was, in some ways, a typical ramshackle bachelors' pad, a kind of extention of Nanjing's cramped university dorms immortalized in popular films like *When We Were Young*. Up to eight *dixiong* occupied the three small rooms. Bunk beds flanked the walls, each littered with stacks of books. Meals were eaten communally around an old coffee table. There was no television, only a few shared refurbished laptops. Yet, this was for Zhiwei his first experience of the luxury of being among fellow Christians. Evenings there passed in chatter about philosophy, theology, novels, films. One of Zhiwei's roommates was a film buff, and loved to extol the virtues of Hitchcock and his incisive representation of evil in the world. Another *dixiong* (Zhou Qin, who had first led me to the GAC's clandestine assembly spot) spent the bulk of his time assisting in arranging music for the GAC's choir and organizing their first foray into recording the complete Psalms. These individual activities worked along with group habits — such as morning and evening prayers, coordinated Bible readings, and other spiritual exercises that centered on self-reflection, either verbally or through journal-writing — to bring the church into the domicile. Differences between the *jiaotang* (the physical space of assembly) and the *jiaohui* (the congregation) could, in this social arrangement, be seen to dissolve.

As the Brothers' Home sat the intersection of comings and goings, it also marked particular life stages. The brothers would depart, in turn, as they got married, often to *zimei* within the church. A number of "promising" single brothers — those who took on leadership

roles at the church and showed interest in theological study — took their place. Their circulations through the Brothers' House were a rite of passage, and a confirmation of their entrance into the inner circle. Its insularity — rarely did they "mix" with *fei jidutu* (non-Christians), Zhiwei noted — protected against the encroachment of "worldly" sensibilities. "A few years after I converted, I began to drift away from *fei jidutu,"* Zhiwei recalled. "It wasn't that they had changed, it was because *I* had changed. I found it more difficult to find things to talk with them about."

At the Brother's Home, *dixiong* often pushed back against what they considered "worldly" material striving, and criticized the intractability of such desires among the rest of their fellow parishioners. "We're not interested in *mai fangzi* (buying homes) in order to get married," Zhiwei said to me, referring to the ubiquitous aspiration of private home ownership that seemed inescapable among urban dwellers. His implicit criticism of those at the church who still valued *maifangzi* as a requisite to marriage was echoed by articles of moral guidance that circulated online, which advised young Christians in the Reform community to marry first, buy later. To encourage early marriage, the GAC even distributed financial aid, drawn from weekly collections, to young couples to supplement rental fees. Zhiwei himself remained a staunch bachelor, despite many community members' attempts to set him up with a suitable *zimei.* He continued to live among his books, oscillating between dreams of becoming an ordained pastor and a human rights lawyer. The summer after I met him, he self-funded a trip to Chengdu to study with Pastor Wang Yi at Early Rain Church. The experience changed his life, and he found it less easy to settle back into the bubble of *jiayuan* at the GAC. A year later, he left for Shanghai, where he joined another Reform church that was engaged with *gongkai hua* (opening up) and open dissent to state policies.

His eventual departure had been fomented at the Brother's House. For, despite sharing the values of the GAC leadership, the Brothers' Home also came to embody a collective pursuit of spiritual and theological orientations that were not isomorphic with the statements of church leadership, and in which *dixiong* could cultivate a sense of tension and resistance to how the church was currently conducted. Here, they exchanged their true opinions about the Elders in the GAC: whose sermons, for instance, were getting too "folksy" and lacked theological depth; whose Biblical understanding was falling short. An enclosure *within* the already-insular *jiayuan,* the Brothers' Home fostered a space of critique, and a self-conscious recognition that the church's theological direction would soon begin to shift in their hands, perhaps towards the more stridently evangelical outlook of Wang Yi and Liu Tongsu. This critical and reflexive stance, it seemed to me, was central to the formation of a particular sense of *dixiong* masculinity, which held itself apart from the domestically oriented femininity of the *zimei.* Indeed, in order to become more involved in the pastoral activites of the church, several *dixiong* who circulated through the Brothers' House sought to become elected as deacons — a process that resembled a circumscribed political campaign, with the circulation of candidate statements and speeches before the general assembly, culminating in an annual vote by all the registered members.

As I saw at the Brothers' Home, with Zhiwei as my host, the domestic enclosures of *jiayuan* also fostered openings for individuals to seek exposure within the church public — to address audiences of *dixiong* and *zimei* from subject positions they normally did not inhabit in other spaces. As one Brother's Home resident said in his speech to the assembly: "In society [*zai shehui li],* I am nobody. I'm ordinary, I don't make much money, and I don't stand out. But here, I am among *dixiong* and *zimei,* and I have a voice."

Gendered enclosures

On a spring afternoon, I was walking with Sister Chen Xiuwen on our way to a church member's wedding, which was to be publicly held on the grounds of Nanjing Normal University. Ordained pastors of the church performed community wedding ceremonies, and many saw them as semi-public events in which testimonies of faith could be heard by invited guests outside of the Christian orbit. Strolling with me toward the reception site, Xiuwen began to lament her romantic prospects. "There are too many *zimei* and not enough *dixiong,"* she said, referring to the gender imbalance at the GAC. This excess of sisters made the market for single brothers a veritable "festival ground" (*youle chang),* she added. "Many *zimei* have to accept that they will never get married." This numbers game was, she claimed, part of the reason she decided to go abroad for graduate studies, when once she had previously hoped to stay near the GAC.

Xiuwen's story was not out of the ordinary. She had discovered the GAC while an undergraduate at Nanjing Normal, and remained at the church while working as an English instructor in Nanjing after graduation. A Jane Austen devotee, her views of sociality had a distinctly Austenian mix of acerbic knowingness and observational acuteness. As we walked onto campus, we were guided by clusters of *zimei* holding signs pointing to the wedding venue, and Xiuwen pointed out to me, as an Austen heroine might, the sisters she had already identified as "future old maids."

The interpellation of church members into the community as *dixiong* and *zimei* rendered a somewhat enclosed circle of endogamous relations. There were no explicit prohibitions against marrying "outsiders" to the church, but the social efforts of creating intimacy and sustaining the church as a "home/land" did much to create a limited pool of marriage candidates. At the very least, unmarried parishioners sought out other Christians as marriage partners; one more than one

occasion, I caught conversations about the adverse effects that different faith orientations had on marriage and family. One effect of the *dixiong/zimei* dynamic at the GAC was that the gender binary took on a kind of intensified prominence, and standards of feminine and masculine comportment were mutually enforced. A strong patriarchal order was visible in most social interactions, from the prohibition against women preachers to the paternalistic model of care taken on by ordained elders. One could especially hear it reinforced in the a capella singing at services and *xiaozu,* in which it was usual for *dixiong* and *zimei* to take up alternating lines of each psalm, thus highlighting the contrast between masculine and feminine voices. This reinstantiation of "Biblical" gender roles was frequently cited as a departure from post-1949 reforms toward gender equality in China. As one Elder at the church responded to one of my attempts to push him on the subject of gender norms, "We were taught in school that 'women hold up half the sky' [a reference to a famous Mao Zedong saying]. In the church, we learn that 'the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is head of the church'."[9]

Under these gender-normative conventions, marriage became the top priority for young men and women. Yet, as Chen Xiuwen pointed out, norms of endogamy at *jiayuan* created a localized ecology of scarcity, which at times seeming to reproduce the problem of "leftover women" (*shengnü)* — although, with some important differences. The popular discourse of *shengnü,* which has circulated in Chinese media since the mid-2000s, posits the social trend of highly-educated, urban, professional women who delay marriage and find themselves subsequently under-valued on the marriage market after reaching a certain age (Gaetano 2014). Following these diagnoses of a marriage "crisis" for high-achieving women, the derogatory label

[9] Ephesians 5:23.

of *shengnv* plays on women's anxieties about reconciling the supposedly short timeline of female "marriageability" with the exigencies of becoming competitive on the job market. So-called *shengnv* are often attributed with excessive ambition and a deficit of "femininity." This discourse was certainly alive at *jiayuan* — as a career-focused PhD student, I can recall being on the blunt end of such comments, and a few female graduate students also expressed anxiety that they would become "leftover." Yet, the social roles of unmarried women were also resignified in complex ways. Crucially, being unmarried was not merely a reflection of personal defects, but a *community* dilemma — that is, it was understood as a problem that stemmed from a deficit of available *dixiong* at the church. It was also a problem that was addressed communally, through group prayer and collective efforts by other women to provide emotional support for single women.

One of these women was Wang Lili, a *zimei* in her mid-thirties whose unmarried status had become a burden to her. Most of her prayer requests for the community, she said, centered on her wish to become married and start a family. Yet, she did not identify with the image of the *shengnv*. For Wang Lili, it was not her education or ambition but her insistence on marrying someone from the GAC community that made her opportunities slim. This commitment to *jiayuan* marked women like Wang Lili with an aura of self-sacrificial piety — they were the "good *zimei,"* the ones who cooked more than their share of communal meals and helped care for other people's children. Their single status was seen as a mark of uncompromising moral quality, thus making Wang Lili someone who others would refer to as a spiritual model. "I don't care about how much money a man has, or how many houses he owns, or what his job is," she said, "only that he is close to God [*kaojing shen]."*

* * * *

The gendered distribution of labor and moral value was a product of *jiayuan's* sense of social enclosure, as well as one of the mechanisms that sustained this enclosure. By this I mean that an intensified sense of gender-normative sociality was both the impetus for the church's emphasis on turning inward, and a way in which that inward sensibility could be socially reproduced. This cultivated insularity had been made even more visible around 2009, when church leadership instituted a full-time nursery and primary school in response to demand from newly married couples. This clandestine, unregistered school – which operated, like the church, on the margins of the law – further blurred the lines between educational institution and the intimacies of home.[10] Co-living arrangements sprung up around the church and school, in which families shared the burdens of housing expenses and childcare. The latter was an especially important realm of shared labor, as many families in the GAC chose not to comply with Chinese population control policies, like the One-Child Policy. In some ways, this revival of an emphasis on collective life and mutual dependency seemed to recall older social forms, a phenomenon that was at times rendered explicitly. For instance, church members called the "self-reflection" (*fansi*) groups held after each Sunday service *xiaozu* ("small groups"), terms strongly associated with Maoist-era political meetings (Madsen 1984).

While this accordance does not necessarily suggest a political affinity between Maoism and the GAC — indeed, most members were ardently anti-Maoist in their politics — they do, I think, point to the ways collective modes of social organization lingered for them as an alternative possibility to individualistic striving. The GAC's forms of social organization are, I suggest, provisional efforts at producing an *aspirational enclosure.* That is, they strove to

produce a kind of underground community in which the terms of enclosure and concealment were differently determined than those imposed from the outside by state regimes of legal recognition; rather than see their concealment primarily in terms of defying the state, they sought to ground their enclosure in a common aspiration toward living a particular kind of spiritual life.

As I moved through the GAC, I became aware that something further was also enfolded into the imagination of *jiayuan:* the social enclosure of this "home/land" was secured through the sustained production of an imagined risk of exposure. That is, inhabiting the semi-concealed space of *jiayuan* was also to experience (and perform) being the imagined object of state surveillance. In the final sections, I will explore how GAC members responded to the imagination of surveillance, and to an actual series of events of exposure.

Events of exposure: entrances of the state

Performing the surveilled subject

It was a Sunday, and instead of going to the large assembly by the southern wall, Sister Fang planned to take me to a *jvhui dian* (meeting point) of the GAC that was farther afield. The meeting point was located about an hours' train ride from the city center, and more like a traditional house church, it was held in the apartment of an ordained deacon of the church, with services for a group of around thirty parishioners.

That morning we arrived early. As we approached the resident compound, where high-rise apartment buildings encircled brick courtyards, Sister Fang pointed out the security guards that waved through cars and visitors at each courtyard's entrance. She and the other attendees always indicated that they were going to a social gathering if prompted, she said, and

[10] I explore this school in further detail in Chapter 4.

she had a polite rapport with the security guard. Today, however, as we waited to enter, something was different: the guard motioned for a driver in front of us to sign in on a visitor's log, writing down full names, host's name, and hours of visitation.

Sister Fang stiffened; she motioned for me to follow her as she rapidly sent off several texts on her cellphone, and began walking away from the check-in point. It was unclear why this procedure had been put into place — there could have been any number of reasons related to the administration of the apartments — but Sister Fang felt sure that it was a sign that the deacon's apartment was being monitored. Surely, it had drawn too much attention to have so many congregants gathering on a Sunday morning. Or perhaps a neighbor had informed on them. In any case, she decided to go back into town on the same train we had arrived on, and we joined the larger congregation, where Sister Fang cautioned other parishioners: "There's something suspicious going on at Deacon Zhou's place…"

* * * *

Suspicion, like books and MP3s, circulated among members of the GAC. Church members were sure that the *gongan jv,* the Public Security Bureau, was watching underground churches in Nanjing. Countless stories and rumors circulated among congregants of police shutting down underground assemblies, arresting participants and threatening them with loss of homes and jobs. The origin story of the GAC itself contained such a crackdown, as one of the founding pastors had been arrested and forced to flee to the United States. The possibility of being "exposed" to the Bureau of Religious Affairs and the Public Security Bureau as an unregistered church carried an array of risks — from the revoking of leases or deeds on properties where assemblies were held, to short-term arrests or interrogations, to the threat of

losing one's job if "outed." But while they could imagine the mechanics of surveillance – phones being tapped, emails hacked, web forums monitored, and "spies" and "informants" cultivated – they could only guess at their extent. While the GAC prided itself on refusing to engage with aspects of the "atheist" state — avoiding registration, as well as taking measures to withdraw children from state educaitonal institutions and refusing party membership — there was also a feeling that the evacuation of the state could at any time be ruptured by a crackdown or an arrest. Most of the times, however, it wasn't, and life went on. The state had a spectral presence, at once unpredictable and banal.

The banality of a spectral state shaped, for instance, habits of communication among congregants — but not in particularly consistent ways. Secrecy ebbed and intensified according to periodic waves of anxiety and complacency. GAC members were hardly secretive online; most were active on social media platforms, particularly in Christian-themed WeChat groups and through individual blogs on Sina and QQ, and some published articles in online and print media under pseudonyms. On social media platforms, personal anecdotes, testimonies, Bible verses, and theological and political writings (including those of "third church" leaders) had a sustained circulation. However, church members took precautions. Phone calls about church business were preferred over emails, and voice-recorded messages over WeChat were preferred over text exchanges. Casual communications over the web — which was assumed to be heavily monitored by government censors — were frequently selectively encoded through the use of alternative characters and emojis. For instance, a woman I will call Zhang Qian, who had been attending the GAC for over a year, posted the following remarks about *jiayuan* on the general assembly's WeChat group:

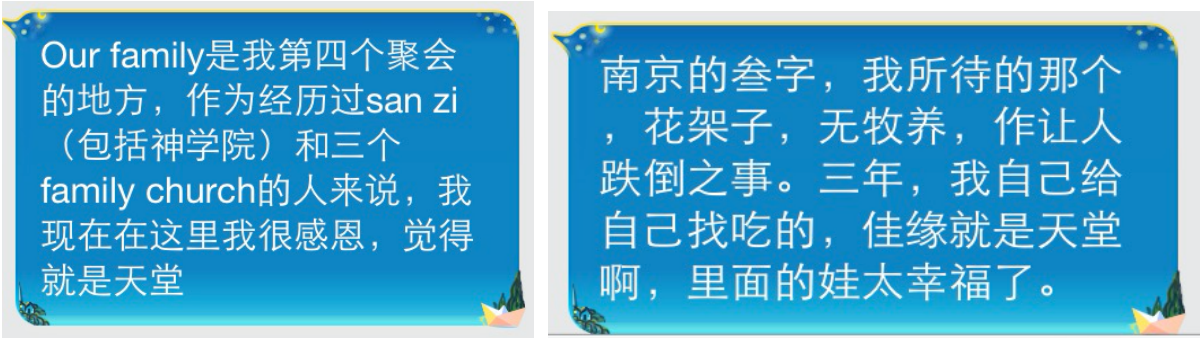

Figure 2: WeChat forum postings on a GAC chat group. Author's screenshots.

> **Our family** is my fourth assembly spot. Speaking as a person who has experienced the **san zi** (including seminary) and three other **family church[es]**, I'm very grateful to be here, I think this is heaven. Nanjing's **Three-Self**, where I stayed, is a flower frame [*a spectacle or show*]. There's no ministry there, they do things that would have people fall down [*lose their way]*. For three years, I searched for ways to feed myself. *Jiayuan [alternative characters]* is truly a heaven. The dolls [*colloquial expression for girls]* here are so lucky.

Zhang Qian's posts were written in response to a debate in the WeChat group about whether the Three-Self could be considered a true church at all (a discussion that was periodically hashed out on both the WeChat group and in the Bible study *xiaozu*). In both their form and content, Zhang Qian's posts are emblematic of the reflexive discourses that circulate in the production of the GAC public. Her account of movement between and through state-authorized and underground churches is a typical narrative of mobility between these different institutional forms — one in which individual exposure to the state-authorized church provides further evidence of its "emptiness." Moreover, her writing features fragments designed to avoid— or at least gesture to a cognizance of — online censors. For instance, in the first post, her use of the English phrase "Our family" and the English transliteration of the Three-Self church ("san zi") is meant to skirt automated searches for "sensitive" Chinese characters. Similarly, in the second post, she uses

homophones for potentially sensitive characters (叁字 instead of 三自, 佳缘 instead of 家园) in order to avoid detection.

While government monitoring of WeChat private groups was a persistent rumor in China (Griffiths 2016), it was unclear to participants whether such tactics were indeed effective. Rather, it seemed to me that these practices of selectively masking routine communications were performative gestures toward a shared discursive ground, one in which GAC members cultivated a collective sense of being "underground" in a larger social context in which state surveillance made complete secrecy an impossibility. Such performances of concealment created, in Lauren Berlant's words, "an intimate public sphere," where participants worked to produce certain "modes of attachment that make persons public and collective — and that make collective scenes intimate spaces" (Berlant 1998). Zhang Qian's mode of attachment to the GAC was made clear in both the content and the form of her communications, in the signaling of her words and her masking.

Inspection at the Covenant School

Like the bookshop where I had first encountered the GAC's bible reading groups, its underground primary school — which I will call the Covenant School — hid in plain sight. Located past the southern city walls, its cluster of classrooms occupied a nondescript storefront — unmarked save for some colorful welcome banners, written in bright English bubble-lettering — in an unfashionable commercial district surrounded by aging apartment buildings. Its neighbors were low-rent karaoke bars, massage parlors, Internet cafes, and cavernous abandoned arcades, as well as mahjong and card rooms, and a dozen open-air shops peddling bootleg DVDs and cheap speakers. On sleepy afternoons, American pop songs set on repeat blared across the

square as shopkeepers, waitresses, and masseurs dozed or chatted or smoked outside, running down the clock until nighttime peak hours. They paid little attention to the groups of first and second-graders who filed outside for recess, using the alleys and stairways that linked the stores as makeshift playgrounds.

During my first trip to the Covenant School, where I eventually became a volunteer English teacher, this enclave of mundane vice seemed an incongruous setting for a religious school. But, as the school's principal Pan Xiaozhang said to me, the environs in fact provided some welcome cover, the opportunity to hide in plain sight: "The more undesirable the environment, the safer we are." What Principal Pan meant by safety was not protection from petty criminals or undesirable environmental influences, but from authorities from the city's Public Security Bureau (PSB). In 2014, several crackdowns on church-run schools in the provinces of Anhui, Guangxi, and Guangzhou had already resulted in the eviction of school spaces and the arrests of teachers on charges ranging from illegal business operations to "threats to public security." The Covenant School itself had relocated several times during its existence, some years as frequently as once a semester, due to complaints filed by neighborhood committees. With its move to a commercial district that appeared neglected and empty during the day, and where more visibly shady establishments might distract public security authorities, Covenant teachers hoped to recede into the background.

One day I arrived at the Covenant School to find it in disarray. Wall hangings and posters had been removed, leaving only the colored paper underneath and a few resilient staples hanging. The doors were closed, a heavy curtain pulled over them. There was an eerie silence; morning worship, which usually featured hymn singing and "prayer calisthenics," had been quieted for the day. A group of teachers were tensely hovering over the main desk and central meeting area

of the school, heads bent over scatterings of paper. Teacher Chen filled me in, her voice at a whisper: “Some city inspectors came by this morning and said they’d come back, so we have to take down anything having faith content (*xinyang neirong*), and anything with names.” Beside her, Principal Pan gestured at an array of forms that the inspectors, who had been patrolling the neighborhood as part of a city safety inspection unit, had left, demanding lists of the students’ names.

But it wasn’t just the “safety inspection” that worried everyone — it was the rumor that one or all of the elders in the GAC, all of whom had children that attended Covenant, had been called in for interrogations the night before. Principal Pan’s mood darkened when she saw a volunteer teacher pull out his cellphone. The elders, I was told, had had their mobile devices confiscated by the police. Seeing the volunteer pull out his cellphone, Principal Pan warned him harshly against taking photos or attaching recognizable names to his contacts; she herself was in the process of moving internal files off of the school’s computers, explaining to me that the police was very tough (*lihai*) and could easily access phone messages and emails. No one was certain what had prompted the sudden coincidence of the interrogation of the elders and the safety inspection of the school, or even whether the two things were related. A few teachers had theories on covert infiltrations of the house church networks; others suspected that some change in leadership in the city government had been the cause of the increased police activity around churches.

By noon all the walls had been stripped clean. And, gradually, the mood also shifted. As the teachers busied themselves with removing all signs of religious life from the walls, they began sharing anecdotes of previous experiences with inspections, interrogations, and encounters with local authorities: police bursting into prayer meetings in displays of intimidation; secretive

requests for building doormen to keep track of residents' movements; tampered-with emails and text messages; and, occasionally, interrogations in which authorities threatened to put church leaders' jobs or academic placements in jeopardy. Indeed, it seemed that the more we talked about the particulars of the inspection and the interrogations, the more banal — even laughable — the intrusion appeared. After lunch, the teachers sent home a few children whose names were kept off the list of students, for an unscheduled "vacation." Several volunteers arrived for the afternoon classes. One young man asked the kindergarten instructor Zhang Laoshi where her missing students had gone. She answered in a cheerful sing-song chant: "They've gone to escape the police! *(Tamen qu bikai gongan le!)"*

Elder Lin's Arrest

The rumors I heard at the Covenant would be confirmed that Sunday at GAC serivces. Elder Lin Wanfang had been detained by the police. On Sunday, his colleague Elder Wen spoke to the congregation on Elder Lin's behalf. The sermon was titled: "How to face oppression," (*ru he mian dui ya po*). Elder Wen, reaching for a lighthearted and evenhanded tone as the teachers at the Covenant School had done, recounted what had happened with Elder Lin the prior week. First, he said, the police came to Lin's home and confiscated his computer and cellphone. They then asked him to appear at an interrogation ("always show up on time to interrogation appointments!" Elder Wen said in a joking aside), where they threatened to revoke his employment at a nearby university. When that failed to move Elder Lin to reveal anything specific about the church, they resorted to violence, striking Elder Lin about the head and shoulders, and imprisoning him for several days of interrogation. At around the same time, he

reported, the Covenant School had submitted to an unannounced inspection by an urban "beautification" squad, forcing the teachers and children into temporary hiding.

These two events jolted the church out of its ordinary sense of security. Several congregants cried audibly. Elder Wen consoled the assembly: "We believe one thing," he said, referring to the police who beat Elder Lin. "Their sins will one day be exposed *[baolu]*, and even if they are not exposed while we are alive, there will be the Final Judgment, and they will be exposed before God." How to face oppression? Turn away from the world, Elder Wen preached, and toward the soul, the home, the family. They were not to march on the streets, beating their brows. They were not to publicly resist. Instead, this crackdown was a gift: it only intensified the revelation of their faith, and exposed, in its turn, the sins of the police and the state.

Elder Wen's call for the church to turn further "turn inward" was not accepted by everyone. A contingent of young brothers at the church, among them *dixiong* from the Brother's Home, strongly were vocal in their ambivalence after the service concluded. The church's responsibility was not only to protect itself, they reasoned, but to obey God's commandment, to save souls and spread the Gospel; this meant becoming visible and audible to the masses, and projecting a public message of faith and political resistance, as other "underground" churches had done. These churches were led by charismatic male pastors who were also public intellectuals, who openly criticized the Chinese state; the dissenting brothers saw none of this potential in Elder Wen. "Would he have us act like women," one brother said to me in a moment of anger, "and just sit at home?" As I have shown throughout this chapter, such tensions – between inward-turning and outward-turning, between care of the "home" and orientation to the "world" – were often mapped onto gender lines. And these debates would remain a source of

unresolved internal tension for the GAC long after Elder Lin had been released with little further incident, and his arrest largely forgotten.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the imbrications of enclosure and exposure at an underground church. I have suggested that, while the GAC shares many theological and demographic similarities with other "third churches," their negotiation of secrecy and publicity is a *localized* one. On the one hand, the production of *jiayuan* as an aspirational enclosure produces specific possibilities for collective life, and for social arrangements in which spaces of intimacy and authority are constituted. On the other hand, this sense of enclosure is tightly intertwined with the elaboration of the risks and consequences of exposure by the state. This double experience of enclosure and exposure mutually enforce one another, producing an affect of what one might consider "banal paranoia" and vigilance among community members. Throughout these scenes of enclosure and exposure, what I also want to emphasize is that the distribution of the effects and forms of enclosure and exposure are inescapably *gendered*. That is to say, the theorization of publicity and secrecy has an essential gendered dimension (Gal 2002). I will return to the space of the Covenant School, and in particular to women's practices of care, in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER THREE
Church construction, demolition, and palimpsests of urban Christianity

"Churches watch over the city." —
Pastor Liu, Shanghai

Introduction

For many Nanjingers, Shanghai represents the intimate elusiveness of a global city. Just under an hour away by high-speed train, its accessibility can highlight, rather than diminish, the sense of a massive cultural gulf between the two cities — one a stunningly cosmopolitan metropolis and one of the urban "Big Four," the other still firmly classified as a rising "second-tier city" (*erxian chengshi*). While many native Nanjingers are proud of their city's arguably deeper cultural and political history — "besides nightclubs and restaurants, there's really not a lot to *see* in Shanghai," one of my acquaintances had once scoffed — roaring post-millennial Shanghai is clearly seen as the vanguard of global urbanism. Shortly after I arrived in Nanjing, several Three-Self pastors and seminary teachers there prodded me to go to Shanghai, to "get a real sense of urban churches [*chengshi jiaohui*]." It was the hope of my Nanjing interlocutors that I could glimpse the cutting-edge of the urban cosmopolitan church in Shanghai, characterized by the abundance of international and multi-lingual fellowships and the spread of church-directed social services throughout the city. Shanghai's churches, one pastor said, were more *kaifang* (open) than those in Nanjing — suggesting not only a greater degree of publicity but a more "modern" style of preaching and worship.

I obliged by going on a self-directed tour of the major city churches — Abundant Grace International Fellowship, Hengshan Lu Church, Dongjialu Cathedral, all featuring impressive and, judging by the many camera phones being wielded, eminently Instagrammable buildings — before I went to meet with Pastor Liu at Chongshan church, in Pudong. I arrived early enough to

sit awhile among the audience of an open-door wedding ceremony that Pastor Li was in the middle of officiating. The young bride and groom — dressed in white lace gown and tuxedo, as picture-perfect as two figures atop a wedding cake — exchanged vows before the altar, as the midday light streamed in exuberantly through Chongshan Church's windows. Notably, some of the on-lookers sitting in the back rows near me were curious passersby, apparent *waidi ren* (out-of-towners) who had stepped into the chapel to witness a "Western-style" wedding. I was reminded that an entrepreneurial friend of mine in Nanjing, who had started his own wedding planning business exclusively for Christians, had once noted to me that Christian wedding ceremonies were now a burgeoning industry in Chinese cities — even for non-believers. These *feijidutu* (non-Christians) were apt, added my friend with no small degree of chagrin, to hire actors to play the parts of Christian officiants and to adopt all the formal trappings of a Christian ceremony for its social cache. In some cases, the "restrained" aesthetics of the Christian wedding were adopted to explicitly resist the "excesses" of traditional Chinese weddings that centered around gift exchange and extravagant banquets. The sight of tourists gathered at Chongshan confirmed my friend's observations: the Christian wedding had become a curious site of cosmopolitan performance.

Chancing upon the wedding observers suggested a set of questions in my mind, as I finally tracked down Pastor Liu for our scheduled interview, which was conducted in his spatious office on the church grounds: How, and why, did certain forms of urban and rural distinctions map onto Christian practice? What does it mean to be an "urban Christian"? Why forms of experience and spectacle — like the Christian wedding in Chongshan's chapel — worked together to produce this sense of self? However, Pastor Liu, though polite, seemed unimpressed with this line of questioning. Having ministered at Chongshan Church for nearly

fifteen years, it was obvious to *him* what qualities marked the urban church — how it was shaped by the shifting demography of the city, and by a dynamic mixture of congregants who were white-collar urban-dwellers and working-class migrants. What interested him more, he indicated, was the newly emergent ways in which the expanded visibility of Christian churches could have imprints on the city itself.

"Imagine you are approaching a city. A cross on top of a church, on a city's skyline, is one of the most important things you can see," Pastor Liu said. "It tells you something about the kind of city you're expecting to enter, one where not only commerce and money rules. What is a city? It's education, sanitation, health. Without the church, there's no city." When I asked him to elaborate further, Pastor Liu pointed to the contributions of 19th- and 20th-century Western missionaries in establishing schools, hospitals, and reforming hygiene. The city's present churches were emblems of this contact. The physical structures of the church, in his estimation, had the power to render legible a necessary *moral* topography of the city that is often obscured — or indeed obstructed — by an emphasis on urban development. Such physical structures had a particular force in cities like Shanghai, he suggested, where commercial architecture dominates the landscape and "everyone seems to only care about buying homes [*mai fangzi*]." In contrast, he said, the value of churches could not be measured by its price-per-square-meter. They had, rather, a *moral* presence: "Churches watch over a city [*jiaotang guankan zhe chengshi]."*

I returned to Nanjing from my trip to Shanghai with a renewed sense of the live space of possibility that Pastor Liu attached to urban Christianity. His words attuned me to imaginations of urban Christianity that could be inhabited and projected onto the cityscape in morally transformative ways. My own subsequent experiences in Nanjing, tracing pastoral activities and

church-goers' engagements at a variety of Three-Self churches, further sharpened my sense of the different ways in which this potentiality could be mobilized and experienced by individuals.

Recent scholarship (still relatively sparse) on urban churches in China has focused, for the most part, on the way in which rapid urbanization provides a socio-economic *context* for the emergence of Christian communities, and traces the ways in which such communities adapt to and function within urban contexts (Fulton 2015; Ying et al 2014; Liu and Wang 2012). Rather than attempting to typologize the kinds of Christian churches that might be designated "urban" as opposed to traditional or village churches (which have classically been the focus of studies of Chinese Christianity), this chapter attends to discourses and practices that *produce* urban Christianity (*chengshi jidujiao)* as a site of transformative potential and of meaningful "cultural value."

Palimpsestic topographies

As it happened, my return coincided with a period of time in which the social experiences and costs of urban development — and, in Christian circles, the politics of church-building and expansion — seemed a particularly intense topic of discussion. In addition to the ubiquitous conversation about rising housing prices and aspirations to home ownership, which became inescapable in any social setting, several other events contributed to this sense.

First, a new "globalized church" (*guojihua jiaotang*) had recently been opened to the public in the Hexi New City district, a development zone built on reclaimed farmland, with unprecedented investment by the local government. Shengxun Tang (Church of the Holy Word) was not the only new church construction in Nanjing — my acquaintances in the city often alerted me to signs of Christian life that popped up in their neighborhoods — but it was certainly

the largest scale construction, with the most architectural grandeur and national profile. Secondly, the whole of Hexi New City, the surrounding region of Shengxun Tang, was undergoing a rapid transformation as part of Nanjing's ambitious 20-year City Master Plan, which was drafted in 2010 as an effort to catch up to other more developed cities like Suzhou and Wuxi in the Yangzi River Delta Region. Elaborate construction projects included the extension of a new subway stop, and the building of a world-class Olympics sports stadium (which would host the 2014 Youth Olympic Games), a new museum memorializing the Nanjing Massacre, a World Expo Center, and several booming retail and entertainment plazas. The center of gravity for forward-looking urban Nanjing seemed to be shifting to this formerly water-logged land west of the Qinghuai River, where the modern spire of Shengxun Tang had been designed as a major "cultural landmark."

This fervor for "catching-up" could be felt in quotidian ways even in the city's oldest districts. In its aspirations to a future as a "first-tier city," Nanjing had become notorious for being constantly dug up — its then-mayor, the soon-to-be disgraced Ji Jianye, was not nicknamed "Mayor Bulldozer" for nothing. Ji's arrest and subsequent sentencing on charges of corruption in 2013 would be another event that momentarily jarred Nanjingers, even while it seemed to surprise few. Living with the constant noise and detritus of construction and demolition was a fact of life. In my lively *Xuanwu* neighborhood, layers of rubble, new constructions, and soon-to-be rubble spilled their striations onto the street, where one could often see the red mark of 拆 *chai,* a spray-painted character indicating a tear-down, emerge above the piles of detritus it would soon join. I had gotten used to the appearance of large holes in the ground whose purpose was inexplicable to me, which were generally dug out by construction

workers in the morning and then bandaged by nightfall with what looked like hastily-arranged scraps of dirt-covered canvas. Whether the culprit was recurrently faulty pipes or simply a Kafka-esque process of rebuilding without end, I could never be sure; the ground seemed to be ripped up as soon as it healed, causing consternation among the neighborhood dogs. More uncannily, rows of construction barriers on streets undergoing demolition were themselves the surfaces upon which utopian dimensions of urban space were overlaid — from printed landscapes of verdant greenery (ironic given the destruction of Nanjing's famous plane trees in the construction boom), to posters with slogans from Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" (*zhongguo meng*) campaign, rendered in the eye-catching style of Chinese folk art.

Developments within the city proper and at the metropolitan fringes exist in an unruly "economy of demolition-and-relocation" (*chaiqian jinji),* in which the constant flux between massive demolitions and the building of in-demand new housing is a determined part of urban planning strategies (Hsing 2010). These linked processes of tearing-down and building-up, in which images of both simulated futures and nostalgic pasts lay atop construction debris, create a texture of urban life often evoked through the metaphor of the palimpsest — a way of seeing urban spatialization that has been especially generative in discussions about Chinese cities in the post-Reform era (Braester 2010; Abbas 1997; Eng 1999). The image of the palimpsest — literally, a text in which parts have been effaced or covered over by later iterations but in which the original still appears as traces — has been applied to the changing facade of modern cities to suggest how built environments contain historical layers. The interpenetration of accumulated temporalities in the built cityscape has been deployed by writers like Walter Benjamin, Michel de Certeau, David Harvey, and Andreas Huyssen to suggest ways in which urban dwellers might

excavate meanings in the life of the city that outstrip the hegemony of planned spaces, the "geometrical space of urbanists and architects" (de Certeau 1984, 100).

Importantly, this semiotic layering of cities' palimpsestic forms is excavated through the mobility of subjects — the city itself is created, as in Michel de Certeau's famous essay on walking, via the inhabitant's steps. In her observations on the radically shifting facades of Chinese urban spaces, Yomi Braester (2016) incisively analyzes visual technologies of representing the city to itself — particularly through cinema — to show that "the urban palimpsest instates an *anticipatory visual regime*, idealizing the city in the form of its potential future" (2015: 32, emphasis mine). That is, in addition to reminding us of the traces of memory and past temporalities in present architectural and spatial formations, the palimpsest gives us a sense of what Andreas Huyssen (2003) calls "present futures."

In my own movement around the public churches of Nanjing — traversing, as it were, established traditional churches, housed in old missionary buildings, and new structures like Shengxun Tang — I came to experience this palimpsestic texture most intensively in the topography of Christian churches in the city. As shown in the map below, the largest registered Protestant churches in Nanjing (numbered 1-10) are generally concentrated in the densest parts of the city, which are also its oldest neighborhoods. These include the venerable St. Paul Church (*Sheng Baoluo Tang*), the oldest surviving Protestant church in Nanjing and now a protected cultural relic, and Mochou Lu Tang, the bureaucratic seat of the municipal Chinese Christian Council and Three-Self Patriotic Movement headquarters. The dozen or so smaller red dots, signifying registered but more informal "meeting spots" (*jühui dian*), beam out from the center. Some of these are former "house churches" that have been incorporated into the Three-Self

registration system; others were founded by individual pastors who wanted to cultivate smaller congregations in neighborhoods outside of the city center.

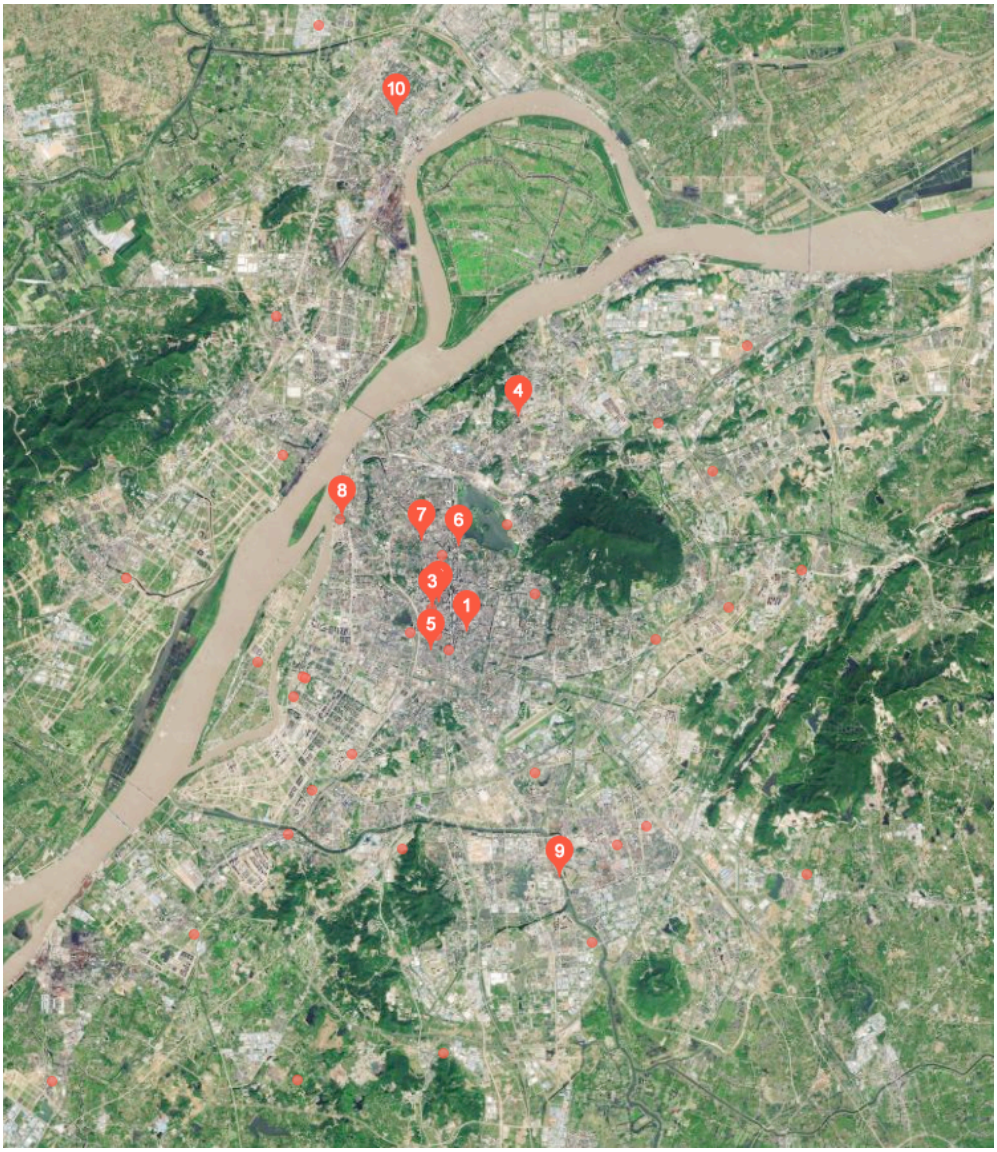

Figure 3. Map of Protestant churches and meeting spots in Nanjing.
Google map image modified by author.

This map, showing only registered churches, could also be traced over by a dense network of underground churches, not rendered outwardly visible. As I had discussed in the previous chapter, much of the landscape of Christian life in Nanjing is sedimented in clandestine or semi-hidden informal gatherings, housed in private domiciles and commercial spaces. In this

chapter, I focus on the layer of officially registered city churches represented on this map, in order to examine the public level of Christian activity recognized by the state and open to general publics. This not only maps the visual availability of Christian structures and spaces, but also attends to the concrete dimensions of how Christianity is incorporated, discursively and through practice, into the topography of the city itself.

In Nanjing, this imagination of the urban Christian landscape was informed by certain tensions. On the one hand, I found that *Christian development* (*jidujiao fazhan*) had become one anticipatory node of future orientation, particularly in a city that sought to become first-tier and saw the building of a potential mega-church like Shengxun Tang as an expansion of its cultural visibility. Shengxun Tang brought Christian iconography to bear on the city's futurity in the same register as commercial and civic developments, hubs of high-end consumerism, and sustainable "green" spaces. On the other hand, such new developments in some cases struggled to attain the authority and sense of sacrality of historical church structures, whose inheritances embed it into a sense of Nanjing's own place within *national* history. St. Paul, for instance, was a cultural relic not only for its being one of the earliest churches built in Nanjing, but because it had famously given refuge to embattled residents besieged by Japanese troops during the bloody Nanjing Massacre. Its aura was not easily reproduced.

This tension between the "authenticity" of older churches and the forward-looking spectacle of the new was also haunted by the specter of large-scale demolitions, which were occurring during the same time-frame in the urban areas of neighboring Zhejiang Province. As I saw new churches emerging as sites of "cultural value," others of similar scale were being torn down on charges of *excessive* visibility, in which their powerful Christian iconography — like the oversized crosses of Wenzhou's most visible churches — became sites of fiery contestation.

In the juxtaposed optics of church demolitions and constructions, the material expressions of state power appear at different but equally meaningful registers. Highly exposed church building projects tout cooperation with local governments to smooth the way for land allotment and building permits — and index the ways in which Christianity can be recruited to goals of national advancement. Demolitions, on the other hand, offer an assembly of images — forced evacuations, material destruction, confrontations between local protestors and police — that narrate the essentially hostile entanglement of state and religious actors. One could say that demolitions and constructions are stagings of certain kinds of *state affect.* The protestor, the architect, the pastor, the surveying city official — these actors, in turn, perform different relationships to these registers of state affect, such that urban palimpsests are always, as David Harvey (2000) writes, being "reproduced, sustained, undermined, and reconfigured by political-economic and socio-ecological processes in the present" (78).

Specters of church demolition

One day in early 2013, I was doing some reading at the library of the Jinling Union Theological Seminary, and took a lunch break to chat with Chen Yiping, a graduate student in theology, about my research. "Xiaobo, have you seen what's going on in Zhejiang?" he asked. In response to the shake of my head, he pulled up a video on his cellphone and showed me a brief video. "It's like the old days…" [*zhe jiu xiang guo qv yi yang]* He trailed off. The video, recorded by an anonymous participant in the protest and circulated online by International Christian Concern, records a soon-to-be familiar scene: in front of Yahui Church, in the city of Wenzhou in Zhejiang Province, a crowd had gathered to witness a cross removal.

Figure 4. Screenshots from eyewitness video of Yahui Church cross removal. Image source: International Christian Concern (www.persecution.org)

As the camera phone's image pans down, following the massive crane that first removes and then lowers the red-colored cross from the top of the church steeple to the ground, voices of the gathered protestors could be heard singing a hymn:

十字架 ，十字架，永是我的荣耀！
我众罪都洗清洁， 惟靠耶稣宝血。
The cross, the cross, forever my glory!
All my sins are washed clean, but by the precious blood of Jesus.

The last brief shot confirms the presence of the state: a glance at the line of helmeted police officers in front of the church steps.

Officials had targeted the cross as an “illegal structure,” although it belonged to a state-sanctioned church. This partial demolition at Yahui Church was immediately followed by

forty additional such removals in the Wenzhou region of crosses deemed to be "excessively visible," and would eventually be one of thousands conducted by provincial authorities as a part of Zhejiang's "Three Rectifications and One Demolition" (*sangai yichai*) campaign. Initiated in March 2013, the *sangai yichai* campaign had been framed in official terms as part of urban development and beautification efforts in the province. According to a circular released by the provincial government, the campaign's purpose was to rectify (*gaishan*) old residential and commercial districts and urban villages, and demolish (*chai*) "illegal structures" that violated building codes and land management regulations. What received the most public attention, however — and spurred condemnation from international organizations — were the demolitions of specifically Christian buildings and symbols. In the ongoing campaign, over 2,000 crosses had been removed from church spires, and dozens of pastors and protestors arrested.

Such scenes of demolitions have reverberated across global social media and Christian activist platforms as another example of the Chinese state's "clampdown" on Christian institutions and gatherings. An Amnesty International report dubbed it a "large-scale campaign against churches," and other news organizations followed suit in pointing out the incidents as signs of China's abuses of religious freedom (Amnesty International 2015). Christians in the city of Wenzhou (a developed economic zone with a large population of Christians, which has garnered it the nickname of "China's Jerusalem") protested the removal of a cross from their church by staging rallies, demonstrations, and sit-ins around threatened crosses. By targeting mostly state-authorized and registered Three-Self Churches, the campaign was understood by local Christians to be the government's attack on Christianity itself, rather than on illegal forms of religious organization. In the provincial government's discourse, however, it was the *normative* incorporation of Christianity into the broader urban landscape that was at stake; the

crosses were seen as “signs of religious excess” that had to be “harmonized” with a larger urban infrastructure. State officials especially targeted crosses, for instance, that were visible from highways around Wenzhou. Indeed, Zhejiang’s demolitions were accompanied by the drafting of new regulations specifically for “religious structures,” which required crosses on both Protestant and Catholic churches to be affixed to the front of buildings and to not exceed a height ratio of 1-to-10 with the building’s height.

In Nanjing, I heard many responses to these images of demolition -- but they were not always cut to the contours that I expected. While Chen Yiping, the JUTS graduate student, vaguely likened the demolitions to a past time of anti-religious state activity ("it's like the old days") and criticized the national TSPM’s tepid response to the campaign (mostly silence from official quarters), other Three-Self pastors and seminary teachers I spoke to had a far more conciliatory tone. Church-building had to be done in cooperation with official guidelines, one pastor insisted, and “some churches in Zhejiang were growing too fast” (*fazhan de tai quai le).* I was surprised at this suggestion — wasn’t the rapid growth of churches desirable in the eyes of Christians? Didn’t such growth expose more of the general population to the faith? Like the pastor, many people in the Nanjing Three-Self Churches that I spoke to were sympathetic to the individual churches undergoing demolition, but also conceded that state-sanctioned Wenzhou churches, while ostensibly registered and regulated, had gained so much influence and power that they were in danger of becoming overly-expansive. Large private investments from the wealthy Wenzhou business class had created a class of "boss Christians" whose influence was far from benign. That is, the *saigai yichai* campaign could be read as a state crackdown on financial corruption, or even as a moral intervention into wealth-obsessed materialism, and not on religious institutions per se.

In other conversations with my interlocutors, I was further surprised to find that those who worked in the Three-Self church were in agreement with many observers in Nanjing's "underground" churches. Fewer people than I expected came out vehemently *against* the state's church demolitions. Instead, many underground Christians expressed some agreement with the outspoken Pastor Wang Yi, of Chengdu's famed Early Rain Church, who in a widely circulated blog post urged Chinese Christians to pray for the Three-Self institutions' destruction and transformation as they could not be, in his view, considered "true" churches in the first place. That is, these were churches that, due to their accommodation to state registration, were already morally and spiritually corrupt, if not financially. Wang Yi's comments stirred controversies, on- and offline, about the kind of solidarity that Chinese Christians, both registered and unregistered, should feel with one another across political and social differences.

The complicated matrix of these reactions and orientations toward the images of church demolition suggests that, rather than demonstrating state crackdowns on Christianity in a straightforward way, the church demolitions were read by my interlocutors as part of a larger negotiation of and competition for urbanized space and the prestige of visibility among commercial and religious interests. The demolitions in Wenzhou were not just demonstrations of the state's power to contain religious space -- or, in more dramatic readings, the state's attack on Christianity -- but could also be taken as a warning against the risks of accelerated church growth. Instead of assuming unequivocal stances *for* or *against* the demolitions, the pastors in Nanjing suggested a more oblique experience of what seemed to be a vivid contradiction in the public life of Christianity in China — the oscillation between the perception of state suppression and, at the same time, an increasingly broadening space for government investment in the growth of churches and the cultivation of their "cultural value" (*wenhua jiazhi*). In a more immediate

sense, the demolitions did not seem to reflect their experience in Jiangsu Province. For, at the same time as the uptick in demolitions were occurring in Zhejiang, Nanjing's Christian sphere was seeing what seemed to be an unprecedented amount of local government investment in the building of Shengxun Tang.

Spectacles of development

Shortly after it opened, I had been promised a ride to Sunday services at Shengxun Tang by my friend and guide to all things Three-Self in Nanjing, Jian Yang *laoshi,* a long-time teacher at the Jinling seminary. Shengxun Tang, she promised, was the future of the Nanjing Christian sphere, not only as an architectural landmark but as a hub of national and international Christian activities. At the last minute, however, Jian *laoshi* had to cancel — she had been called on, she said, to substitute for a preacher at her own local meeting spot (such additional affiliations with meeting spots outside of larger, more formal Three-Self churches where they are officially employed is common for pastors in the city). Thus, I went alone, taking the newly-extended subway line from Xinjiekou (the geographic and commercial center of Nanjing) to the Olympics Sports Center, where I could then walk to Shengxun Tang. Emerging from the subway stop into the clear light of morning, I felt the uncanny sensation of being deposited in a life-size architectural model. After living in the always-crowded old city, this space seemed to swallow me. The wide, neatly-arrayed streets were starkly empty of cars, bicycles, buses, and pedestrians, and lines of yet-uninhabited high-rises loomed in shiny rows. There were neat squares of greenery, and more posters affixed to street barriers that depicted renderings of future buildings: brand new office towers interlaced with green parks and set against a crystal blue sky. This was, indeed, both the present and anticipated district of Hexi New City (*Hexi xincheng),* a

development zone to the west of the Qinghuai River, an off-shoot of the Yangtze. Not coincidentally, its adjacence to the river reminded one of Pudong New City in Shanghai, which sat east of the Huangpu River; indeed, city planners envisioned Hexi to be the Bund of Nanjing (Zhang and Wu 2008, 154).

The plan for Shengxun Tang was born in 2007, when Nanjing's CPPCC Subcommittee on Social and Legal Affairs and Ethnic and Religious Affairs proposed the construction in a report titled, "Recommendations regarding Hexi New District's Choice of Site for the Building of a Christian Church." In it, they outlined an ambitious plan for constructing a church that would "adapt to the internationalizing requirements of city construction, as well as to allow Hexi New District to become a new cultural landscape in Nanjing." With the support of enthusiastic city officials, the ground broke on the construction project of Shengxun Tang ("Church of the Holy Word") a mere ten months after the submission of the proposal. Architects from China's top design institutes as well as a U.S.-based firm competed to be selected, with the final commission awarded to a Southeast University architectural team. Overall, the municipal government and the Nanjing Three-Self Patriotic Movement/Chinese Christian Council invested more than 100 million RMB in the construction project. The resulting structure occupied 13,000 square meters of land, with a seating capacity for 5,000. With its completion and opening in 2013, Shengxun Tang took its place alongside the Jinling Library, the Nanjing International Expo Center, and the Nanjing Olympics Center in the landscape of Hexi New Town.

As a new "cultural landmark" in Hexi New City, the erection of Shengxun Tang was indexed to the anticipatory space of speculative investment and Nanjing's future growth, of which a burgeoning Christian center of worship was imagined to be a critical part. Driving Shengxun Tang's accelerated design and construction was the municipal government's desire to

radically transform Hexi (literally "west of the river") into an administrative and service hub. The core of Hexi had already been designated a Central Business District (CBD), a model of development in which local governments allocate city land specifically for commercial use. Since the 1990s, CBDs have become ubiquitous in both prosperous and mid-level Chinese cities, as signs of urban China's definitive break from the socialist and industrial past. CBDs like Hexi New District offer nodes for cultural discourses of "neo-urbanism," in which a wholesale cosmopolitan-urban lifestyle is being marketed to city-dwellers, often in the form of gleaming images of the city's future and, increasingly, an emphasis on keywords like "sustainability" and "ecological" (see Hsing 2010: 112-13). In Nanjing, the development of this CBD transformed a formerly underdeveloped and waterlogged rural land west of the Qinghuai River into a mixed residential and financial district. In conjunction with the promotion of international sports events in the region, this massive construction spurred a "marketing mega-event" in the mold of the Beijing Olympics and the Shanghai's World Expo (Zhang and Wu 2008), as Shengxun Tang saw inclusion in many "top lists" of landmarks and worthwhile tourist spots in Nanjing.

That Christianity had become part of the "urban contract" (Yomi Braester 2010) — the shared investment in constructing the city by state authorities, nongovernmental institutions, and media — is perhaps unsurprising given Christianity's associations with prosperity and modernity. In the discourses of state investors in the building project, the presence of a monumental Christian church was meant to increase Hexi's marketability to foreign investors, as well as to Nanjing's growing population of Western expats, which had by the late 2010s numbered approximately 30,000. That is, state investment in the church as cultural infrastructure aimed to, as Bishop Ding Guangxun was quoted to say in the church's publicity materials, "improve Nanjing's entire image." This image-making boosted Nanjing's competitive status

with neighboring prosperous cities whose commercial development had begun earlier. Indeed, before the construction took place, Nanjing government officials had sent representatives on fact-finding trips to Hangzhou, Wuxi, Suzhou, and Ningbo (all prosperous commercial cities in Zhejiang Province), where large church-building projects had recently been undertaken. As in these cities, Shengxun Tang was imagined to bring a certain symbolic exposure to Nanjing as a site amenable to the transnational flows of global capital.

While the marketing language around Shengxun Tang emphasized the symbiotic relationshiop between state, commercial, and religious interests, it had not always been apparent that Christianity would exert the cultural capital of "modernity" in Chinese cities. Part of this was due to real constraints put upon church growth in the post-Reform years. At that time, only a small percentage of the Christian buildings that had been confiscated during the Maoist years were then returned to usage as places of religious worship. Sociologist Fenggang Yang reports, for instance, that by the 1990s, only four of Beijing's previous 66 Protestant churches had been restored, and that Shanghai's 204 churches had been reduced to eight (Yang 2005, 429). Document 19, which in 1982 set the national religious policy, stipulated the methodical restoration of temples and churches, particularly structures with historical and cultural prestige. But there was little room for the expansion of smaller churches, and Document 19 explicitly discourages new building projects:

> In the process of restoring places of worship, we must not use the financial resources of either country or collective, outside of governent appropriations. And we must particularly guard against the indiscriminate building and repairing of temples in rural villages. We should also direct the voluntary contributions of the mass of religious believers for construction work, so as to build as little as possible. Much less should we go in for large-scale construction lest we consume large sums of money, materials, and manpower and thus obstruct the building up of material and spiritual Socialist civilization (MacInnis 1989, 17).

At the time of Yang's writing, local government officials, aware of these stipulations against expanding religious structures, were reluctant to grant building permits. This worked against state-sanctioned churches' abilities to evangelize to larger publics, as both public proselytization and the expansion of physical capacities was largely forbidden. But, as we see in the proposal of Shengxun Tang in 2007, urban churches have increasingly successfully entered into negotiations with local government and won the approval and expedition of land and building grants. Nanjing's Three-Self pastors saw the development of Hexi New City as an opportunity for Christian expansion -- and, by marketing the church as a *cultural* landmark that would give added value to the commercial investments that surrounded it, were able to push through the construction with demonstrable speed. In Shengxun Tang's case, church-building, like the larger pattern of developments in Hexi New City, was an entrepreneurial enterprise -- a far cry from the processes of salvage and reclamation that defined the restoration of churches in the first two decades following Reform and Opening Up.

* * * *

As I walked west from the Olympic Sports Center, the first glimpse of Shengxun Tang rose ahead, a large glass structure with a minimalist spire intended to abstractly evoke the hull of Noah's ark, atop of which stood a relatively small and unobtrusive cross. The spire that jutted into the hazy Nanjing sky, and the wide reflecting pool and manicured lawn behind the car park, had the qualities of monumentalism not often associated with Christian churches in Nanjing. Approaching, I passed two other striking buildings — one, the domed structure of the recently relocated Jinling Library, and the other, a geometric building housing the city's Center for Women and Children's Activities (*shi funü ertong huodong zhongxin*). En route to the church

itself, small congregations of blue-hued shelters — generally used to temporarily house migrant construction workers — hugged the edges of the property.

Figure 5. Shengxun Tang exterior. Photo by author.

I followed a trickle of attendees into the church, guided by volunteer ushers who shepherded us closer to the pulpit of the mostly empty main chapel, which could, when full, accommodate more than 5,000 congregants. Smaller and more intimate fellowships for specialized groups (youth, singles, couples) were advertised on posters, which at times featured

both Chinese and English, hung on the interior walls. In the main chapel, there were both pews and several tiers of elevated theater seats; huge screens on either side of the main stage projected the day's Bible verses and hymns, allowing attendees to follow along. These attributes lent Shengxun Tang something of a hybrid atmosphere: half-church, half-convention center. Both the church's interior and exterior recalled a kind of global aesthetics of the "megachurch," particularly as it has been developed in urban South Korea. What such megachurches demand, both architecturally and atmospherically, seems to be a break from the neo-classical forms of traditional spaces of worship, and an embrace of what might be termed the *qualia* of the "modern" (not to be conflated with architectural *modernism*). And then there was the *space.* Shengxun Tang's abundant and luxurious land — as well as its parking lot, full of spaces for private vehicles — attested to its solid emplacement in the aspirational aesthetics of Hexi New City. In a Chinese city, the sheen of the modern (*xiandaihua*) — of technological advancement and commercial prospects — is perhaps most closely paired with the class signifiers of luxury culture in the presentation of *empty space,* that is, by the absence or evacuation of crowds, noise, traffic, and other ubiquitous facts of densely-packed urban co-existence.

This dramatically highlighted Shengxun Tang's difference from Nanjing's established churches, where late-arriving church-goers on Saturdays and Sundays poured into courtyards, filled extra rooms with PA systems, or perched on stools in the aisle. The "hot and noisy" (*renao*) atmospherics of overcrowding had been replaced by a rather unfamiliar spaciousness. During my first Sunday there, the head pastor even referenced the empty seats in his sermon, calling on the assembled congregants to spread the word to their family and friends, "even those with no interest in faith."

This impression lingered when I described my visit to Jian *laoshi,* after I had gotten back to the city proper. Her response: "Now there's a church there, but there's not yet a *church*" [*xianzai you jiaotang, hai meiyou jiaohui]*.

Jian *laoshi's* diagnosis aptly put into play the two terms in Chinese that are both translated as "church," but indicate two different aspects that are, in English, easily conflated: *jiaotang,* the physical church structure, and *jiaohui,* the collective body and ecclesiastical polity. By suggesting that Shengxun Tang was still a *jiaotang* without a *jiaohui* despite its spectacular facade, Jian *laoshi* pointed to the considerable social labor that goes into filling a physical structure with something that could constitute a living community. In the coming months, I would attend many services, events, workshops, and gatherings at Shengxun Tang, and witness these labors up close. These activities of cultivating a *jiaohui* were directed both inwardly, toward establishing relationships of intimacy between church and an established group of parishioners, and outwardly, toward enhancing the church's value in drawing resources and prestige to the Hexi area.

Shengxun Tang's geographic location at a transitional rural-urban zone, in which a large number of displaced peasants still lived, meant that these two aims existed within the frictions of class and social difference that inevitably emerge within economies of demolition and relocation. Once they occupied the magnificent building, the pastoral staff were faced with questions of how to fill it. How would Shengxun Tang manage to, as Jian *laoshi* suggested, constitute its own local *jiaohui* within the tenuous landscape of a half-populated development zone? How would it draw parishioners from elsewhere in the city, even *away* from their previous churches? How might the church's pastoral staff both attend to its particular location at the boundary-space of city and countryside, while at the same time cultivating a style of urban Christianity that bolstered the

city's "entire image"? And what would that *style* of worship look like? In encountering these questions, both pastors and local parishioners at Shengxun Tang found themselves reckoning with multiple temporal imaginations of Christianity — the "modernity" of the built edifice, and the aspirational horizons for Christian development it signified; the perceived "traditional" or "backwards" practices of certain sectors of local attendees; the temporalities of liturgical form; and the multiple experiences of time, place, and possibility that resonated within collective church activities and rituals. In the following sections, I explore some of these tensions and faultlines that were illuminated within these early processes of church assemblage.

Disciplining church bodies

To attract more steady attendance, shortly after their opening Shengxun Tang invited one of the most well-known and senior pastors in the Nanjing Three-Self church to personally facilitate a catechism class (*mudao ban*) for prospective church members and those who were interested in being baptized. An alumnus of the Jinling Union Theological Seminary, Pastor Ji had ministered at Mochou Lu Church and also headed various Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Chinese Christian Council committees at the municipal level. His presence at the catechism class gave it an aura of the "official" — even unbaptized attendees would have known him by face, if not by name, as he often presided over public church events. Even so, this first catechism class on offer was rather sparsely attended; the number oscillated between ten and fifteen participants, while similar classes in churches in the city center might attract several dozens per year.

The attendees were almost all women, and presented a spectrum of class and social dispositions. There were several upper-middle-class married women from the city (whom I'd

come to think of as the "Gucci mothers," from their luxury handbags and their dutiful tag-along children); a few elderly retirees from rural backgrounds, who in most cases had come to Nanjing to help supplement childcare for their grandchildren (an extremely common phenomenon); and several former peasants (sometimes called "land-losing peasants," *shidi nongmin*), who had been forced to relocate from farms to high-rises in the wake of Hexi's land development. This mixed audience had different levels of familiarity with the basics of the Christian confession of faith, and varying experiences with church-going in general. As an observer, I found the class to be an absorbing site in which implicit differences of class and *suzhi* were drawn out by Pastor Ji, and in which, on the peripheral edges of the pedagogical content, participants were pushed to adopt appropriate *comportment* as well as adhere to Christian propositions of faith. In one illuminating instance, a rather tense exchange between Pastor Ji and a student, who I will call Mr. Yang, drew out some of the contours of this disciplinary space.

Mr. Yang was one of the only men at the catechism class. Perhaps in his late forties, he always came alone, dressed shabbily, and had a habit of humming softly to himself continuously, even when others were speaking. His clothes told a story of possible vagrancy, but I heard from others that he was a *shidi nongmin* living with his sister's family, and was having no luck at finding employment after his displacement several years ago. In Pastor Ji's no-nonsense catechism course, Mr. Yang's behavioral quirks — humming, laughing, at times interrupting or checking his phone conspicuously — had an outsized presence, at times drawing attention away from Pastor Ji himself. This came to a head at the end of Pastor Ji's lecture on the Trinity, when Mr. Yang abruptly broke in:

> Mr. Yang: I thought — I already took the catechism class at Mochou Lu. I passed and was baptized (*yi jing shou guo xi)*. Will this one be covering the same thing?

He told us everything already. Ten commandments. Can't worship idols, give false testimony — he said it all. I already passed, I got baptized in 2013. Last year, December.

Pastor Ji: Excuse me, what is your surname?

Mr. Yang: My name is Yang.

[*Pastor Ji pauses here at Mr. Yang continues to speak, insisting that he understood everything Pastor Ji was saying and had already passed. In the meantime, Pastor Ji takes out his cellphone and asks Mr. Yang again for his full name. Returning to his phone, Pastor Ji places a call to an associate at Mochou Lu and, speaking into the phone, asks that Mr. Yang's baptism records be checked out. He repeats the information, then hangs up.*]

Pastor Ji (*to Mr. Yang)*: Those who are registered here, are here for the catechism class [*mudao ban]*. It's for people who haven't been baptized. You must listen carefully. You say you were baptized? We must check on that [*cha yi cha]*. We will check. [*Indicates phone]* Checking the list — even if you're on it, I want to re-evaluate you [*wo congxin yao kao yi kao]*. [*Several members of the class laugh]* Do you recognize me? You know who I am?

Mr. Yang: Yes, you preach at Mochou Lu Tang.

Pastor Ji: That's right, I [preach] at Mochou Lu Tang (*wo shi zai mochou lu tang).* You must pay attention to what class this is. If you'd like to come and listen, you can listen. If you listen and find it boring, you can leave. But you can't sing. [*The class laughs again]* If you want to sing, make your own time to sing. [*Raises voice]* Christians are those who must learn, must follow rules! (*Jidutu jiushi yao xuexi, yao shou guijü de)*

After this exchange, Mr. Yang was slightly abashed; he readily nodded his head in acceptance of Pastor Li's admonishment: "I will try to do better." Some in the class, having witnessed this dressing down with no small amount of satisfaction, piled on: "Yes, you should listen better! Pay attention to what you're registering for!" (Interestingly, it was not the Gucci mothers who did this additional scolding, but the older grandmothers.) Pastor Ji, for all his previous agitation, stepped in quickly to speak some forgiving words.

Implicit in this confrontation was a script of class distinction, mapped onto the persons of Mr. Yang and Pastor Ji. The latter acted as an authority on behalf of "rules" of conduct and comportment, as well as of bureaucratic order (notice that he insisted upon correct registration and even called an associate to check on Mr. Yang's baptismal records). The pastor associated such procedural fidelity with the subject position of a Christian; he phrased his admonishment to Mr. Yang in terms of subjectivity and not merely as a prescription for behavior. It was not just that Christians *should* follow rules, but that to *be* a Christian was to "learn" and "follow rules" (*shou guijü).* To say that he wished to "re-evaluate" Mr. Yang after he had already attended a *mudaoban* and undergone the baptismal ritual was Pastor Ji's way of calling into question Mr. Yang's conversion; it was as if Mr. Yang's outer signs of indecorous behavior marked him as being inadequately transformed.

Interactions like this were not uncommon. In my experiences participating in church activities, one of the qualities most associated with low *suzhi* was a disregard for rules, and the sense of disorder among crowds of people. I can recall, for instance, numerous events in which ordinary parishioners were thoroughly scolded at church events for fighting among each other for free books and other handouts, or for gossiping loudly with neighbors while church announcements were being made (behavior that might not have drawn any comment in the older, overcrowded city churches). Within the orderly architectural lines of Shengxun Tang and its "modern" atmospherics, the orderliness of conduct was also duly emphasized. In these instances, the church became a site of moral training and refashioning, and reinforced an implicit (and sometimes explicit) association of Christian subjectivity ("to be a Christian is to follow rules") with the elevation of citizens' *suzhi* on a practical moral level. These encounters within the church were framed by broader anxieties about moral sensibilities, and pervasive narratives

about the decline of civility and moral quality (*daode pinzhi)* among the ordinary masses (*lao baixing)* in the post-Reform period. Within these discourses, the loss of *suzhi* is frequently disproportionately attributed to those of lower social standing, like Mr. Yang. At Shengxun Tang, the conduct of those like Mr. Yang became sites of intensified scrutiny as the pastoral staff sought to assemble a *jiaohui* that matched the *jiaotang's* facade.

Tradition and ritual, reconsidered

Concerns with the rectification of conduct at Shengxun Tang were also evident on a larger scale. In 2013, several senior pastors in Nanjing led the charge to standardize the liturgical calendar (*jiaohui nianli*) and lectionary that was used across individual Three-Self churches and meeting spots. This standardization would emphasize the formal liturgy of the Anglican Church, including adherence to the *Book of Common Worship,* the liturgical calendar of feasts (*jieqi)* and sacraments (*shengli),* and the specific colors of vestments associated with each season (see Figure 6). One of the first steps — and greatest challenges — of promoting this standardization was the reproduction and distribution of the following rendering of the liturgical calendar, which were disseminated to parishioners beginning in 2013:

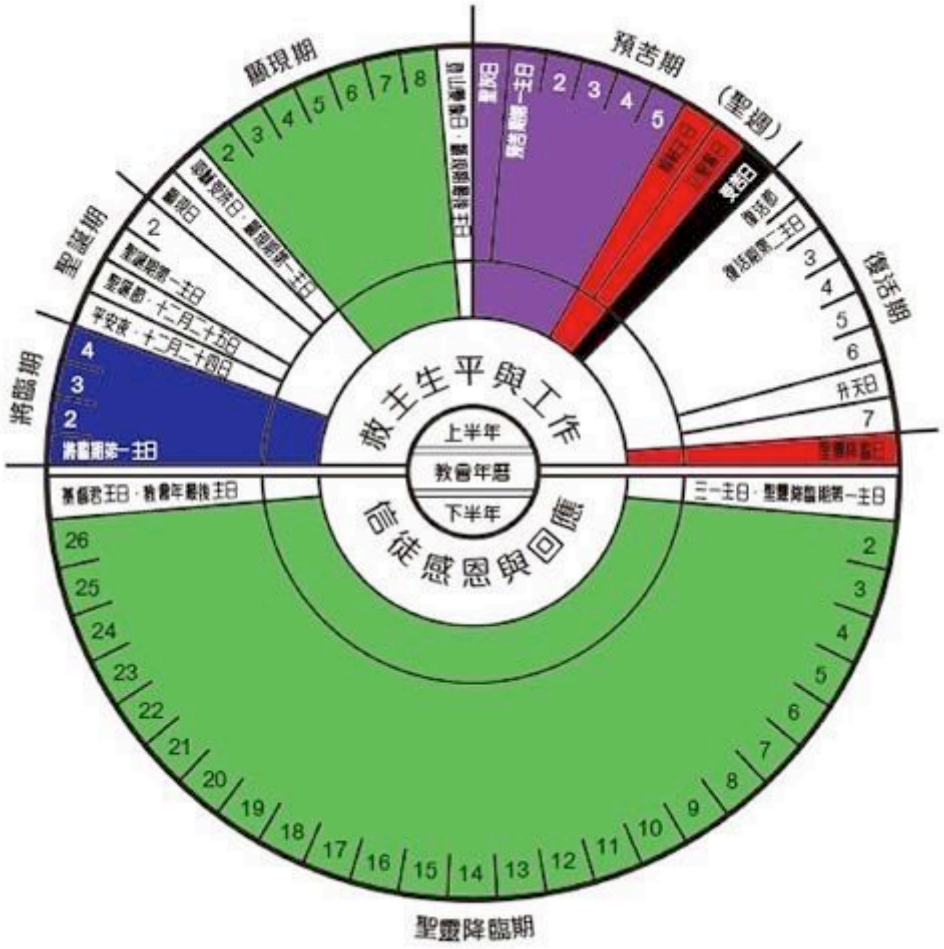

*Figure 6: The standardized liturgical calendar (*jiaohui nianli), *used at Three-Self churches in Nanjing. Photo of printout by author.*

As Pastor Ji told me, introducing this calendar as a central feature of the worship style was meant to "enable Christians to make Jesus their center (*shi jidutu yi jidu wei zhongxin)*, to live a life of salvation as the wheel turns from beginning to end (*zhou er fu shi)."* That is, the liturgical calendar was not only understood to organize the activities of the church itself, but to reorganize the day-to-day experience of temporality among adherents.

Notably, this circular calendar, while reproducing the seasons and holy days of its Anglican equivalent, turns the Gregorian calendar several degrees counter-clockwise; that is, it begins the year at the start of Lent (the region in purple, labeled 预苦期 *yukuqi,* literally

"preparation for suffering season"), which generally corresponds with the Lunar New Year and Spring Festival -- the true "beginning of the year" for most of East Asia. This temporal orientation has the benefit of locating parishioners inside a familiar calendrical year. However, the emphasis on abstinence and atonement during Lent could at times clash with the festive atmosphere around Spring Festival. There was, at times, an atonality to the way the calendar sought to orchestrate church members' behavior. In response, a variety of workshops and articles, published on church websites, emerged to instruct parishioners on what rituals to expect on which days, as well as how to read and incorporate the liturgical calendar into their own private spiritual practices.

This focus on Anglican liturgical forms in the Nanjing church seemed to harken back to a strong Anglican missionary presence in pre-1949 Nanjing, while avoiding the explicit adoption of a denominational identity (as is forbidden by religious policy laid out in Document 19). Chinese state-sanctioned churches are supposed to be post-denominational, although it is not uncommon for particular churches to retain the liturgical style of their missionary roots. But the liturgical changes in Nanjing were also something of an invention, rather than a nostalgic return. More causal than the past seemed to be recent exchanges between Jinling Seminary-trained pastors and Hong Kong-based theologians, particularly at the St. John's Episcopal, the oldest Anglican church in East Asia. There, several pastors and seminary teachers had been hosted on theological training exchanges, with funding from the municipal TSPM/CCC. They had brought back with them a stronger grounding in Anglican/Episcopalian theology, as well as a desire to see congregational practice in Nanjing echo the high-church sensibilities of places like St. John's in Hong Kong. In an interview, Pastor Li Liancheng, head pastor at Shengxun Tang and president of Nanjing's Chinese Christian Council, elaborated on these liturgical reforms:

> Since the restoration of the Chinese church in the 1980s, most churches have used a very simple way of worship. The recently constructed and presented Shengxun Tang has prepared its exterior appearance (*waiguan de yubei*); we must also consider better church development and pastoring. …When the church has just been restored, having a place to worship is enough. But after thirty years have passed, people gradually have more of a consciousness of the rituals and procedures of worship (*chongbai liyi he chengxü de yishi).* Many grassroots churches (*jiceng jiaohui)* don't have much of an understanding of ritual (*liyi*). Pastors or church volunteers, many people want to know how to perceive, from within standardized (*guifan*) rituals, the greatness (*weida*) and dignity (*zhuangyan)* of God, and how to make the church a peaceful (*sujing)* and sanctified (*jingqian)* place.

Li goes on to suggest that an emphasis on standardized liturgy would function as a break from the "tradition" of the Chinese church, which he traces to the restoration of church life in the 1980s. This sense of "tradition" is, in fact, a euphemistic way to say "evangelical," indicating the predominant mode of worship in Three-Self Chinese churches, in which services did not follow a pre-ordained sequence and minimized the importance of formal liturgy. An engagement with high church ritual complexity was, according to Pastor Li and his colleagues, the necessary corrective for a Chinese Christian landscape that had grown increasingly disorderly (*luan*) — that is, susceptible to evangelical and Pentecostal influences.[1] For him and other pastors at Shengxun Tang, the hope was that liturgical authority and ritual complexity would not only distinguish their church from the older and more "simple" churches in Nanjing, but would eventually become the Nanjing church's own mark of distinction among other urban Christian spheres nationally. The "return" to Anglican liturgy was, in fact, a projection of an imagined future: that "traditional" modes of Chinese Christian worship — that is, those leaning towards

[1] See Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of efforts within the church to curb *luan*, in the form of anti-heterodoxy and anti-cult campaigns.

evangelical, Pentecostal, and spiritualist forms — would gradually recede and be replaced with a stolid, and centrally regulated, liturgical order.

As we can see, the particular tensions being negotiated in the creation of a localized *jiaohui* and style of liturgy at Shengxun Tang challenge the usual narrations about cultural clashes between Chinese "tradition" and "modernity," between new and old, urban and the rural. Rather than engaging in these well-worn categories, pastors at Shengxun Tang were involved in producing very specific orientations toward modernity and tradition. Shengxun Tang becomes a palimpsestic space of historical imagination. There, centuries-old customs of liturgical practice could be deemed a better resource for "modernization" than the evangelical Chinese styles of worship that emerged in re-opened churches in the post-Maoist era. What looked to be an "old" form of Christianity -- the purple-hued vestments, liturgical patterns, and 17th-century Anglican hymns that were sung inside the chapel at Shengxun Tang -- could be excavated for the production of Christian futures.

The wrong grave

On a spring weekend in 2014, it was nearly Easter on the liturgical calendar -- and Qingming Festival by the lunar reckoning. During this annual festival, celebrants visit the tombs of their ancestors, where they sweep the burial mounds (*saomu)*, make offerings of tea, food, libations, and burn spirit money (*yinsizhi).* While some evangelical Christian communities in China pointedly forego Qingming Festival, suspicious of traditions of ancestor veneration, Shengxun Tang, along with several other churches in the city, made a point of organizing Qingming commemorations. During the previous week's services at Shengxun Tang, Pastor Li encouraged congregants to "integrate Chinese people's customs of tomb-sweeping" with the

Christian commandment to "honor thy mother and thy father" — which, he reminded everyone, was the same principle as demonstrating filial piety (*xiaojing fumu).*

Through a new orientation to the calendar, Pastor Li suggested, Qingming's primary significance to Christians could lie in its *symbolic* display of rememberance, not in the literal animation of relations with a spirit world; it was also, as he reminded the congregation, an opportunity to witness to non-Christians by dispelling superstitious practices and offering up Christian prayer and communion as a contrastive mode of worship. This view that Qingming could be *Christianized* echoes writings like that of Daniel Tong, a Singapore-educated theologian and author of *Ancestral Veneration: A Handbook for Christians (*1993), which argues that Christians should enthusiastically participate in Qingming and other rituals of ancestor veneration as long as they treat it as a *moral* performance of filial piety, while excising superstitious elements from the ritual. This work of re-training Christians' habits (particularly those of new converts) around Qingming and other traditional Chinese festivals was part of the Shengxun Tang pastors' efforts to re-order congregants' sense of temporality — to teach them to experience the Chinese festival cycle with "Jesus at the center." Eventually, one pastor told me, they wished to more fully blend Qingming into the run-up to Easter.

In this last ethnographic sketch, I follow along with Shengxun Tang's Qingming celebration, in order to illustrate how ordinary congregants negotiated these spaces of ritual and communion while attempting to hold apart their "beliefs" from "superstition." Having discussed the establishment of spatial ordering, authority, and liturgical style at Shengxun, this example moves us away from the church structure itself, and focuses on how discourses of order and reform shape personal interactions.

* * * *

To commemorate Qingming, Nanjing's TSPM/CCC had organized a bus trip for congregants in city churches to the Nanxiangshan Public Christian Cemetery (*nanxiangshan jidujiao gongmu),* designated especially for the burial of Christians in Nanjing. The cemetery was established by missionaries in the 1920s; after a tumultuous period of being under threat of demolishment, the graves were moved from its previous location in the city neighborhood of Maigaoqiao to its current spot near Qixia Mountain, about eighteen kilometers northeast of Nanjing. One of the few such cemeteries remaining in China, the Nanxiangshan cemetery housed more than one thousand graves in 2014 (among them purportedly two of my own distant ancestors, although I failed to find their plots there). I, along with other Shengxun Tang members, would journey there for the *saomu* ritual, followed by a prayer service in the chapel that adjointed the cemetery.

As I wandered the cemetery with the group, chatting and looking aimlessly for a possible sign of the ancestors whose names I didn't know, I cast an eye over the neat rows of graves. Carved crosses and the character 爱 (*ai,* love) adorned the tops of gravestones, as did markings of church lineages (many preachers' families are buried here) and scriptural quotations. Aside from these signs of Christianity, the scenes of tomb-sweeping were familiar, save for the notable absence of burning spirit money. I passed families solemnly or mournfully clearing the tops of graves with willow branches and plastic brooms; more than one group had spread a picnic of cold dishes and tea out at a gravestone, and were sitting down to lunch.

Figure 7: Entrance of Nanxiangshan cemetery, labeled "Nanjing Municipal Christian Cemetery." Photo by author.

Figure 8: A group of picnicking tomb-sweepers. Photo by author.

Amid these serene scenes, I suddenly heard a few women's raised voices. Sister Zhang, a *dagongmei* ("working sister," a common term for female migrant laborers) from rural Anhui and

a new congregant at Shengxun Tang, had started arguing with Sister Fan, a middle-aged native Nanjinger and one of the volunteers on the trip. As I approached, their conflict became clearer. Sister Fan had found Sister Zhang praying over the "wrong grave." That is, she was praying for her parents over a proxy stranger's grave, as both of whom were buried in their home village (*lao jia).* Sister Fan, clearly disconcerted, scolded her: "*Zimei,* you can't use another person's grave, we here all have family members buried here. You can't just pray over *any* grave!" Another volunteer walked up to agree with Sister Fan: "Yes, you'd have to move your parents' bodies here if you want to do that. Are they Christians?" Sister Zhang assured her that they had converted during their prolonged illness. Her distress was becoming evident, at both her own seeming *faux pas* and at the reminder of her parents' deaths. At that moment, a fourth volunteer interjected, confidently bursting the conversation's bubble: "Sisters, it doesn't matter if their bodies are here or there. Christians can pray for them anywhere!" This back-and-forth went on for awhile, with each woman seeming to become more resolute in her opinions.

Finally, they decide to find Pastor Ji and have him settle the issue. Pastor Ji listened to both sides of the argument. In reassuring tones, he told Sister Zhang that her parents' bodies did not need to be present in order for her to pray for them; their souls had risen to heaven and were not contained by any particular physical space. "But then why is it wrong for me to pray over another's grave?" she asked. Gesturing with a sweeping motion, she indicated the many gravestones. If souls were immaterial, what would be the harm? Instead of answering right away, Pastor Ji addressed the other assembled women: "It's hard to get rid of superstition (*mixin).* Even Christians have a hard time with it." Gently, and to end the argument, he led her to a clearing underneath a few trees away from the other women, saying that he would personally "lead her in prayer" (*daidao).*

Pastor Ji might have thought this disagreement showed the intractable nature of *mixin,* on both sides of the argument. To the women, it might have reaffirmed the authority of the pastor to adjudicate in such matters, and to bring comfort to Sister Zhang. To me, it illuminated some of the different representational economies and semiotic ideologies (Keane 2003) that mediated their disagreement over the materiality of practices like tomb-sweeping — and more broadly, that mediate efforts, like those at Shengxun Tang, to rectify the conduct of their congregants. It is one of the many labors that produce a church like Shengxun Tang — a particular kind of urban project that has emerged within both local development economies in Nanjing, and within broader economies of exposure for Christianity in urban China. In the next chapter, I will examine how questions of aspiration and exposure unfold in an underground Christian community, for whom the very futures of their children are at stake.

CHAPTER FOUR
Cultivating "Little Sinners": counter-conduct and the ethics of care

Introduction

In this chapter, I return to the Grace Alone Church and the Covenant School, the underground Christian school run by GAC members where I taught English to both children and adults. I will explore the Grace Alone Church community's experiments with crafting alternative lives for their children, and ask how local regimes of ethics and care are constituted in and through these ambivalent encounters with "the state." I do this by exploring, in particular, this underground Christian community's refusal to comply with population-planning policies and nationalized education systems, as well as their attempts to establish different modes of care, self-cultivation, and ethical practices in their reproduction and instruction of children. More broadly, the chapter asks what labors of imagination and exercises of self-formation attend the production of alternative futurities for children, particularly as they are imbedded in contemporary China's intense investments in the biopolitical management of children's lives.

My aims here are twofold. First, I wish to situate the emergence of this underground Christian movement within the Chinese biopolitics of population management and the discourse of citizen "quality" (*suzhi*). Tracing the GAC's efforts to continuously reform their assembly through the intertwined nodes of home and school, I examine how their reproductive and educational practices constitute a different set of stakes around the futures of their children. Specifically, I address how, counter to what Andrew Kipnis has called China's ubiquitous "educational desire" informed by the nation's decades of population planning, GAC parents experiment with alternative horizons of aspiration, in which subjects' moral formation is

grounded in striving toward insecure and uncertain futures. Secondly, in examining these practices of moral formation, I argue that underground Christian reproductive and educational practices emerge not as an *exterior* form of resistance to state-controlled education — in the familiar narrative of pitting religious practice against governmental regulation — but might be better seen, in Michel Foucault's terms, as modes of "counter-conduct" whose forms are *specific* and *internal* to the "conduct" to which they are reacting. By refusing to comply with population planning policies and national standardized testing for children, Christian communities install alternative relational structures between parents and children, teachers and students, church and state. In the process, their techniques of self-making have the potential to both reproduce and transform national discourses of education as a route to security and stability, by reevaluating taken-for-granted regimes of aspiration, risk, and the value of imagined futures.

In the first section, I map out the biopolitical management of the population in China as the conduct of futures, focusing particularly on the temporal aspects of future-making in national discourses on optimizing the population. To understand the forms of counter-conduct expressed through the GAC's reproductive practices requires first unpacking the modalities of power through which birth, children's education, and citizen "quality" are managed nationally in China. I then turn to examine various modes of counter-conduct in the specific engagements of the GAC with population planning and educational structures. These ethnographic examples of noncompliance and refusal to work within state regulations are also positive accounts of the labors of reproduction and self-cultivation, revealing how Christian families negotiate terrains of future possibility and risk. Finally, I reflect on how these practices of counter-conduct install new forms of authority and power by transforming the ethical habitus of Christian subjects.

Conduct and counter-conduct

In Foucault's 1967 lectures collected in *Security, Territory, Population,* he proposes the notion of "conduct" as the most expressive of that form of power that seeks to "govern men's souls" — first in the activities of the Christian pastorate, which concentrates on regimenting religious institutions, and then more generally in governmentality, which locates that power in political institutions. Foucault takes advantage of the double meaning of "conduct" as both a way of directing and being directed by others and as a mode of relation to oneself (i.e., behavior):

> Conduct is the activity of conducting (*conduire*), of conduction (*la conduction*) if you like, but it is equally the way in which one conducts oneself (*se conduit*), lets oneself be conducted (*se laisse conduire),* and finally, in which one behaves (*se comporter)* under the influence of a conduct as the action of conducting or of conduction (*conduction*) (Foucault 2009, 193).

In his historical account of the "opening up" of pastoral power into more generalized forms of governmentality, Foucault discusses the medieval pastorate as exercising a "highly specific form of power with the object of conducting men" (2009, 194); however, he is simultaneously attentive to the "equally specific movements of resistance and insubordination [that] appeared in correlation … that could be called specific revolts of 'conduct'…" These movements, he continues, had as their objective "a different form of conduct, that is to say: wanting to be conduced differently, by other leaders (*conducteurs*) and other shepherds, towards other objectives and forms of salvation, and through other procedures and methods" (194). Crucial to these "revolts of conduct" is their "non-autonomous specificity," by which Foucault means that they are always formed in relation to particular questions that emerge from historical social relations: "by whom do we consent to be directed or conducted? How do we consent to be conducted? Towards what do we want to be led?" (197)

Thus, what is important about counter-conduct is not just that it *resists* existing power structures, but that it also generates its own corresponding forms of power, authority, and obedience, and thus produces new circuits of power-and-resistance. Thinking about my informants' practices as certain "revolts of conduct" specific to the ways in which "secure futures" are ordinarily conducted in China allows me to elaborate on two dimensions of these resistances: 1) the *refusals* of Christians to participate in structures of state education, and 2) the concomitant *promotion* of other kinds of subjectivity and ethical practice. It allows me to explore the *counter*-counter-conducts that emerge internal to the Covenant community in response to these promotions, in the form of vocal skepticism, doubt, and contestation of the imagined futures for Covenant children.

As Arnold Davidson (2011) has written, the conceptualization of conduct and counter-conduct has an explicitly ethical component, allowing us to move between the ethical and the political; it emphasizes acts (Foucault gives examples like asceticism, military desertion-insubordination, and mysticism) whose recognizability as political "resistance" can be quite ambiguous. Indeed, the practices of schooling, care, and nurture I describe in this chapter can seem to reinforce, more than resist, the more conservative tendencies in the aspirational politics of Chinese education — the rehearsal of highly policed gender distinctions, household divisions of labor, socially-conservative values. Yet if, as Foucault writes in "Le sujet et le pouvoir," "to govern…is to structure the possible field of action of others," counter-conduct should be understood as a re-ordering of this field of possibilities, while bringing our attention to the contours of the regimes of conduct in which they are imbedded. Thus, while some actions — individual exercises of piety, or domestic practices of nurturing and care, for instance — could be seen as "apolitical," their work on a structured field of possibilities for action may come to

have a clearly political dimension. Even counter-conduct that self-consciously disavows the arena of politics — as my informants do, when they insist that what they are doing has "nothing to do with politics" — can "incit[e] a process of productivity" (Foucault 2007:200). In the following sections, I take up Foucault's call for attentiveness to the "modalities of relations, mode of existence, types of values, forms of exchange" and "unforeseen lines of force" that are formed within currents of conduct and counter-conduct (Foucault 2009: 983).

Conducting futures: *jiaoyu*, population management, and *suzhi* in Christian discourses

> It does not seem far-fetched to describe the nation's current Christian education movement as 'let a hundred flowers bloom.' Speaking of form alone, there are families that spontaneously start home schools, and specialized educational institutions and church schools; there are schools that center around children from one house church, and others that see multiple churches' school-aged children are their targets" (Jiaohui 2015, 10).

In 2016, *Church China,* a respected print and online journal circulated among urban house-church networks, published an issue focusing on "the church's next generation" (*Jiaohui* 2016). The writings gathered all addressed themselves to the problem of child-rearing and instruction for the Chinese Christian church's vanguard, with titles including: "How to Teach Your Child the Bible in Postmodernity," "How to Preach to Adolescents," and "Are We Obstructing Our Children?" These *Church China* commentaries serve as signposts of what we might call underground "official" discourse, authored by church leaders and intellectuals with acknowledged expertise, that seeks to define and consolidate a project or movement for a disaggregated community of urban house churches. The curation of articles here not only collects together disparate writings but performatively constitutes "the church's next generation" as an object of intervention. The concerns they articulate — over the conduct of childhood, education,

family life, and the securing of young people's religious commitments — point to the centrality of imaginations of futurity to the administration of house churches.

The object toward which the writings direct much of their reformist spirit is a newly-emergent social category characterized as the *xinerdai,* literally "faith second-generation," in direct allusion to other social stereotypes in popular circulation: *fuerdai* (second-generation rich) and *guanerdai* (second-generation cadres). These second-generation monikers appear frequently in media and ordinary conversation, stereotyping the children of the wealthy and powerful who form an ostentatious consumer class, flaunt their wealth and privilege on social media, and contribute to the corruption of the nation's officials and the outward flow of the country's capital. Such outrages of the "second generation" crystallize popular sensibilities about the degradation of moral values in China. For many of my Christian interlocutors, the label of *xinerdai* works as a rhetorical device for associating second-generation Christians with similar traits. Claiming to reflect information gathered from a number of interviews with young churchgoers, the editorial preface of *Church China* distills the characteristics of this "fallen" generation:

> Their faith exists only at the level of knowledge, and has no influence on real life.
> Their understanding of the Gospel is one-sided or even false.
> They are not strangers to the form of the church, but rarely do they have individual spiritual practices (Jiaohui 2015, 3).[1]

The editorial goes to cite "chilling data" from teachers at Christian schools purportedly showing the low numbers of *xinerdai* who believe themselves to be "truly saved." It concludes that the biggest crisis facing the church is not the numbers of children who "clearly declare themselves

[1] Translations in this chapter are by the author unless otherwise noted.

'not believers,'" but the prospect of producing "a group of 'Pharisees,' which is known as the 'pastoral second generation,' [*muerdai]* the preacher's children" (Jiaohui 2016).

In short, the editorial suggests that proximity to Christian institutions does not equal its proper reproduction; in fact, the growth of Christianity in China poses certain dangers. When passed in a habitual way from parents to child, faith runs the risk of dilution — of constituting a showy mastery of certain religious flourishes without any true internal yielding. My interlocutors at the Grace Alone Church frequently expressed similar anxieties about the opacity of "mere speech." At times, they cast aspersions on young members of the GAC who were known to come from long-standing and multi-generational Christian families — "preacher's children" — by saying, "His/her words from the mouth sound beautiful" (*zuiba shang shuo de hua hen hao ting),* but their "behavior" (*xingwei)* was another matter. These doubts as to the capacity of speech to reveal true faith is a familiar facet of the semiotic and linguistic ideologies of many Christian communities, as anthropologists have pointed out (Keane 2007; Robbins 2008; Bialecki and Pinal 2001). But, in the Chinese context, the generational label also carries more specific associations drawn from the circulation of discourses of moral distaste for the *fuerdai* and *guanerdai.* This second generation, it is suggested, suffers from the post-millennial Chinese disease of conspicuous overconsumption — with religion, like wealth and power, as an unearned and wasted entitlement.

If the problem with *xinerdai* is set up as an extension of China's larger social ills, then the solution proposed by *Church China* and by many of my interlocutors takes the form of specialized religious *jiaoyu,* a term understood more capaciously than formal education and better glossed as "cultivation." But the form that *jiaoyu* should take in order to prevent the inevitable dissipation of faith over the generations is under constant, lively contestation. For, as

Church China's articulation of the problems of "preacher's children" indicates, it is not enough to socially reproduce the structures of the church to ensure the genuine transformation of souls. This quandary is a deeply theological as well as social one: if salvation is ultimately a matter of grace and not of good works or speech — if it is fundamentally inward, not outward — it nonetheless demands the transformation of external practice such that the transformation might be judged sincere. What modes of cultivation, then, would produce the conditions for sincere salvation, while at the same time effacing the *cultivatedness* of modes of pious performance that seemed to be embodied by the *xinerdai?*

* * * *

Underground Christian schools, like the Covenant School, were formed in rejection of standardized, state-mandated education, which many devout Christians believe to propagate "atheistic ideology" *(wushen lun*) at its core. This resulted in a broadly termed "Christian education movement" (*jidujiao jiaoyu yundong*) movement, which some churches also refer to as the "Reformed education movement" (*guizheng jiaoyu yundong*) movement, as they are mostly driven by denominations in the Reform Calvinist tradition. One American missionary, who works regularly among such schools, told me the movement had become an "explosion" since the mid-2000s: within six or seven years, thousands of schools have sprung up, most of them small-scale but some with hundreds of students. The Covenant School wasn't the lone underground Christian school in the city of Nanjing; several of its teachers had had prior experience at a similar school in the region, and, importantly, had received training in theology and pedagogy at training centers run clandestinely by Evangelical American and Canadian missionaries in Beijing and Fujian.

Importantly, such communities opt out of the national college examination system, or *gaokao (*"the big test"), which is the prerequisite for entrance into almost all higher education institutions in China. Without entering the *gaokao,* students from Christian schools are enormously limited in their options for higher education in China, and for those without the financial resources, studying abroad is also out of reach. Such a pointed opting-out is particularly conspicuous for the class backgrounds of those who work at the Covenant School: a mixture of middle-class well-educated urbanites, several of whom work as college professors or have graduated from top-tier universities, and white-collar professionals. Despite their own educational backgrounds, the teachers and parents of Covenant students uniformly expressed a strongly felt opposition to the *gaokao* system and wished to keep their children out of it. Reasons for this opposition vary, ranging from cynicism about the "corrupt" testing system to principled hostility toward the compulsory courses in "Marxist-Leninist Philosophy" and "Mao Zedong Thought" that are standardized in state curricula; many Covenant teachers complain that religious students are discriminated against in such courses, which purvey an "atheistic ideology." A common thread is the experience of immense pressure (*yali*) attached to *gaokao* preparation, which spurs its own widespread industry of "cram schools" and "test prep factories," and has been roundly critiqued as damaging to students psychologically. Not only did almost everyone I spoke to at the Covenant School express disappointment with their own educations, but they also closely linked this traumatic disillusionment, often experienced as a letdown or psychological "void" during college, with their subsequent conversion to Christianity.

More than just an alternate institutional *form*, my interlocutors saw the reform education movement as structuring the possibilities of producing a different kind of child — one who grew up cut off from both the traumas and false self-affirmations that they saw in mainstream

educations. On a pragmatic level, of course, these were also children who would be highly cultivated in certain ways, and in refusing the determinations of the "atheistic" state educational system and its evaluative regimes geared toward producing competitive global citizens, might nonetheless end up *outdoing* the state-engineered citizen in the cultivation of "quality." Toward this end, Reform educators have begun purchasing Bible-based curricula of classical Western education (Greek, Latin, art history) from abroad, and investing in training in pedagogical styles (like Montessori) that carry the cache of cosmopolitan progressivism. Thus, it could be argued that the Reform education movement emerges as much from within state projects of population management as in opposition to their particulars. That is, the aspirations expressed in *Church China* suggest an expansion of the urban underground church's ambitions to govern the "quality" of its congregations.

As many scholars have noted, the Chinese state's strategies of controlling population growth, coupled with state-led efforts to maximize citizen "quality" (*suzhi)* that came to prominence in the 1990s, are part of a historical trajectory of biopolitical governance in China. The current state's population management efforts began with the introduction of the "one-child policy" in 1979-80. Since then, they have expanded to include a wide array of related state projects, some which deal specifically with the social and demographic dilemmas that have arisen from implementation of the one-child policy, such as the lack of elder-care for an aging population and an uneven gender distribution. At the turn of the century, both aggregated population growth and the social dimensions of reproduction have become national concerns, as

state discourses take "population-and-reproduction policies" to be synonymous with social policy (Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005).[2]

The expansion of an emphasis on controlling population to the demands of maximizing population quality (*suzhi*) can be linked to China's embrace of the "socialist market economy" in the 1990s. Under these new economic conditions, national discourses of how to heighten (*tigao)* the collective and individual *suzhi* of the population in order to produce competitive citizens in the global marketplace exploded into ubiquity.[3] In the early 2000s, for instance, anthropologist T.E. Wolonov tellingly observes that no locals near her Beijing home gave a second thought to the slogan-bearing banners carrying notices about *suzhi* cultivation: "the relative invisibility of the banners and slogans indicated not that they were meaningless, but instead that they expressed such commonsensical notions that no one needed to read them" (2009, 568). The banality of these axioms show the naturalization of the concept of *suzhi* as a calculus of human value under conditions of the socialist market economy. And at the center of this calculus is the figure of the child. As Woronov writes:

> The problem that *renkou suzhi* (population quality) is supposed to solve is the nation's advancement into a future of wealth and power within the highly competitive global field. Children's *suzhi* is thus a particular concern, for children are seen as embodiments of the future: not only do they represent the future, but their bodies are the site upon which the terms of the national future are being worked out (2009, 570).

Children, as "embodiments of the future," are primary nodes upon which population management strategies play out, as well as sites in which the "health" of the population can be

[2] I use the encompassing term "one-child policy" to mean the government's advocacy for a one-child-per-couple rate of population growth.

[3] This ubiquity of social discourse around *suzhi* has been matched by a large volume of scholarly literature. See Anagnost 2004; Kipnis 2006; Tomba 2009; Sigley 2009; Crabb 2010. The work of Lily Chumley and Nicholas

measured. Thus, "education for quality" (*suzhi jiaoyu)* has become one of the guiding principles of educational policy starting with the 1994 "Central Committee Opinions on Further Strengthening and Reforming Moral Education in Schools." These recommendations gathered together a wide range of disparate aims to reform Chinese national education, including curriculum reform, moral education, physical and aesthetic education, and the standardization of Mandarin language for ethnic minorities (Dello-Iacovo 2009).

If in many ways the management of "second-generation believers" seems to resonate with the aims of *suzhi* education, it equally raises important questions about why underground schools still strongly resist the idea of integration into national educational regimes — how are the areas of disarticulation constituted? What are the fault lines at which divergent concepts of "reform" are drawn? I think it would be reductive to conclude, as anthropologist Nanlai Cao (2009) has suggested in a discussion about elite Christians and education, that Chinese Protestant ethics is "not so much related to acts of spiritual seeking … as it is shaped by desires and practices of self-making among neoliberal individuals under rapid marketization" (54). As I will show in my forays into the domains of child-rearing and education in a house-church community, the logic of *suzhi* only partially captured my interlocutors' engagements with their children. Discourses of *suzhi* privilege the perfectibility of human subjects through instruments of techno-scientific rationality and calculation, in which ever more precise techniques of self-cultivation can elevate citizens' qualities. This perfectibility finds less firm ground in the Christian imagination I encountered. What is at stake for "second-generation Christian" children was not only *suzhi* but moral *sincerity* and the capacity to carry on an "inheritance" of faith.

Harkness (2013) on "qualia" has also been significant for its emphasis on the semiotic properties and processes by which "value" is determined within particular evaluative frameworks.

They also, as we will see, fostered ethical habits that seemed to run counter to the mission of "raising quality," including practices of legal noncompliance, aspirations directed away from normative horizons of achievement and accumulation, and the embrace of conditions of insecurity.

In the following section, I unpack acts of noncompliance with the One-Child Policy, especially in their circulation as narratives of self. These practices of counter-conduct, I will argue, hinge on labors of narration and practices of circulation that destabilize the contours of the "quality" that comes under governance.[4]

Narrations of risk and redemption

Among the two hundred or so members of the Grace Alone Church in Nanjing, Deacon Wang Ming and his wife Bai Hua were known for their down-to-earth personalities and their leadership of several Bible study groups for young families. But they were especially known for their son, Yisai (Mandarin for Isaac): a boisterous boy of four whose loud propensity for collecting car toys, food, and fun made him a figure of ubiquitous cheer in the children's nursery at Sunday services. Before the beginning of service was signaled with the singing of that week's psalm, Yisai would march with impunity up and down the crowded improvised aisles, greeting

[4] Among Christian churches in China, Three-Self leaders have officially endorsed compliance with the one-child policy. In recent years, public resistance has come from several high-profile unregistered Christian communities, largely underground urban churches. Unlike the kind of noncompliance that has occurred frequently and for a variety of reasons, particularly among rural populations, these more recent instances of religious demonstration take on the rhetoric and tactics of an explicitly "pro-life" movement. Beginning in 2012, for instance, Pastor Wang Yi's Autumn Rain Church in Chengdu began publicizing a campaign via Weibo and other Chinese social media that called for "No Abortions on Children's Day" (a national holiday on June 1). Autumn Rain then coordinated protests at abortion clinics in Chengdu, where they passed out flyers to passers-by and carried posters displaying aborted fetuses; the church at one time also took out anti-abortion ads on the side of public buses. These pro-life demonstrations drew explicitly on tactics of public exposure in the idiom of similar political demonstrations in the West — including, as shown in one of their social-media videos, the strategy of confronting passersby with images of fetuses, engaging strangers in conversations and sometimes arguments over issues of fetal personhood and abortion-as-murder.

many of the "brothers" and "sisters" who babysat him and pointedly ignoring the ones who had yet to win his favor. His own teenaged brother kept to a tight-knit group of friends, while in the front row his parents looked on, his mother's newborn sleeping in her lap. In the austere setting of the church — originally an office space, leased in a high-rise commercial building full of anonymous darkened hallways — their familiar presence signaled a sense of home.

Indeed, the more common way that parishioners referred to the Grace Alone church was by the term *jiayuan* — literally "home garden," or homeland. In many ways, Wang Ming and his wife served as an exemplary model of what church members called "making family" (*jianli jiating)* in the home of the church. Their decision to raise three children in the city, without a particularly comfortable income or abundant family resources, was seen by their fellow parishioners as a sacrificial act of piety, an example of a family living "according to the Bible" despite material scarcities. While anti-abortion pamphlets and other pro-life literatures were scattered in abundance on church tables, it was the living example of such families that normalized a form of quietly resistant life. Their noncompliance was taken less to be a "private" choice — that is, to be an exercise of reproductive *freedom*, which underlies most liberal arguments for disobeying the One-Child Policy — than as an essentially public act of counter-obedience to another source of authority: the Biblical injunction to "be fruitful and multiply."

And so they did: among the young just-married families of my acquaintance during my 18-month period in Nanjing, a majority had or were planning to have between three and five children. New parents who were established in the community enjoyed the infrastructure of collective support. On a monthly basis, collections went around for financially struggling families; tithes were at times distributed by the church leadership to those needing to pay off heavy fines for noncompliance; and a rotating roster of "sisters" volunteered to provide childcare

and education for infants and toddlers. I observed that even the most eligible bachelors anticipated entering the fray of caring for multiple children. Once, while I was chatting to two church brothers about their marriage prospects (both of them were single at the time), one of them declared resolutely, "I'm going to have three children. At least." [*Wo xiwang you san ge hai zi, zhishao*] Among the larger networks of urban house churches in China, the abundance of families with multiple births indexed the spiritual health and fidelity of the entire church community — a statistic to be cited with pride.

Noncompliance thus expressed communal moral expectations as much as they were indexes of a pro-life antipathy to family-planning policy. Church members' practices of concealing multiple births were quickly producing new norms within the burgeoning community. Not only did the image of the normative family unit change from the single-child nuclear family propagated as the image of a "civilized" China, but the exigencies of having multiple children generated cross-kinship ties and structures of sharing the labor of childcare, as well as new expectations among young couples of marrying age. Crucial to the shifting of normative orientations to family and future was the narrativization of "birth" stories, which became enfolded into larger conversion and faith narratives, such that a "productive" marriage would come to signal a particular sort of exemplary Christian life. Suffering or *chiku* (literally eating bitterness) was central to such narratives of self, experienced largely through economic hardship brought on by potential fines as well as by the skyrocketing cost of raising children in urban China.

Perhaps more radical than its indifference to state policy was the GAC's defiance of mainstream economic logics. As the declining birth rate in Chinese cities shows, where the One-Child Policy had once regulated birth-rate through restricting growth, now the population could

police itself as childcare became increasingly privatized and education unsustainably expensive. Large families in the Grace Alone church, however, pointedly eschewed such economic logics. Indeed, reproduction was seen as a God-given responsibility, as well as the crucial instrument for socially reproducing their faith — something reflected in the festive atmosphere that surrounded the church's annual baptism ceremonies for all infants born within the last year, which was especially conducted by a visiting pastor. In such scenes of celebration and ritual, the continual spread of Christianity could be imagined as exponential with the generations in the presence of growing families and the bursting church nursery.

* * * *

Wang Ming's family lived in a compound of shabby apartments only reachable from the city center by a convoluted series of buses. Yisai attended the Covenant School, although his presence had been sporadic due to his family's lack of reliable transportation; his older brother, 16, had been re-enrolled in a public school after several years in homeschooling. During my first visit with my friend Zhang Wei (a very active brother in the congregation, whose reading and consumption habits ran the gamut from 19th-century Dutch theology to modern cinema), he characterized their living quarters as "a scene from a slasher film." A hyperbolic description of the unlit corridors of their building, to be sure, but perhaps exaggerated to a purpose: Zhang Wei's point was to show me that "making family" in the proper way required material sacrifices and the invitation of risks.

We had been invited for dinner and conversation, in a somewhat structured fashion, at Zhang Wei's request. In the Wang's apartment, a main room and abbreviated kitchen branched into a small bedroom shared by the whole family, where the youngest son, at three months old,

napped under his oldest brother's supervision. Yisai played with a plastic model car Zhang Wei had brought him in the living room, recruiting bowls and chopsticks to serve as train tracks and carriages. As the sun began setting, the family soon gathered for their daily Bible reading: that day, a passage from the *Song of Songs,* Chapter 3. The family bible was a heavy and ornate Chinese edition of the Union translation, which had its own setting in a corner of the room, and which nearly toppled Yisai as he fetched it to and fro. After we went around the table and finished the reading as an ensemble, Wang Ming asked Zhang Wei — one of the more well-read brothers in the congregation — whether he could venture an exegesis, what most congregants call "sharing" (*fenxiang*) in small group meetings. At that, Yisai raised his head indignantly: "*Baba* always does the sharing," he said, pointing to his father, who in turn admonished him, "We must be polite to our guest!" Some courteous back-and-forth followed. Finally Wang Ming took over the discussion, elaborating on the lover's passionate seeking in *Song of Songs* as an analogy for the "lost sheep" of the church seeking Christ.

After dinner, the children were dispatched to their games and books. The conversation between Wang Ming, Bai Hua, Zhang Wei, and I began haltingly, until Wang Ming remarked cryptically that he had nearly not made it to dinner that night. "What happened?" Zhang Wei probed. Wang Ming revealed that he had nearly been fatally injured in a workplace incident at a construction site, in which a faulty pressure gauge violently released a spare part that missed his head by inches. This account of his dangerous working conditions seemed itself to release some conversational valve.

Wang Ming and Bai Hua noted the deep ambivalences they felt in carrying the last two children to term; each time she had discovered her pregnancy, she had subsequently made an appointment to get an abortion (a fact that she then hid from the church, out of shame). Yet, each

time, some occurrence or other — a bicycle accident, a sudden emergency in their apartment — had prevented her from going through with the procedure. In hearing this, Zhang Wei seemed shocked: "I had no idea that you experienced these hesitations!" he said, expression shifting. Some part of the narrative revealed itself to him, and he said resolutely, "But these incidents were surely signs from God." Wang Ming and Bai Hua's expressions were not so sure; suddenly, they seemed to waver, not in agreeing with Zhang Wei's reading of the events in the present but in untangling their recollections of their own feelings in the past. "Perhaps—but then, I wasn't sure," said Bai Hua. For the next several minutes, Zhang Wei re-narrated the string of events at the hospital to reassure her that she *had* been certain at the time that abortion was not a moral possibility.

The structure of confession that unfolded did not, then, unfold through a straight-forward revelation; rather, the confessional structure of Wang Ming and Bai Hua's story relied on a mutual reconstruction involving Zhang Wei to resolve its ambivalences. Wang Ming's family not only modeled a kind of idealized lower-middle-class family who cultivated the *xinerdai* despite financial insecurity; they also demonstrated the power of the confessional mode in negotiating a partially concealed life. For, as George Simmel (1906) has noted in relation to the productive capacities of the "secret" in social life, concealment enables forms of confession and revelation that are crucial in the constitution of Christian selves. Part of living clandestinely, away from official structures of birth registration and education, involved continuous processes of revelation to authorized others within the community who help to support them. These modes of storytelling and self-narration might often reveal deep ambivalences in their paths to "making family," drawing out the tenuousness of individual virtue and the reliance on continual enfolding back into the social structures of the church.

* * * *

In the next section, the chapter shifts its focus to ordinary labors of childcare and cultivation: the Covenant School teachers' practices of instruction and their efforts to produce pious personhood in both their students and themselves, and to create particular forms of affective attachments between students, teachers, and school. I wish to draw out the ways in which these practices — from the development of habits of prayer to forms of self-surveillance and the practice of confession and testimony — are intended to form a moral habitus that counteracts mainstream, normative regimes of aspiration. Instead, these instances of ethical work and "practices of the self," in Foucault's language, which are undertaken by teachers as much as by students, inscribe modes of relating to the self as "sinner" (*zuiren).* As I will show, the polyvalency of *zuiren* as meaning both "sinner" and "criminal" in vernacular Mandarin is highly generative; this capacious usage of "sin" (*zui*) allows for both the enfolding and transformation of state logics of crime-prevention and securitization into the everyday lives of my interlocutors, producing subjects whose ethical practices exceed the frame of concerns about *suzhi.*

Educating "Little Sinners"

At the Covenant School, I often heard the expression, "that's just what little sinners do" (*zhe jiu shi xiao zui ren de xingwei*) whenever there was misbehavior and rule-breaking among students. It was an accepted truth among teachers at the school that these little sinners (*xiao zuiren*) were naturally apt to act in their own selfish interests, disrupt class, and glory excessively in their defeat of friends in classroom games. They incited competition, used swear words gleaned from forbidden TV shows, and bragged about their grades. Even in the intimate spheres

of the Covenant School, where classmates were usually housemates as well, tacit bullying among children could be a fact of life: this too was a sign of their *xiao xie'e* ("small evils").

Teachers had intimate knowledge of their students' *gexing*, or personalities, and discussions of the minute shifts of their dispositions and family lives were crucial parts of pedagogical discourse. Gathering around a large shared desk that was the hub of activity at the school, one teacher might share observations that a seven-year-old male student puts on a "face" (*mianzi*) for his teachers that disguises his tendency to tyrannize over his classmates. Another teacher might complain that a second-grader is still occupying the same bed as her parents when she's much too old for it. Or perhaps, after an arduous class with first-graders on an unseasonably hot day, Teacher Chen, heavily pregnant with her first child, might comfort a bedraggled new volunteer: "It's normal. You see, they're just *xiao zuiren*. People think children are innocent, that childhood is a time of purity, but they're wrong."

While these after-class huddles among teachers might be a common ritual of collegial commiseration across all types of schools, such references to students and children as *zuiren* would likely be incomprehensible to most Chinese people outside of Christian circles. To characterize children as *zuiren* seems particularly striking at a time when Chinese attitudes toward children, particularly among urban middle class parents, are widely perceived to be overly-indulgent — in the era of the "little emperors and empresses," children of a One-Child Policy society seemingly occupy a privileged place. Neoliberal transformations of education into a market-driven commodity have made middle-class children particularly intensive carriers of cultural capital and objects of obsessive cultivation (Crabb 2010). Yet, at the Covenant School, it is the conception of children as "little sinners" — a designation that would seem to sit uneasily

with national aspirations attached to a newly-cosmopolitan generation of privileged youngsters — that enables the formation of ethical subjectivity.

Translating "sin"

A brief digression is warranted here on the semantics of translating the Biblical concept of "sin" (*hamartano* in the New Testament) as *zui* (罪). Along with other so-called "term controversies" in the history of Sino-Christian translation, the translation of the concept of "sin" as *zui* has long been regarded as problematic. In Chinese, *zui* denotes "crime" in the legal sense, and its corresponding *zuiren* (sinner), a "criminal" who has been caught and convicted. In everyday contexts, the more common legalist denotation of *zui* frequently causes confusion among newly-converted Christians, and many cite it as a conceptual obstacle in converting unbelievers. This "translation challenge" of *zui*, for instance, came up just minutes into the first session of a catechism class at the Holy Word Church, a new church built in a Nanjing development zone. Pastor Yang, head pastor at a well-established Three-Self Church in the city, was teaching the inaugural class for a group of church members set to be baptized in a month. The first class in the series of eight addressed the basic theology of the Trinity. Speaking of God's salvation as applied to humans with original sin (*yuanzui)*, he said:

> The *zui* that is used in the Bible is not the same as the *zui* that we understand in society (*shehui*). Everyone should understand this. *Zui* in society means actually doing evil deeds (*zuo'e*), committing crimes (*fan zui*), breaking the law (*wei fa*) — these kinds of actions. What our Bible says, to think something evil without actually bringing it about, in society we can't call this *zui*. But the Bible says that when one person has a bad thought, they already have *zui*. So, the *zui* that is in the Bible, it penetrates to your internal state, your motivation. For ordinary people this will be very uncomfortable to hear. 'What *zui* do I have? I'm pretty good and honest [*laolao shishi de*], what kind of a *zuiren* am I?"

This resistance to or misunderstanding of *zui* that Pastor Yang anticipates in his preamble has been frequently construed as a sign of a fundamental civilizational or dispositional difference between Chinese people and Westerners. Many of the Chinese pastors I spoke to understood the "translation problem" of *zui* to index a certain irresolvable conflict between East Asian and Judeo-Christian philosophies of humanity, a contrast in fundamental cultural dispositions. The concept of "sin" as an innate quality of persons was frequently contrasted with Confucian scholar Mencius's insistence that humanity is fundamentally good (although this is not a philosophy that is universally held by Confucians). As Tu Wei-ming has written, "A defining characteristic of East Asian thought is the widely accepted proposition that human beings are perfectible through self-effort in ordinary daily existence" (Tu 1985, 19). *Zui*, in its evocation of "original sin" or a fundamental evil that outstrips the efforts of humanity to avert, is thus often taken to be a *foreign* concept. From the perspective of some Chinese Christians, the denial of sinful humanity in favor of an "optimistic" view of human nature constitutes the main source for what they by-and-large consider to be China's "godless" traditional culture.

Nonetheless, *zui* and *zuiren* are terms that have become shibboleths among Chinese Christians, indexing mastery of a certain "Christianese" and invoking in-group-ness (Chow 2013). Coming to linguistic clarity marks a critical juncture in the life of a Christian, as Susan Harding (2000) has written about in her study of Christian "Fundamentalists" in the U.S. whose spiritual transformations are enabled by the adoption of particular ways of speaking. Concurrently, the resistance to embodying *zui* in oneself — and the insistence that one is fundamentally good, honest, decent — also features in many narratives of failed conversions and endangered faith, and even in larger historical narratives of the "intractibility" of the Chinese, a kind of "native" resistance to Christian conversion. ("My husband won't admit to his *zui*," I often

heard from church-going sisters who had tried and failed to bring along their "stubborn" spouses.) A particularly strong embodiment of an identity as a *zuiren* is often a public sign of piety and of being particularly sincere (*qiancheng*).

A sensitivity to sin

On my first day as a volunteer at the Covenant School, unsure of what to expect, I had a long conversation with Principal Pan as she walked me through the school's spaces. Rather than give me an overview of the curriculum or explain the school's history, Principal Pan relayed to me a narrative of her own spiritual path. Pan, unmarried and in her forties, was a quite singular figure in the socially-conservative world of the Grace Alone Assembly. Unmarried and in her forties, forever in flannel shirts and sandals, she described herself as a "person of freedom" (*ziyou zhuyi zhe*). She proclaimed pride in not belonging to any documented work unit (*danwei*), even though it complicated her plans to apply for a visa to visit the U.S., as was her dream. Appointed principal of Covenant by the school board during the year preceding my visit, she was a divisive and divided character, passionate, eloquent, and yet ambivalent in her administrative duties and the responsibilities of developing Covenant's capacities to keep up with a growing student body. Her autobiographical commentary gave me a sense of not only how she saw herself, but exemplified a mode of testimony that would soon become familiar to me: the path of the "model *zuiren.*"

Describing herself as a self-aggrandizing high achiever in her youth — arrogant and self-possessed — Pan had multiple contacts with Christian prosleytizers as a student at university but had always resisted conversion. As one of the few from her village in Anhui Province to make it to a national university, she studied medicine and became a physician, but recalls experiencing a

psychic crisis in her first year: “Medicine in China is all about prescribing drugs, making money. All the old-timers did corrupt things, taking gifts and money, right in front of us! I saw it all, the gifts handed behind people’s backs.” At the end of her first year, she quit her job as a physician and began working as a bank clerk — a step down, but employment that she said she got by “opening back doors” (*kai houmeng),* wrangling favors from an extended *guanxi* network. Distressed again at what she saw —“most people came through the backdoor, you got a job because you were someone’s daughter or wife or mistress”—Pan quit her bank job within the year as well. This time, she was reduced to being a street vendor near the Nanjing University campus, where she sold cheap goods — instant noodles, hot water bags, other daily necessities — to students. She traveled via an electric bike to a wholesale factory outside the city to pick up her merchandise, and made only 20 or 30 RMB a day, barely enough to survive on. During this time of struggle, she recalled, the seeds of her conversion were sown:

> I had prayed before but not like this. I prayed to God every day. Never before or since in life have I felt as close to God. I realized that, even before then, during my employment troubles, I had a special sensitivity to sin (*dui zui de minggan*). I noticed corruption everywhere. When I worked at the bank, I would sometimes accept money, but I felt sick about it afterwards, physically nauseous, it wasn't something I could bear.

Significantly, Principal Pan’s experience of "sensitivity to sin/*zui*" emphasizes emotional and bodily capacity more than it does the propositional content of Christian belief. The term *mingan* suggests an acuteness of perception — it can mean a special susceptibility, as in being particularly "sensitive to cold" or "sensitive to light." (This has an interesting and complex significatory relation to the usage of "political sensitivity," *zhengzhi mingan*, that I write about in the previous chapter.) While this disgust with corruption has affinities with genres of secular moral complaint often heard in China today, it is the bodily dismay (nausea, not being able to

physically continue in the presence of corrupt dealings) that stands out in Pan's story, and that it shares with other experiential accounts I have heard from Grace Alone Church members. Several GAC brothers and sisters, for instance, either quit their white-collar jobs in companies and research institutions or were on the verge of doing so because of feeling an increasing inability to physically withstand those places of employment.

It was a feeling, one GAC brother named Peng Yuan told me, akin to having a hyper-attenuated sense of smell in a foul, polluted place (a potent metaphor given the record-breaking air pollution we were then experiencing in Nanjing). Having graduated with high marks from a prestigious university in the northeast, Peng had come to Nanjing to work for a trading firm but only lasted a few months, before he quit his position and took up temporary jobs at small businesses owned by Christian friends, finally settling on a job selling knickknacks in the stalls below the Xinjiekou subway station. He moved out of the apartment he had once shared with co-workers and into a small home shared by a rotating set of single men from the GAC, which was known as the "Brothers' Home." Although Peng Yuan, who was talkative and loved a good debate, sustained lively relationships with his old "atheist" friends and pursued conversation with all kinds of people, he admitted that, increasingly, he found himself unable to form serious attachments with non-Christians.

For both Principal Pan and Peng Yuan, the faculty of a "sensitivity to *zui"* seems to operate beneath consciousness, as the attunement that both prefigures conversion and that, in hindsight, makes a conversion event seem inevitable. At the same time, it is the everyday experience of this sensitivity that informs one's on-going moral disposition as a Christian convert; for this reason, my interlocutors warned of the dangers of *de*sensitization after spending time in particularly "sinful" environments and becoming numb in one's moral attunement. Thus, this sensitivity

represents an embodiment of the gulf between Christians and the secular world (*shisu shijie*) as well as the necessity of communion with other Christians. As Charles Hirschkind has argued, moral and political judgments are grounded in the "affective and visceral registers of human existence" (2006, 31). Here, I argue that "sensitivity to sin" is one such register for my Covenant interlocutors, which ground their decision to break away from the stability of state-run schools and embrace a state of self-exile.

Ethical habits

Covenant teachers were expected to be spiritual models, in that they should aspire to a special degree of sincerity in their faith and maintain vigilance over their own spiritual states. "What makes a good teacher," she said, "is that they are constantly paying attention to their relationship with God." Covenant teachers held weekly prayer and study sessions led by one of the Grace Alone elders, also the father of a kindergarten student. They shared, as well, details of their private lives during faculty meetings — mundane exchanges of personal commiserations and advice that were formalized to a certain extent as "sharing opportunities" (*fenxiang jihui*) in which the principal served as a guide and interpreter of what was shared. Within these interactions, teachers engaged in nuanced evaluations and comparisons of their own and others' spiritual (*shuling*) states.

At the same time, a sense of shared "sinfulness" at the Covenant School gave rise to intimate relationships of nurture that both cut across kinship lines (in the form of teacher-student love) and intensify the centrality of kinship relations (in the sense that education is ultimately configured as a responsibility and reflection of the family). The object of such cultivation was not only the student (*xuesheng*) but just as importantly the teacher (*laoshi*). The degree of

intimacy between students and teachers was unusual compared to those in public schools, and bound up in some cases in close-kin networks, in other cases in domestic co-habitation among families. At times, teachers were self-conscious about the collapse of overlapping relations. Chen Laoshi, for instance, shared an apartment with one of her students and insisted in a strict separation of their two spheres: "At home, she calls me *jiejie* (older sister) and at school it has to be *laoshi* (teacher)."

A male church member, also a volunteer at Covenant, remarked to me that the teacher-student interactions he observed went *beyond* that of family relationships: "The *laoshi* there care more for their students than family members do. They are closer to them than their own parents." This extra-filial degree of care was seen to further endow *laoshi* with a particular sensitivity to students' internal motivations, unencumbered by the tendency of blood relations to spoil or think too highly of their children. For instance, Wu Laoshi told me that she purposefully refrained from praising a student who got top marks in her math class because "I can see some signs that he's beginning to get arrogant *(jiao'ao*), and I think it has something to do with how much they prop him up at home."

Yet, during school hours, these forms of teacherly and maternal care often seemed to blur in the abundance of talk about the best practices of *jiaoyang*, a hybrid notion of "education" (*jiao*) and "care" or "cultivation" (*yang*). Since some of the teachers were parents of their students, or at the least had intimate knowledge of how their non-offspring were being parented at home, these exchanges of advice and expertise were commonplace, a source of both camaraderie and, in some instances, subtle rebuke. A teacher called Sister Qi (this form of address marking her out as an emulated person with good "spiritual habits") was one of the most vocal in such conversations, often asserting herself as an expert on aspects of childcare and

taking particular interest in the parental preparations of the pregnant Teacher Chen. One of Sister Qi's strongest insistences was that practices of attachment parenting — "coddling," excessive holding, rocking to sleep — popular among many Chinese mothers (and caretaker grandmothers) produced disastrous and lasting habits of over-dependency in children. Using her own son, a five-year-old named Shengming ("holy name"), as an example, she described to me how, against the advice of her own mother, she never rocked her son to sleep and always had him sleep alone in his own bed in a separate room with the door closed. "He has his own routine now," she said. "Before bed and after this bath, he listens to three verses of the Bible. We have a Bible-reading machine and he knows how to play three verses by himself. Then he turns it off and goes to sleep."

Against this precocious display of self-directed pious behavior, she brings up the contrastive example of the son of her younger brother, a non-Christian. Her nephew, she said, was brought up by his grandmother in the close manner of most Chinese families, co-sleeping with her since his birth: "He's older than Shengming and he still can't sleep alone, plus he has to be holding hands and touching feet [*shoubaoshou jiaobaojiao*] when he sleeps." Sister Qi noted that her disapproval for her nephew's upbringing, and the relative severity with which she brought up Shengming, accounted for tension and conflict between her and her mother. Such chasms within the extended (and often unconverted) family members of Christians were, in her estimation, a near-ubiquitous problem. It was also clear from her descriptions of the two boys that she read a difference on their bodies and modes of comportment that marked them as Christian and non-Christian. Her own son was already, at five, developing an autonomous spiritual routine of his own volition. Her nephew, on the other hand, was literally still attached to his caregiver, his body resisting being separated from the source of familial comfort.

Conclusion

The stakes of the Covenant School's project came into focus during a church-wide performance staged by the school at the end of 2013. For the month leading up the festivities, teachers painstakingly corralled students into performing songs, skits, dances, and memorized speeches, meant to display the fruits of the semester's learning. Daily rehearsals took place at the school, and I, along with other volunteer, did my part in painting backdrops and arranging the English-language songs that were to take up about a quarter of the performance program. The event was, in fact, meant to evangelize Christian education to the congregation at large, which included many parents who were still wary of withdrawing their children from accredited institutions. Principal Pan toyed with the idea of making a "promotional video" featuring interview segments with parents giving their testimonies, but in the end decided to allow one parent to make a representative speech during intermission, on the topic, "Why did you send your child to Covenant?"

Hu Jun, the parent asked to address the crowd, was in his mid-thirties, a full-time preacher at a large house church in Anhui. His son was an exemplary student at Covenant, and Preacher Hu was one of the most visibly involved fathers among the Covenant parents. As an "out-of-towner" (*waidi ren)* like the majority of Covenant families, he split his time between Nanjing, where his wife lived with his son in a group home shared with another Covenant family; his local church in an Anhui prefecture; and in theology training at an underground seminary. In his speech to the audience — which combined elements of sermon, testimony, and advertising pitch — Hu drew a comparison between families semi-displaced due to seeking out Christian education and the exiled Israelites of the Old Testament. (Indeed, he had chosen the name "Moses" for his son.) He explained his family's decision as a matter of following God's commandment, an "expression of faith from within its substance, a testimony" — that is, sending his son to Covenant was not foremost a matter of their "child's healthy development," but more

importantly, a "part of their faith that couldn't be lacking." In Hu's appeal to Christian parents as a coherent category of persons — a counter-public whose moral values were fundamentally different than those of the general public — he also cannily put voice to their lingering skepticism:

> Our hearts will be unsteady. Well, there're are no degrees, that's okay, but how much longer can the school go on? Can anybody give us a guarantee? [Laughter in the audience] No guarantee! What are we going to do about middle school? High school? Where will they go to college?
>
> There was actually one time when a mother in our home church said to me: our entire society is like this, there's no remedy, do you think you can change the world? Then, she said, smiling she said to me, are you using your children as experiments?
>
> No, brothers and sisters, we are not using our children as experiments. This is very serious. […] I would rather see my child lug bricks in order to eat, then to to see him take steps onto the road of sin and walk toward the gates of Hell.

Here, Hu puts two voicings of doubt into play. First is the voice of the hesitant parent who has legitimate qualms about sending their child to an unrecognized school. This mode of shared uncertainty and anxiety is part of the performative efficacy that calls the public of Christian parents into being. Second, Hu stages a confrontation with an accusatory sister in his home congregation, using her skeptical remarks to voice what he suspects are widely-shared sentiments that undermine underground schools. In Hu's speech, these two renditions of doubt — both reflecting a sense of the underground school's precarity — seem poised as ethical oppositions: the first voicing of doubt remains in the form of questioning and lands on "no guarantee," thus containing an element of faith in the abstraction of uncertainty, and the second form, the seemingly intrusive questioning of the sister, stands as a rhetoric of accusation, of disbelief in the fundamental goal that Hu sees as the ultimate purpose of education — salvation for his son, a sinner.

An everyday life built on "no guarantee" is, by its nature, fragile. And the religious skepticism toward future-oriented material aspirations voiced by Preacher Hu was also met by corresponding forms of doubt and dissent, issuing from subjects in attendance separated from Hu

by age and class. After the year-end performances were over and it was time to pick up the detritus, I chatted with two young brothers, both single and in their twenties, who came to see the performance. They were not much impressed with Preacher Hu's speech, finding his vision too closed off and insular — although they grudgingly praised his oratorical skills as being "decent for a rural house church preacher." For them, their aspirational orientations are far more this-worldly, and they criticized Preacher Hu for having too much of a "fundamentalist" (*jiyao pai*) and "evangelical" (*fuyin pai*) style most associated with the insular "paternalistic" world of Chinese rural house churches. "I support the idea of Christian education, but I'd never send my own kids to a school like Covenant," one brother said. They felt their identities and faiths had been shaped by experience in public schools and university, the latter being a particular fomenter of conversion among disaffected youths; their immersion among nonbelievers in "society" had been the sort of grindstone that strengthened their resolve and gave specificity to their critical perspectives. Without this experience, they each feared that their future children would grow "soft" — feminine, in fact, and too much molded into pious subjects to have any purchase on the world outside a self-exiled community. My two unimpressed informants would move back and forth through different aspirational imaginations, finding themselves convinced by some accounts of Christian education's gains while highly skeptical of others.

The tensions signaled by the two brothers' disagreements with Preacher Hu point to the uncertain terrain on which the ethical projects of the Covenant School are being pursued, even within the fold of their "home" community. Throughout the months I would know the GAC and Covenant School communities, I frequently witnessed this oscillation between embracing "no guarantee" and lingering forms of attachment to state-protected institutions — a wavering around which both sentiments of personal spiritual doubt and faith could congeal. This tension highlights a precarious character of the everyday, one that Veena Das characterizes as "the mutual shadowing of the ordinary and skepticism … so that to secure the everyday, far from being something we might take for granted, might be thought of an achievement" (2010: 376).

We might think here with Arjun Appadurai's work on the "capacity to aspire" as locally specific sets of values tied to imaginations of the "good life" (2013, 292-3). As part of Appadurai's discussion of aspirational horizons that are unequally districted among the globe's poor and struggling populaces, he contrasts two "ethical styles" of approaching the future, which he terms the "ethics of possibility" and the "ethics of probability." The former (and more valorized in Appadurai's work) are ways of thinking and feeling that "produce greater equity" in the capacity to aspire and "increase the horizons of hope"; the latter by contrast is a negative form of aspiration that is really risk avoidance, and arises out of regimes of risk calculation and the profiting of global capitalism from disaster and insecurity (2013, 295). People's practices of future-making, Appadurai suggests, emerge from the encounters between these ethical styles, in which the possibilities for anticipated futurities are set against calculations of risk.

Drawing on Appadurai's astute push for more anthropological attention to the valences of such "speculations," I suggest that the "capacity to aspire" might itself be re-valuated within quotidian practices of future-making. Indeed, as well as expressing forms of value and visions of the good life (or afterlife) that compete with normative ones, Preacher Hu's speech illuminates a form of self-negating aspiration, one that *puts into question* the value of normative aspiration and striving itself. The image of self-abnegation that Hu asks his audience to imagine as the potential price for his son's salvation — that of being a laborer, carrying bricks — is a "step back" for the educated, lower-middle-class status of the Hu family, as it is for most of the congregation; it flies in the face of the striving toward upward mobility that constitutes the shared fantasy of Chinese public aspiration, which has been internalized by the sister whose disbelief Hu voices. Hu's embrace of the affect of "no guarantee" in a sense encapsulates the encounter between what Appadurai terms an "ethics of probability" with "an ethics of possibility," in which the risk of an insecure future is itself the condition of possibility for ethical being.

CHAPTER FIVE
Engendering heterodoxy: the corporeal politics of *xiejiao*

Introduction

On a smoggy Sunday morning in Nanjing, I'm approaching Shengxun Tang from the parking lot with a host of volunteer ushers when I hear a strange voice rising above the sound of chatter. A lone woman has set up camp a dozen meters in front of the church entrance, issuing a shrill incantation, a rhythmic litany of which I can only make out snippets due to her thick Jiangbei accent — the words *Jesus Christ* and *almighty heaven,* the phrase *two thousand years*. I contemplate approaching her to listen more closely, but I'm quickly whisked away by the volunteers, who don't bother with the woman herself and emphatically direct the congregants around and past her. For the next few weeks, the woman is a recurrent figure outside Sunday services — in the same clothes (cheap rhinestoned t-shirt and sneakers, a canvas bag), speaking in the same tones. Church-goers make their way around her on their route into the chapel, taking surreptitious peeks over their shoulders or shaking their heads in knowing disapproval. It is not until a few Sundays later that Pastor Zhang, head minister at Shengxun Tang, diverts his sermon to finally address her presence:

> We've all seen the person who has come to our doors. Some people have been telling me that we should let her in. But whatever is *xiejiao* (evil cult) or *yiduan* (heresy) we must keep out. She's not here to hear the Word (*tingdao*), she's here to pull in sheep (*la yang).* If you try to pull her in with us, you yourself might fall in (*ni ruguo xiang ba ta la jing lai, ni ye xü hui shuai jing qü).*

In Pastor Zhang's words, we can hear the production of a complex configuration of inside and outside in the relationship to heterodox speech. The woman whom Pastor Zhang has identified as propagating *xiejiao* ("evil cults") on the grounds of Shengxun Tang is allowed to

remain on its fringes as a reminder to the congregation of the *internal* presence of heterodoxy within Christian spheres; her voice and body, past which congregants must walk to enter the chapel, marks a zone of exclusion that nonetheless remains interior to the space of worship. She, too, marks an "inside" into which unwitting observers might be pulled, should they become lax in policing this boundary. Pastor Zhang employs her presence to mark a space of both absence and excess: the absence of proper religious thought, and the excessive force of this speech that can cause others to "fall in."

Discourses of *xiejiao* frequently cite a particular social subject as both its most vulnerable victim and its most dangerous perpetrator: the rural woman. The woman in front of Shengxun Tang may have served a pedagogical purpose for the pastors at the church, not only because she could be used to train church-goers to disengage from such public performances, but because she also exemplified the kind of "evil cult" adherent frequently caricatured by Chinese Christians. This stereotypical figure is vividly illustrated, for instance, in the cartoon below (Figure 9), which was printed in *Tian Feng* (Heavenly Wind), the official publication of the nationwide Three-Self Church. Wearing a black shirt with *xiejiao* written in place of a brand logo, standing at the ready with propaganda posters and a bucket of poster paste, the "cult" woman is rebuffed with an oversized hand on which is written the following admonishments to the reader, clearly issuing from church authority: "Don't Listen" (*bu ting*), "Don't believe" (*bu xin),* "Don't Spread" (*bu chuan*), and "Don't Participate" (*bu canyü).* Although not explicit in its class and cultural associations, a few sartorial clues index the figure to the familiar derogatory image of rural women in the city: the outdated hairdo, the black t-shirt with loud logo, and the prominent open mouth signaling a loud, unrefined voice.

Figure 9: Cartoon of a woman wearing a T-shirt labeled xiejiao ("evil cult"). Written on the hand: "Don't Listen," "Don't believe," "Don't Spread," and "Don't Participate." Source: www.ccctspm.org.

This caricature resonates with an array of prejudices embedded in perceptions of rural-to-urban migrants, particularly women; qualities of "backwardness" and "low *suzhi* (quality)" are often wedded to women identified as *dagongmei* (working sisters, in reference to migrant women in their teens to twenties in urban waged labor) or *xiangxia laotai* (country old ladies) or *baomu* (domestic workers), an assemblage of social categories comprising what Wanning Sun has called the "Chinese subaltern" (Sun 2009, 2014). As Sun has argued, affixing qualities of "low *suzhi"* to mobile bodies – i.e., rural-urban migrants who come from stereotypically "low quality" origins, like Anhui – depends heavily on processes of reading "corporeal evidence" like "complexion, hairstyle, accent, speech, body language, and … clothes" (2009, 619). One sees precisely such corporeal evidence being evoked in the *Tianfeng* cartoon, which can be seen as instructive media designed to train spectators in a certain practice of reading and inspecting others.

In conversations with my interlocutors, I found that these gendered notions of the "low quality" of peasant women were ubiquitously re-inscribed onto rural Christian women as

tendencies toward superstition, heretical thinking, and a stronger susceptibility to cult religion. Consequently, whenever there were influxes of migrant women to urban churches, anxieties would emerge about the potential theological "pollution" of the congregation, and attempts would be made to re-educated or mediate these women's relationship to spiritual texts and doctrine. For some of my pastor interlocutors, these anxieties made the overwhelming presence of "at-risk" female congregants – who are statistically reckoned to comprise some three-quarters of the Chinese Protestant population — both problematic to the "sorting out" *(zhengli*) of the church and a rich opportunity to make a difference through pastoral care.

This chapter unpacks the circulation and deployment of gendered signs of heterodoxy within Chinese Protestant discourse. By "signs of heterodoxy," I refer to the assemblage of phenomena – social bodies, ways of speaking, ordinary practices – that are indexically linked to what Chinese Christians designate as *xiejiao*. These designations are shifting and fluid, but they have a general relationship to notions of *luan* (disorder). Thus, I ask, what are the qualities and features that attend the disorderly in Chinese Christian practice? How are heterodox tendencies directly or indirectly indexed to certain social subjects, namely, lower class and so-called low *suzhi* (quality) women? How are gendered and classed bodies imagined to be differently vulnerable to heterodoxy, and indeed constituted through such exposures?

Heterodoxy, I will argue in this essay, is imagined in two ways simultaneously: as a disordering of signs (e.g., the misidentification of theological concepts or the superstitious "mixture" of Christian signs with other spiritual systems) and as a disordered way of *reading* sign phenomena (i.e., ordinary people's tendencies to mistakenly discern cause-and-effect, or to misattribute agency or authority, in ways that make them vulnerable to heretical thinking). Anti-heterodox campaigns, then, work on both these fronts; they affect ways to detect heterodox

signs as well as ways to reduce the risk of exposure through particular techniques of self-reflection and confession. Specific regimes of detection and prevention thus emerge in relation to the threat of heterodoxy. Yet the threat itself remains difficult to pin down, despite the Chinese government's release of a list of fourteen officially named cults in 2009. As an emblem of the *luan* (chaos) that is opposed to the orderliness of church-mandated practices, heterodoxy marks the "other-ness" of faith practices seen as eccentric and impure. The very capaciousness and instability of the term allows us to think about how religious difference is constituted internal to church communities.

Similar to the heterogeneity of practices labeled heterodox, the accompanying fields of disciplinary discourse are *heteroglossic* in Mikhail Bakhtin's sense (2010), comprising multiple logics and genres – including popular health advice, healing, popular psychology, and scientific reasoning. In this chapter, my attention to the heteroglossia of discourses around heterodoxy lends itself to an attunement to the multiple ways of *reading* signs (textual and embodied) that consequently emerge in response to the challenge of eradicating heterodoxy: for instance, practices of diagnosing the self and others of heterodox tendencies; of treating instances of suspicion and accusation; and of interpreting and re-appropriating instructional materials on avoiding cult activities disseminated by state apparatuses.

Ultimately, this chapter's analysis of how heterodoxy is assembled as a boundary, a threat, and an object of intervention for Christian communities aims to shed light on what Ann Anagnost (2004) has referred to as the "corporeal politics" of value production in post-Socialist China. In her discussion of the coding of migrant laborers' bodies as having low *suzhi* (and their inversion in the high-*suzhi* figure of the urban middle-class child), Anagnost notes that the

devaluation (or, as she puts it, derogation) of this population through the reckoning of human capital obscures the actual surplus value that is produced from their labor:

> The laboring migrant body is the hidden source of wealth production in China's economic 'takeoff,' even as its lack of value is blamed for holding back China's development. The discourse of *suzhi* therefore yields a surplus value not just in the economic realm but also in the realm of political representation. It works ideologically as a regime of representation through which subjects recognize their positions within the larger social order and thereby sets up the conditions for socioeconomic striving (193).

In Anagnost's account, the derogation of migrant laborers is understood not just as the implication of inferiority, but the active impairment or removal of value from certain bodies that allows for the redistribution — or, one could say, re-inscription — of value onto others (namely, that of the aspirational middle-class). The *corporeality* of the politics of *suzhi* refers to the "intensification of the body *as* a site of investment" within this economy of human capital (2004, 200). She sees both the derogated body of the rural migrant and the valorized body of the middle-class only child (a product of population management policies) as sites where abstractly differentiated categories of embodied labor are manifested.

Drawing from Anagnost's insights, my examination of signs of heterodoxy similarly focuses on the regimes of representation that derogate "heterodox" subjects — particularly rural women — in ways that obscure the labor of these very subjects in creating religious community. To be more precise, my ethnography shows that, despite the claims of anti-cult discourses, heterodoxy is not merely constituted as a negative feature of Chinese Christian life to be excised, but also as a source for the positive (re)production of value, through labors of care, healing, and the cultivation of alternative spiritual gifts. Despite the fact that rural women are often framed as problematic to the theological ordering of the church, it is often their labors of overcoming their own derogation in systems of value that constitute some of the personal and organizational bonds

relied on by the church authorities. In what follows, I move from a broad discussion of the "return" of *xiejiao* discourses to the public fold, to an examination of how women who are themselves often the target of anti-*xiejiao* warnings work to fashion protections and solidarities against it.

Xiejiao's return

After a long period of relative absence from public discourse, the term *xiejiao* regained currency in the late 1990s, and now permeates both the Chinese state's governance of religious life broadly speaking, and Christian life in particular. *Xiejiao,* a term with a long history of usage by imperial regimes, literally translates as something like "crooked teachings," as opposed to the proper "upright" order (*zheng*正), as embodied by the imperial state. This opposition organized an array of state suppressions against sectarian rebellions throughout Chinese dynastic history, beginning in the Eastern Han (CE 25-550), during which a particular discourse stigmatizing politically heterodox religious groups emerged (Palmer 2008, 116). In interpretations of Chinese religious history, the distinction between "orthodoxy" and "heterodoxy" has also been sociologically represented as the mapping of difference between the beliefs of elite classes and the masses. Max Weber, for instance, struck upon this demarcation in his reading of the Dutch Sinologist J.J.M. de Groot, suggesting in his volume *The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism* that Confucian orthodoxy, embodied by the sober literati, was fundamentally opposed to Daoist heterodoxy, oriented towards magic and ecstasy, and embraced by the masses (Weber 1964).

During the Maoist period, the term *xiejiao* was largely replaced by "reactionary secret societies" (*fandong huidaomen*), which nonetheless marked rebellious religious groups like

Yiguandao (Way of Pervading Unity) for suppression in much the same way. State discourses of *xiejiao* were reanimated and came to once again replace "reactionary secret societies" around 1989-99, when the Chinese state made Falungong illegal in Mainland China and a pervasive public campaign was launched against the new religious movement.[1] Since then, state campaigns against *xiejiao* have portrayed forms of heterodox associations as special threats to public order, with frequent reference to a series of cases in which cult activity has resulted in injury or death. Among the most notorious of these incidents occurred in 2014, when a group of adherents of *Quanneng Shen Jiaohui* (全能神教会, Church of the Almighty God, also known as Eastern Lightning) beat a woman to death with a steel mop-handle for being a "demon" — an incident captured on the security camera of a McDonalds, and circulated widely in Chinese media. In the months following the attack, I saw state-issued warnings against *xiejiao* began to appear regularly in Nanjing's residential neighborhoods and Three-Self church courtyards in the form of illustrated *guatu* (wall hangings), with instructions on how to recognize "cult" behaviors among strangers, acquaintances, and kin.

Within Protestant circles, *yiduan* (异端, glossed as heretical thought) and *xiejiao* (cult associations) were often paired in ministers' cautionary speeches, which warned of the twin dangers of engaging in heretical thought and encountering un-orthodox religious associations. The warning signs of *xiejiao* were numerous, but the descriptions I most often heard emphasized claims of apocalyptic prophecy or millenarian speculation; the demand to obey a human leader who supplanted God's singular authority; and a focus on faith healing, spirit possession, and miraculous healing.

[1] For details of the anti-cult campaigns and the larger context of popular religious and healing practices that emerged in post-Reform China, see Chen 2003; Palmer 2007; Ownby 2008.

In my observations, such descriptions of cults and warnings against them were issued as forcefully in Three-Self as in underground churches, although the tenor of the critique could often take different forms. In the official statements of Three-Self churches, *xiejiao* organizations were often accused of "disturbing social order," and being "unpatriotic" ("Resolution on Opposing Evil Cults," 2002), in which "cults" could at times stand in for any religious organizations that were detrimental to the coherence of the Three-Self governing organization. In the official materials of the Three-Self establishment, many plans for reforms of heterodoxy took place under the banner of Theological Reconstruction (*shenxue sixiang jianshe*), a movement to consolidate theological views in the officially-recognized church that coincided with the state's crackdown on Falungong, and that some seminarians have privately described to me as an internal "purge" of Christian critics of the state. Critics of the Theological Reconstruction movement has characterized the program itself as "heretical" due to perceptions of its attempts to appease state administrators by diluting (*danhua*) the doctrine of justification by faith (Dunn 2009; Kindopp and Hamrin 2004). At the same time, unregistered churches are similarly arrayed against the encroachment of *xiejiao.* Underground preachers I spoke to in Nanjing rued the influence of cults on the theological unity of parishioners, particularly as their congregations were growing beyond the pastoral capacity of their few ministers; furthermore, they felt endangered by the tendency for governmental anti-cult crackdowns to indiscriminately target *all* unregistered churches, subjecting all house churches to intensified surveillance and disruption.

I also observed a more quotidian spectrum of threat within everyday Christian discourses, what we might call "minor heterodoxy": confused and superstitious thinking, the inculcation of practices and the retention of a "traditional" habitus counter to the proper disposition of a "modern Christian subject." Preachers often refer to this class of behaviors as *hunluan,* or chaos

and disorder. These anxieties about disorderly thinking and un-Christian habitus pervade populations of both state-sanctioned and "underground" churches. Minor pleasures can become sites of self-doubt, as two middle-aged women revealed to me once while we were chatting after a Sunday service: was a sin in the eyes of God, they wondered aloud, to *chi xie* (eat blood)? They were contemplating plans to cook a classic southern Chinese dish, made with pigs' blood curd and tofu, that weekend in celebration of a neighbor's pig slaughter. Would cooking that, or indulging in a bowl of the famous Nanjing snack of duck's blood soup and glass noodles, make them heretics of a sort? Now, given the prohibitions they had heard the preacher mention against "consuming life-blood,"[2] they were not so sure. These ambiguous behaviors and habits could easily cluster around other ideas of *suzhi* and *wenhua* (the quality of "having culture), falling disproportionately on segments of the church-going populations understood to lack both.

While scholars have detailed the reanimation of *xiejiao* anxieties and prohibitions in the post-Reform era, much of this scholarship neglects to attend specifically to the gender and class dimensions of this rhetoric as it is commonly experienced.[3] As I observed in my fieldwork, vulnerabilities to *xiejiao* are imagined to be differentially distributed and experienced by different bodies, conditioned by the kinds of social spaces individuals inhabit; further, the classing and gendering of *xiejiao* informs the ways in which particular social groups are responsibilized for detecting and preventing their own inculcation as heterodox Christians. In the

---

[2] Most likely reference to *Leviticus 17:10-12*: "And if any native Israelite or foreigner living among you eats or drinks blood in any form, I will turn against that person and cut him off from the community of your people, for the life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the Lord. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible. That is why I have said to the people of Israel, 'You must never eat or drink blood—neither you nor the foreigners living among you.'"

[3] Emblematic of this absence is David Palmer's insightful monograph *Qigong Fever* (2009), which mentions the disproportionately high percentage of female participants in Falungong, as well as contested statistics over the exact numbers of female members, but does not dwell much on the gendering of such practices themselves. Peter Sangren (1983) has also noted this lack of attention to gender in studies of Chinese folk religion, despite the prominence of female deities within Chinese rituals and religious pantheons.

next section, I will draw out some of the ways in which qualities of rurality and femininity become indexed to fears of *xiejiao,* in both explicit and implicit ways.

Rurality, gender, and *xiejiao*

Shortly after his sermon addressing the "cult" adherent outside Shengxun Tang, I asked Pastor Zhang, a well-known minister in the Nanjing Three-Self Church and a graduate of Shanghai's East China Theological Seminary (*Huadong shengxue yuan*), about why he thought *xiejiao* was a problem for the congregation at Shengxun Tang. In response, he looked to the residential high-rises that housed displaced farmers close to the church. For him, the high-rises represented a convergence of social ills in which *xiejiao* could spread like a disease: "Farmers lose their jobs and social connections that they once had. They become idle. They're isolated in those buildings, and all kinds of secretive meetings can go on. We've heard about how some house churches can quickly become cult assemblages (*xiejiao zuzhi*), which nobody to look in on what's going on."

Pastor Zhang's impressions were not infrequently voiced among those in both Three-Self and underground house churches. *Xiejiao,* as Pastor Zhang saw it, was symptomatic of the social instabilities that followed rapid urbanization and peasant relocation, a form of response to social marginality; this marginality was not necessarily or centrally marked by material deprivation — many of the relocated peasants, he insisted, actually lived in relatively improved economic conditions than they had before — but by the absenting of previous structures (*guilü)* that regulated life. "They have been culled (*taotai*) from many spheres," he said of the displaced

peasants, "and are now faced with trying to become useful in different ways."[4] In this figuration, former peasants live in a state of suspension between their previous agricultural work and a realm of skilled labor to which they have little access, and are imagined to be particularly vulnerable to *xiejiao's* promises of an alternative route to material gains. Pastor Zhang's remarks linking *xiejiao* to rural conditions of marginality are echoed in many sociological diagnoses of the prevalence of cult activity. Yet others attribute rural masses' susceptibility to a heterodox "folk religion" version of Christianity to a more fundamental and sweeping cultural tendency, as does the author of an article published in the popular news magazine Phoenix News (*Fenghuang Xinwen*), titled "Interpreting why evil cults love to act in the name of Christianity":

> China has long been a feudal society and peasants are accustomed to showing obedience. Even today, although there is no longer an emperor, people are still accustomed to obeying authority figures. Folk Christians (*minjian jidutu)* also have this characteristic. The faithful have a special reverence for those "especially holy" (*tebie ling)* people with "gifts of the Spirit" (*shengling enci*)… Such Christians are especially interested in whether Jesus Christ is "spiritually experienced" (*lingyan*), and in fact, to them Jesus Christ is a "basic Bodhisattva" (*ji pusa*). As long as he can save them from suffering and hardship, and can protect their and their family's safety and health, they will believe and convert (Xü Jia 2014).

Such generalizations of a broadly-understood "rural attitude" — here expressed as a special attachment to utilitarian religion, and a willingness to substitute Jesus Christ for other deities — reads these supposed rural tendencies back onto the national body, as a lingering feature of China's "feudal society." Implicitly, these tendencies are not only understood to hold back rural persons from full participation in upwardly mobile society, but to reflect an on-going deficiency in Chinese culture writ large. This rhetoric of rural deficiency does not necessarily

[4] The term 淘汰*taotai,* as Anagnost (2004, 204) points out, means to "cull" or to put into disuse, and is "inseparably bound to the notion of the survival of the fittest in Chinese translations of nineteenth-century evolutionary theory." The

insist that such dispositions are permanent; on the contrary, the identification of *xiejiao* with rural marginality also propels the argument that improving rural converts' understanding of Christian theology will combat their vulnerability to heterodox thought, and has prompted efforts to expand the Chinese church's infrastructure for theological instruction (Wickeri 2015).

Since the mid-1990s the TSPM/CCC has also been active in producing educational materials that instruct ordinary Christians in how to resist the temptations of *xiejiao,* and this instructional media is particularly telling in its pointed feminization of the imagined recipient of heterodox teachings. One exemplification of this educational apparatus is the comic strip "Sister Martha" (*Mada zimei*), in which the heroin is illustrated to be a Christian model citizen, with echoes of the patriotic devotion and self-sacrifice modeled by Lei Feng in Maoist-era propaganda.[5] Sister Martha is cast as a middle-aged devotee of the Three-Self Church, unfailingly proper in her adherence to "normal religious activities" and cheerfully dismissive of heretical beliefs espoused by her neighbors and friends. In a May 1998 strip titled "Don't believe lightly" (*Qie wu qing xin*), Martha is shown intervening when groups of friends engage with *xiejiao* beliefs, including predictions about Jesus's second coming.[6] In the third frame, they show Martha literature that reads, "Jesus is coming soon. Jesus told me that you should give your money to me, stop work and await his coming. I am sent by him…". While Martha is smiling amicably, in each frame her hands are illustrated in the raised, palms-forward gesture that signals "Halt!" — echoing the large hand, inscribed with commands, that rebuts the wide-mouthed *xiejiao* adherent shown so prominently in the cartoon discussed at the beginning of this chapter

---

concept frequently appears in discussions of situations in which individuals lose the chance to secure middle-class (or upper-middle-class) status, such as the failure to gain admission to university.

[5] See Farquhar 2002, 37-46.

[6] A reprint and analysis of this cartoon appears in Emily Dunn (2009), " 'Cult,' Church, and the CCP."

(Figure 9). In the last frame, Martha opens the Bible to Act 1:11 ("…He will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven") and Matthew 25:13 ("Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or hour"), and presents these passages to be greeted by her friends' applause; these references resolve their confused speculations about Jesus's return. Here, Martha's firm yet amiable response to her friends' heretical thinking is meant to model a proper Protestant rebuttal to such encounters — her refutations are authorized by reference to the appropriate Scripture, and signal that she is Biblically well-versed (Dunn 2009, 111-12).

According to Mao Song'en, the series' author and illustrator, he modeled Sister Martha on the Biblical character of Martha of Bethany, who in the Gospel of Luke is depicted welcoming Christ into her home; her focus on hospitality is such that, unlike her sister Mary, she neglects to listen to Jesus's teaching and is consequently rebuked by Christ himself for her preoccupation with domestic tasks (Luke 10:38-42). There is a certain irony to this association. As Dunn (2009) points out, Jesus's rebuke of Martha resonates with common criticisms that house churches level against the Three-Self Church, claiming that it neglects the central teachings of Christ while overemphasizing service to the state and society. Nonetheless, Mao's choice of this model of feminine labor ("Martha" is etymologically derived from the Aramaic for "mistress") illuminates an imagination of the idealized female devotee: a woman who gently intervenes at any sign of burgeoning heresy on behalf of church authority, wielding Scriptural authority alongside her other virtues.

The negative figuration of this idealized feminine figure is the corrupted *xiejiao* adherent, whose spreading of untruths is often narrated by pastors in terms of virulence and disease. The most feared such organization (loosely termed) is Eastern Lightning, which has been described by Chinese Communist Party officials as an "evil force second only to the cultic organization of

Falun Gong," was the model for these descriptions.[7] First noted by nationally registered Protestant associations in 1992, the teachings of the religious movement remain scattered, its organization clandestine and decentralized. One of an array of heterodox religious movements that developed in rural north China in the early 1990s, it has become emblematic of a style of *xiejiao* that organizes its practices around miraculous healings and demon exorcisms, as well as apocalyptic visions. Its main claim is that "Jesus Christ has returned to earth in the form of a Chinese woman to judge humankind and end the present age" (Dunn 2015, 1). Accompanying this tenet is a vehement demonization of the Chinese Communist Party, as the "red dragon" controlled by Satan. Its embrace of "indigenous" customs of Chinese popular religions is inflected through a Christian grammar — in Eastern Lightning's cosmology, the second-coming of Christ has been prophesized to come from China (the East), in the form of a Female Christ (*nü jidu*) whose features and capacities resemble that of an indigenous goddess (Dunn 2015, 15).

The figure of the Female Christ is highly contested, even internal to the Church of Almighty God. Some identify her as a Shanxi woman named Yang Xiangbin, others as a woman with the surname Deng, and yet others as a purely mythical/symbolic figure with no humanly embodied form – but her portrayals are importantly grounded in the image of the low-status rural woman. In the following section of Eastern Lightning scripture from the movement's early years, for instance, a woman identified as the Female Christ recounts how she was first perceived:

> When people saw me, they didn't pay any attention to me because I didn't wear classy clothes and brought only my 'ID card' (*shenfen zheng*) to 'dine' with them. My face was not plastered with expensive makeup, there was no flashy crown on my head, and I wore only a pair of ordinary 'homemade shoes' on my feet. What people found most disappointing was that I did not wear lipstick and couldn't make

[7] Announcement from the First Division of the Shijiazhuang Public Security Bureau, *http://www.china21.org/simpChinese/docs/shijiazhuang/index.htm*

> 'polite conversation'… so people took me for a 'country bumpkin,' ignorant and foolish." (*Eastern Lightning 31st Scripture,* quoted in Dunn 2015, 71).[8]

In this vivid self-description, one finds remarkably sharp markers of class (the cheap clothes, the "homemade" cloth shoes), derogated rural identity ("country bumpkin"), and what might be termed a deficit in *wenhua* ("culture" or "education," cultural capital in Bourdieu's sense). In addition to the corporeal evidence of her dress and lack of adornment, her reliance on an ID card at a restaurant — rather than a debit or credit card — is a detail that seems particularly emblematic of her exclusion from an urban consumerist life entrenched in the flows of capital. In Eastern Lightning texts, these humble beginnings as a "country bumpkin" in fact authorize the Female Christ's spiritual purity. Although the narrative contours of the Female Christ's life are widely contested, they focus on her "ordinary" origins and upbringing in northern China. One popular story claims that she was born in Henan Province, and failed the nationwide university exam (*gaokao*), which led to a bout with mental illness and an eventual miraculous awakening to her own identity — a narrative that has striking parallels with that of another hero/villain of an indigenous religious movement, Hong Xiuquan, the leader of the grassroots millenarian Taiping Rebellion that occupied southeastern China in the mid-19th century.

Interestingly, Dunn notes that "while the doctrine of the Female Christ is central to Eastern Lightning's cosmology, the female nature of God is less prominent in Eastern Lightning's writings than outsiders' commentaries on the group would lead one to believe" (2009, 98). Scriptures refer more to the "Almighty God" (usually gendered male) than his

[8] Emily Dunn's (2015) textual analysis of Easter Lightning writings remains the most comprehensive treatment of its scripture, which compromises a sacred book, written between 1991 and 1997, called *The Word Appears in the Flesh* (话在肉身显现 *Hua zai roushen shang xianxian).* Adherents hold this book to contain the teachings of the Female Christ as either written or enunciated by her. It has periodically also been published under different names to avoid detection by Chinese security forces, including partial editions under the names of *Lightning from the East* (东方发出的闪电 *Dongfang fachu de shandian)* and *The Holy Spirit Speaks to the Churches (*圣灵向众教会说话 *Shengling xiang zhong jiahui shuohua).*

incarnation in the "Female Christ." Yet, the fact that outsiders, particularly in Protestant communities, so emphasize the femaleness of this "cult" deity might productively suggest the set of anxieties that surround Eastern Lightning. These anxieties, as I will explore in the next sections, weave together several dimensions of the imagination of rural woman as a problematic social actor, simultaneously gullible to others' "trickery" and prone to manipulation, both excessively vulnerable and excessively powerful.

A woman's disease

"Gambling is mostly a man's *zui* (crime/sin). *Xiejiao* is mostly a woman's disease,"[9] Pastor Liu Yubing[10] mused to me one day as we were sitting around in Qixia Church, a Three-Self church on the outskirts of Nanjing. Those listening to her that day — a group of women volunteer staffers at the church — nodded in agreement. This difference between a man's *zui* and a woman's disease had the ringing of truth to them. To unpack this difference, one must trace out the ways in which discourses of gambling and heterodoxy circulate, and the kinds of assumptions about agency, bodily vulnerability, and the intelligibility of signs such discourses carry.

Qixia Church is located in Qixia District, a northeastern district that had recently been incorporated into the Nanjing metropolitan area. Famously, it is home to the Qixia Buddhist temple, a major site of Buddhist pilgrimage and study in Jiangsu Province. I was accompanying Pastor Liu on her rounds attending to parsonages that did not have a permanent minister. That

[9] "赌博主要是男人的罪行。邪教主要是女人的疾病。*Dubo zhuyao shi nanren de zuixing, xiejiao zhuyao shi nvren de jibing."* The term *zui* here signifies both "crime" and "sin" in Chinese vernacular (see Chapter 3 for a more extensive discussion).

[10] Pastor Liu Yubing (a pseudonym) was perhaps one of the most well-respected female ministers working in Three-Self churches in Nanjing. She was educated at the Jinling Union Theological Seminary, and showed a particular skill at traversing various kinds of Christian spaces, preaching at both established churches and at rural "meeting spots."

day at Qixia, Pastor Liu Yubing and I saw no men, only women above the age of 60, many of them older. They were a cohort of faithful volunteers, gray-haired, stooped, rinsing dishes in the communal kitchen and keeping the floors of the church hallways spotless with a broom and pan. Formerly peasants, many of them had, in their old age, found vital companionship and solidarity in the church. Most were semi-literate and largely unschooled. For them, Pastor Liu Yubing said to me on our subway ride to Qixia, *xiejiao* was always on the periphery — this particular congregation was in dire need of permanent pastoral care to guide them away from heretical messages, and toward *zhenli*[11] *(*truth). Stories of demon possession abounded here; according to some parishioners I talked to, there was an intensification of demonic energies particularly at the boundaries between city and countryside. Pastor Liu Yubing herself told me such a story when she recalled an encounter with a villager years ago in the Qixia area, a middle-aged widow whose flesh began one day to "smell like rotting meat," and who began to experience extreme shifts in mood. Only after years of being "prayed over" by the congregation, said Pastor Liu, did she return to normal.

At Qixia Church's daily prayer meetings — attended, again, almost exclusively by rural women of retirement age — gambling and *xiejiao* were the troubles that animated most of the testimonies. One woman tearfully recalled her husband relapsing into hard liquor and mahjong when a rowdy group of friends visited their home; the pastor had to be summoned to intervene before the family's monthly wages were gambled away. The (male) pastor prayed with the storyteller's husband until the assembled fellow gamblers begrudgingly left their house, taking the temptation to "sin" away with them. Another emotional account, for instance, narrated the

[11] While older usages of *xie* (heterodox) was often paired with its opposite *zheng* (orthodox), in my ethnographic observations and interviews, *xiejiao* was almost always contrasted with *zhengli* (truth).

story of an elderly woman whose son had become a quite well-to-do cadre in the area, before racking up gambling debts and embezzling a large amount of money from his *danwei* (work unit) and going on the run to escape corruption charges, leaving his mother to take care of a young child in his absence.

Gambling stories, like these, are frequently grounded in particular persons, times, and situations; they tell of *acts* of sin and crime, mostly perpetrated by men. Their moral lessons lie in the sole power of God to forgive transgressions and transform the transgressors, thus bolstering the solidity of the church as a source of moral reinforcement and sometimes direct intervention for communities. Gamblers, like sinners, could confess to the church public (or have their confessions indirectly narrated), and through such confessional forms, illuminate their interiorities as autonomous, agential subjects.[12] The first narratives of *xiejiao* I heard were often much more ambivalent, the threat displaced, the consequences hazy, all recounted in the forms of rumors, gossip, and hearsay. On the same afternoon A 70-year-old *nainai*,[13] who I will call Lao Zhang, related to Pastor Liu Yubing and me, for instance, that her young grandson had recently been given an amulet of the *Guanyin* goddess[14] for protection by a neighbor suspected of practicing *xiejiao.* This encounter cued her to the presence of cult members in their vicinity, Lao Zhang said. They had even been rumored to sneak into Christian churches in the Qixia region. "To do what?" asked Pastor Liu Yubing, concerned. "To poison our food!" exclaimed Lao Zhang (a discomfiting thought as we were currently eating lunch).

---

[12] Foucault elaborated on the relationship between confession and the workings of power by outlining how confessional practices had been established, in Christian history, as central for the "production of truth." Foucault outlines how a "…continuous incitement to discourse and to truth" (Foucault, 1978, p. 56) emerged concurrently with an ever-expanding array of confessional techniques beyond those codified by the Christian church. These "helped to give the confession a central role in the order of civil and religious powers." (Foucault, 1978, p. 58).

[13] "Grandmother," a kin term used to respectfully address elderly women.

[14] "Goddess of Mercy," an important deity in East Asian Buddhism.

Lao Zhang returned to her story. As the grandson's primary guardian (both his parents were away working in Hangzhou), she felt responsible for dispelling such superstitious objects from his field of sight, but was unsure how to destroy the amulet for fear of triggering unfortunate results in her immediate vicinity. So she kept the amulet for herself, she said, and included it in her daily prayers: *"*Every day I prayed for it / on behalf of my grandson (*Wo mei tian wei ta dao gao 我每天为他／它祷告)."* Note the ambiguity in her construction: *ta* can mean either the gender-neutral *it* or the gendered *he* (referring to her grandson); *wei* can mean "for" or "on behalf of." In the context of our conversation, it was unclear to me whether she was praying *for* the amulet to be rendered ineffective, or *on behalf of* her grandson for being exposed to its magic. In any case, Lao Zhang's daily prayers signaled a kind of improvisational spiritual work — she did not disavow the amulet's powers, even having dismissed it as superstitious. Rather, by praying over it in an effort to *disempower* an object she sees as having uncertain or unknowable power, she incorporates it into a spiritual economy that is neither in the terrain of *xiejiao* nor precisely one that would be endorsed by Pastor Liu, who in this moment motioned to Lao Zhang with a sweep of her hand: "Just throw it away!"

This conversation with Lao Zhang reveals some of the complex play of distance and proximity in tales of *xiejiao.* One the one hand, the threat of *xiejiao* comes from intimates — neighbors, friends, and family; on the other hand, they are also spectral hauntings, rumors of poisonings and secret meetings, unconfirmed gossip. Within these second-hand narratives, *xiejiao* adherents are not represented as confessing subjects; they do not participate in the narrative production of *zhengli* (truth). Their discourses are not, by the standards of Christian

confessions of faith, intelligible as "belief," only as harmful *mixin* (superstition).[15] Lao Zhang's mention of poisoning seems to point back to an imagination of *xiejiao's* indirectness, its obfuscated source, in addition to a certain helplessness of its victims to resist. If in the testimonies of Qixia church members, gambling is configured as the choice of the sinning man — and thus a sign of his sinful agency being exercised — then the consumption of *xiejiao* is figured, like poison sprinkled into food, an evil-doing that alights on the non-agential woman, who takes it into her body unwittingly and suffers the consequences.

* * * *

It was not always the spectrality of *xiejiao* that was notable in these stories. In other instances, the rural woman was not figured as a non-agential victim but rather as someone whose choices could cause irreparable damage to her home and family. Such stories described the aftermath of *xiejiao.* One such story was told by a woman I met at a training workshop for church volunteers at Shengxun Tang. Sister Zhou, as I will call her, was a woman in her thirties from Henan Province, who now worked as a hotel maid in Nanjing. She, along with her parents, converted to Protestantism around ten years ago in their home village in Henan. During a break in the workshop, as I gathered with other women to rest and eat a boxed lunch in the church's vast courtyard, a friend of Sister Zhou urged her to tell me her mother's story, which, after some hesitation, she did:

> My mother used to work at a steelworks. Then she hurt her foot and stopped going. That was how she started believing (*xinjiao*). This was five years ago. She no longer takes helps me take care of the child anymore [*bu dai haizi le]*. I have to go to work, so I leave my son with my aunt back home. My father's had a

[15] Interestingly, for Lao Zhang, nor can their objects be rendered free of their deadly efficacy simply by discarding them — a fear that Pastor Liu Yubing may have considered problematic and perhaps a sign of "superstition" in itself.

> stroke. Even though he's a little better now… All the burdens of my family are on my husband's shoulders now.

Sister Zhou began to tear up, and several other *zimei* reassure her. She continued to elaborate on what happened to her mother:

> Those locals (*dangdi ren)* came to our door to look for my mother while she was injured. At first she didn't believe what they introduced to her. Those people then agitated her (*dou ta*), tricked her (*pian ta)*. Do this, do that! They brainwashed her, and once that happened she couldn't get out. She comes home once a month at the most. In the middle there were two years when she didn't come back. She doesn't care for her family. When she comes back our kid doesn't even call her grandma (*dou bu han popo)*. Recently when she came back, she would just listen to those discs, those recordings. When you say anything to her, she doesn't believe it, she'll say you're Satan, you're speaking the enemy's words. Nowadays cults come to our homes, they spread it in the home. Women spread it to men, adults spread it to children. Imagine that, it even transmits to the children! (*ta lian haizi dou chuan shang le)*

Sister Zhou's account of her mother's "fall" into *xiejiao* attests to some of the larger anxieties around the fragility of kinship networks and domestic ties that arise in an economy of rural-urban labor migration. What Sister Zhou, and the other *zimei* gathered around in conversation, returned to most often was the fact of her mother's disappearance from a kin network of support — that is, she was no longer available to take care of grandchildren and a family in the absence of Sister Zhou as she migrated for work. This reflects the common expectation that elderly rural women are responsible for sustaining farm work, domestic chores, and childcare in order to make it possible for other family members to migrate for work. The arrangements that make Sister Zhou's own striving for economic mobility imaginable are disrupted by her mother's *excessive* mobility — her pattern of leaving and only returning to her home village for brief periods of time, during which she remains neglectful of her domestic tasks. Indeed, anti-cult discourses take women's abandonment of home and domestic responsibilities to be one of the crucial features of

xiejiao's potential to be socially disruptive, not only seeming to rob women like Sister Zhou's mother of their familial identities but also extracting critical labor from rural sites. For people like Sister Zhou, this *extractive* potential of cult organizations seems to run in a kind of demented parallel with the already-extractive quality of migrant labor, forcing her mother to be hyper-mobile as she leaves home regularly to evangelize on behalf of her cult, while her domestic labor must be recuperated elsewhere.

While Sister Zhou's narrative also invokes the image of *xiejiao* as a transmittable disease which "spreads in the home" (*zai jia li chuan*), it does not figure her mother as a helpless non-agent but as an agential subject whose *will* was transformed through "brainwashing," thereby unleashing a series of consequences that demonstrates just how valuable her labor was to the maintenance of the home. As my interlocutors imagined the devastation that would befall Sister Zhou's village should other elderly women be ensnared, they encouraged her to bring back instructional materials from Shengxun Tang's workshops to her home village to distribute among other people expected to be vulnerable to cult entreaties. Such materials included simplified guidebooks through the central tenets of Christian theology, which supplied systematic answers to common questions. They also prodded her to arm herself with persuasive techniques — as well as a honed version of her own mother's cautionary tale — to combat *xiejiao* at its nascent stages (one thinks here of a medical metaphor once more), much as Sister Martha was illustrated doing in the aforementioned *Tianfeng* cartoons. This active mobilization against *xiejiao* encouraged by the sisters was modeled in many of the anti-cult materials they came across, and sheds light on the "uptake" of such materials, which I will further discuss in the next section.

Training discernment: modes of reading *xiejiao*

In response to what is often represented as the irrepressible flood of heterodoxy in rural Chinese churches, anti-heterodoxy campaigns have been variously instituted in these spaces by the Three-Self structure, authorized and often initiated by provincial governments. They come in the form of workshops led by pastoral workers and social workers, pamphlets, online "heterodoxy tests" that are meant to be self-administered and self-diagnostic, and most visibly, in large *guatu* (wall hangings) that are hung around church courtyards in "at risk" neighborhoods. Such was the case on the rounds of Qixia Church, where *guatu* hung warning of the dangers of *xiejiao* and espousing the slogan:

崇尚科学　倡导文明
反对邪教　树立新风
Uphold science, advocate civilization
Oppose evil cults, institute a new wind

The invocation of "science" and "civilization" are common in anti-cult literatures disseminated by the Three-Self Church. This language of scientific reason as a counterforce to cultic beliefs, particularly when used to demystify discourses of miraculous healing and spiritual remedies, has a long history in Chinese anti-cult campaigns. Song Dynasty officials invoked the argument that medicine was more effective than the gods in their local anti-shaman campaigns, during which they destroyed the homes of hundreds of spirit mediums; late-Qing gazetteers also compared medicine favorably to shamanic practices (Sutton 2000, 220). The CCP's anti-cult campaign against Falungong, beginning in 1999, institutionalized this language of contrasts — not only setting cults in opposition to science, but just as strongly in opposition to religion. Religious leaders were just as invested in this contrast as government officials during the organized campaign against Falungong; to avoid "tainting" recognized religion with any kind of

association with *xiejiao,* religious leaders and social scientists insisted that the two were mutually-exclusive networks (Palmer 2009).

In Chinese Christian discourses against heterodoxy, however, one sees the opposite tact. In order to constitute *xiejiao's* dangers as something internal to Christian communities themselves — the very basis for the Theological Reconstruction program instituted by top leaders of the TSPM/CCC — the instructional materials produced by the Three-Self Church emphasizes the ways in which *xiejiao* has the appearance of *likeness* to Christianity proper. Methods of evangelism and the use of Biblical scripture, for instance, may look very much the same. Thus, church-goers are exhorted to cultivate the capacity to *fenbie* (differentiate) between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, and to exercise ways of reading the meta-text of social situations between people equally called *xintu* (believers).

Training this form of discernment was the main focus of a series of *guatu,* titled "Exposing and Criticizing the 'Almighty God' Cult Cautionary Education Poster" (揭批'全能神'邪教警示卦图 *jiepi 'quanneng shen' xiejiao jingshi guatu),* that was newly displayed on the grounds of Qixia Church in 2014. Their contents, some of which I will present below, reveal some of the ways in which anti-cult instructional materials invoke anxieties about the vulnerability of female church-goers and seek to cultivate habits of discernment and suspicion.

The series of seven posters were created and co-sponsored by the Shandong Province Anti-Cult Association (*Shandong sheng fan xiejiao xiehui)* and the Shengli Oilfields Anti-Cult Association (*Shengli youtian fan xiejiao xiehui*),[16] and have been widely disseminated at

[16] Shengli ('Victory') Oilfields Company is a subsidiary of the China Petroleum and Chemical Corporation, or Sinopec Ltd., a publicly-traded Chinese oil and gas company based in Beijing. Shengli Oilfields manages gas and oil workers in Shandong Province, which may explain why it has partnered with the Shandong Anti-Cult Association, a provincial branch of the national China Anti-Cult Association (*Zhongguo fan xiejiao xiehui).* The national anti-cult association was

churches across the nation. The first of the series of *guatu* gives a historical and organizational overview of the Church of Almighty God, identifying its founders and alternative monikers, as well as pulling from Almighty God resources (such as its "Handbook of Principles for Church Work") to identify what the poster's text calls its "extremely strict internal organizational discipline," comprising rules for the sizes of congregations and a warning that any violation of these principles would result in "severe punishment."

Notably, the posters present a narrative of Almighty God's founding that differs quite dramatically from other accounts that emphasize the "Female Christ." Rather than pointing to the church's own narratives of its founding by an ordinary sister who received direct word from the Holy Spirit regarding "God's name" and "God's arrival," the *guatu* draws on an alternative account usually circulated by government and registered church organs. This history charges a middle-aged man named Zhao Weishan (赵维山), a former physics teacher or railroad worker from Heilongjiang Province, with founding the movement. This origin story incorporates a host of spiritual associations deemed *xiejiao,* claiming that Zhao Weishan was an original member of the Shouters before splintering off to form the Church of the Everlasting Foundation, where he declared himself the "God of Ability" (*nengli zhu*). After fleeing from a government crackdown in Heilongjiang, Zhao is said to have founded the "New Church of the God of Ability" in Henan, one of whose tracts was titled *Lightning from the East.* The *guatu* text further claims that Zhao left the country to seek refuge in the U.S., from where he has directed operations of Church of the Almighty God since. This story, as Dunn (2015) has pointed out, minimizes the importance

established in 2000 by a group of scientists, doctors, religious leaders, journalists, and academics based in Beijing, with the purpose of mobilizing social forces to fight the spread of Falungong.

of the "Female Christ" while foregrounding Zhao as an "indolent, poorly educated, self-serving, and criminal man" typical of cult leaders (48).

Throughout the panels, Zhao is depicted as a manipulator of vulnerable women, particularly in "elevating" an ordinary sister to the position of false "Female Christ," as shown in the first cartoon (Figure 10). There, a crown is lowered onto the head of a beatific woman in prayer, with the words coming from above, "She is the Female Christ" (*ta jiu shi nü yesu).* The caption represents this scene as one of capture and deception: "Zhao Weishan, having alterior motives, used the female believer Yang Xiangbin in false packaging, tossing out [as justification] the scripture 'the Word became flesh.' He named Yang Xiangbin 'the true God,' who was the unified body of 'ordinary humankind and the divinity of the Almighty God.'[17]

Figure 10: "The Word Became Flesh Saying," guatu *panel 1. Author's photo.*

The remaining six panels of the *guatu* elaborate on Almighty God's main methods for "ensnaring" Christian believers. Each ink-and-watercolor cartoon is labeled with a "saying"

(*shuo),* comprising a glossary of terms and phrases, marked off by quotations, used by Almighty God adherents. The explanatory captions unpack the language of the church's evangelism, guiding the readers of the *guatu* in methods of interpreting their "true" meanings. This guide, as seen in its title, aims to "expose and criticize" these textual fragments from the published materials of Almighty God, re-signifying their lexicon and establishing the proper reading of these materials as the first step in discerning *xiejiao.* Figure 11, for instance, is interestingly titled 国度操练说 (*guodu caolian shuo),* which could be glossed as "Practices of the Nation (saying)." Its caption clarifies: " 'Nation' (*guodu)* is what the 'Almighty God' cult has sincerely devised as its idealized home (*jiayuan*), called 'God's nation' (*shenjia*). All believers must leave their homes, offer up their money and property to be managed collectively by 'God's nation,' lead 'God's nation lives' *(shenjia shenghuo),* and accept 'practices of the nation.'" Such practices, the *guatu* continues, include complete devotion of the self to spreading Almighty God's gospel, submitting to extreme disciplinary measures, severing all connections to former kin and social networks, and learning to read cryptic signs of God's word in the very etymology of Chinese characters.

The resulting social ills of becoming entrapped are vividly illustrated in the *guatu* cartoons. In Figure 11, several female adherents are shown in the midst of proselytizing while a roughly sketched child languishes in the background, signaling domestic disorder and neglect. In Figure 12, "Heavy Taxation of Wealth," a beleaguered husband is shown asking his wife where all their money has gone; tossing cash into a coffer labeled "Almighty God," the wife answers: "The end of the world is coming! We should do something to prepare."

---

[17] All translations from the *guatu* are the author's.

Figure 11: “Practices of the Nation saying,” guatu *panel 3. Author’s photo.*

Figure 12: “Heavy Taxation of Wealth,” guatu *panel 7. Author’s photo.*

As we can see in these few select panels, the *guatu* represents women as the particular targets of *xiejiao,* and also depict *xiejiao* itself as a threat that fundamentally endangers the home. These messages resonated with the heavily female church-going population at Qixia Church. While it was my sense that the *guatu* did not introduce my new information for seasoned church-goers, who were used to hearing anti-cult sentiments on a regular basis, these images, arrayed prominently around the church's courtyard and entrance, reinforced the institution's investment in policing and preventing *xiejiao.* Importantly, such *guatu* were not much in evidence in more cosmopolitan Three-Self Churches, like Shengxun Tang in Hexi New City and St. Paul's in the city's center. That is to say, they were ubiquitous only in church spaces designated as sites of "rural" assemblage. They very particularly targeted rural, elderly women who could identify — the authorities hoped — with those portrayed in the cartoons.

* * * *

While it was difficult within the parameters of my fieldwork to discern the impact of these specific *guatu,* the habits of discernment, of "exposure and critique," that these instructional media sought to install were very much in evidence. In casual conversation, church-goers seemed to apply these strategies of interpretation to challenge the potential "heresies" they heard. In particular, I noticed concerted efforts to combat particular tendencies to read illness and bodily maladies as "signs from God." This was particularly brought to my attention when my Christian interlocutors in Nanjing began mentioning a controversial blog post made by a self-identified Christian man, titled, "Jesus, Stop Forcing Me to Become Your Enemy" (《耶稣你不要让我与你为敌》*Yesu qing ni bu yao rang wo yu ni wei di).* A man named

Luo Er, from Shenzhen, vented his frustration at God for allowing his daughter to be diagnosed with leukemia. He threatened that if his daughter should die, he would "never believe in Jesus again." This article became viral on both Christian and non-Christian social media sites, and spurred a crowdfunding campaign that raised more than 200 million RMB (equivalent to around $290,000 USD) for the daughter's treatment. Shortly after the money was raised, Luo Er's daughter died. What caused a special controversy was the discovery that Luo Er owned three apartments in the Shenzhen area, and was living an otherwise lavish life, despite his pleas of poverty. Luo Er was later arrested and charged with fraud, and forced to return the donations.

This incident prompted a wave of critical self-reflection among Christians online, among them theological critiques of an overemphasis in Chinese Christian communities on petitionary prayer. In one of the most widely-shared responses to this incident, an anonymous woman calling herself "Rachel" remembers in particular the circumstances of the initial article's circulation among Christian online communities:

> A few days ago I was horrified to see lots of people sharing an article on social media called, "Jesus, Stop Forcing Me to Be Your Enemy." This was because those forwarding the article to me were all girls standing at the doorway of Christianity. I feared that their faith would be built upon the grounds that "God will grant whatever I request," so I talked a lot about issues of truth with them. In the end they indirectly criticized that as: "After you believe in God you become more rational, but you lose warmth for humanity."[18]

The contestations recounted in Rachel's post occurred between her and "girls standing at the doorway to Christianity." While *xiejiao* is not explicitly mentioned in Rachel's account, it was a recurrent theme in my interlocutors' discussion of this case. In their eyes, Luo Er — with his

[18] Translation by author. Original text excerpt: "前几天，看到大量转发《耶稣你不要让我与你为敌》的文字时，我心里是惶恐的。因为转发给我的都是站在基督教门口的姑娘。我生恐她们的信仰建立在"上帝有求必应"

subsequent scheming to make money from personal misfortune, ability to manipulate public sentiment, and dissimulation of his own wealth — turned a Christian plea into a corrupted form of self-enrichment. His attitude — his insincere faith, as shown in his bargaining with God — represented a kind of abstracted heterodox sensibility, detached from particular forms of inappropriate association but available to be writ large as a problem for the church.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined how a category of rural woman becomes constituted as both the primary source of *xiejiao's* transmissions and its principal victims. Women's bodies and habitus, I have argued here, have become intensified sites of discipline for Protestant communities wary of heterodoxy. The skewing of anti-heterodox discourses toward the pathologized bodies and minds of rural women reinforce and reify images of the "backward" woman – the non-modern, irrational, and unscientific subject who is object of the nation's reformational impulses — and consolidate justifications for how they are socially disciplined and, in Anagnost's term, derogated of their value.

I must also note, in conclusion, that the constitution of rural women as particularly vulnerable/dangerous subjects also produces modes of solidarity and mutual support that are both products of a male-dominated "orthodoxy" but at the same time, not *identical* to that orthodoxy nor straightforwardly reproductive of its disciplinary mechanisms. Consider, for instance, this exchange between Pastor Liu and Lao Zhang, on the same afternoon I had been previously recounting. In the middle of our meandering conversation, Lao Zhang receives a phone call on

---

的基础上，于是讲了很多关于真理的问题。结果被她们委婉地批评为"信主后变理性了，但少了人情味." Available at http://ocfuyin.org/63-2-32-124-22-18-21-24-21-20-20-22-22-22-4-59-43

her cellphone, which she takes. Afterwards, she reports back to Pastor Liu that the call came from a member of the Provincial bureau of the State Administration for Religious Affairs. This official, she says, has been calling frequently, poking around for evidence of a "suspicious" house church that congregates nearby. "Well, tell him you don't know anything!" said Pastor Liu. "Just don't say a word."

Lao Zhang agrees to keep silent. Her silence marks a kind of compact between her and Pastor Liu, who is herself a board member of various Christian councils in Nanjing that operate in cooperation with the State Administration for Religious Affairs. As Pastor Liu would explain to me later on our train ride back to the center of Nanjing, it was better for her to deal with *xiejiao* on an intimate, one-on-one level — intervening in "incorrect" habits, giving "sisters" advice on specific encounters with heterodoxy they reported. Getting the local government involved was antithetical to this kind of intimate spiritual governance. Besides, Pastor Liu added, she had known Lao Zhang a long time. To take the matter out of Lao Zhang's hands – to affirm her silence in the face of questioning — was also a demonstration of friendship.

In Foucault's March 1 lecture in *Security, Territory, Population,* he connects counter-conduct to the historical "problem of women and their status in society, in civil society or in religious society" … he is particularly attentive to their "response, often innovative and creative, to a status that is imposed upon them." (2007, 196-7). As Arnold Davidson highlights in his article on counter-conduct, this leads Foucault to a particular interest in "female friendship, how it develops, what kind of conduct it involves, how women are bound to one another through certain type of affect, of affection" (32). How do we think about the affections, the bonds, that emerge *from within* structures of suspicion that systematically target certain marginalized categories of persons? Here, I think, the question is less a matter of *deciding* on the location of

resistance — rather, it is a matter of attunement to the currents of conduct which direct lived experience and are in turn re-directed by them.

WORKS CITED

Abbas, Ackbar. 1997. *Hong Kong: Culture and the politics of disappearance*. Hong Kong University Press.

Abrams, Philip. 1988. "Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State." *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1, 58–89.

Agrama, Hussein Ali. 2012. *Questioning secularism: Islam, sovereignty, and the rule of law in modern Egypt.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aikman, David. 2003. *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*. Washington, DC: Regnery.

Althusser, Louis. 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (notes Toward an Investigation)." *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, 253. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Amnesty International. 2015. "Amnesty International Report 2014/15 – China," 25 February 2015. Accessed July 26, 2017. http://www.refworld.org/docid/54f07e07c.html

Anagnost, Ann. 1994. "The politics of ritual displacement," in *Asian visions of authority: Religion and the modern states of East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Charles F. Keyes, Laurel Kendall, Helen Hardacre, 221-54. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

———. 2004. "The corporeal politics of quality (suzhi)." *Public Culture* 16, no. 2, 189-208.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity al large: cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

———. 2013. *The future as cultural fact: essays on the Global Condition*. London and New York: Verso.

Aretxaga, Begoña. 2003. "Maddening States." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32, 393–410.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

———. 2009. *Genealogies of religion: Discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 2010. *The dialogic imagination: Four essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barmé, Geremie. 1996. *Shades of Mao: The posthumous cult of the great leader.* New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Barrett, Timothy H. "Superstition and its Others in Han China." *Past and Present* 199, no. 3, 95-114.

Berlant, Lauren. 1998. "Intimacy: A special issue." *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2, 281-288.

Bialecki, Jon, and Eric Hoenes del Pinal. 2011. "Beyond logos: extensions of the language ideology paradigm in the study of global Christianity(-ies)." *Anthropological Quarterly* 84, no. 3, 575-593.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1999. "Rethinking the State: Genesis and Structure in the Bureaucratic Field." In *State/Culture: State-formation After the Cultural*, edited by George Steinmetz, 53. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Braester, Yomi. 2010. *Painting the City Red: Chinese Cinema and the Urban Contract*. Durham: Duke University Press.

———. 2016. "Traces of the Future: Beijing's Politics of Emergence.'" *Ghost Protocol: Development and Displacement in Global China*, edited by Carlos Rojas and Ralph A. Litzinger, 15-35. Durham: Duke University Press.

Brown, Wendy. 2010. *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*. New York: Zone Books.

Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.

Cannell, Fenella, ed. 2006. *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Cao, Nanlai. 2009. "Raising the Quality of Belief." *China Perspectives* 4, 54.

———. 2010. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, power, and place in contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Central Committee General Office. 2011. "Notice on "Suggestions for doing a good job of resisting foreign use of religion to infiltrate institutes of higher education and to prevent campus evangelism." Accessed July 26, 2017. http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/world/resisting-foreign-use-of-religion/216/

Chao, Jonathan and Rosanna Chong. 1997. *A History of Christianity in Socialist China, 1949–1997.* Taipei: China Ministries International Publishing.

Chumley, Lily H., and Nicholas Harkness. 2013. "Introduction: qualia." *Anthropological Theory* 13, no. 1-2, 3-11.

Chen, Cunfu. 2005. Zhuanxingqi de Zhongguo jidujiao: Zhejiang jidujiao ge'an yanjiu [Chinese Christianity in Transition: A Case Study of Zhejiang Christianity]. Beijing: Dongfang chubanshe [Oriental Press], p. 51.

Chen, Nancy. 2003. "Healing sects and anti-cult campaigns." *The China Quarterly* 174, 505-520.

Chow, Alexander. 2013. "The East Asian Rediscovery of 'Sin'." *Studies in World Christianity* 19, no. 2, 126-140.

———. 2014. "Calvinist Public Theology in Urban China Today." *International Journal of Public Theology* 8, no. 2, 158-175.

———. 2015. "China, Christianity, and the Question of Culture." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39, no. 2, 104-106.

Cody, Edward. 2007. "Poll Finds Surge of Religion Among Chinese." *Washington Post*, February 8. Accessed March 12, 2017. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/02/07/AR2007020702069.html

Cooke, Susette. 2009. "Religious work. Governing religion in reform-era China." *China's Governmentalities: Governing change, changing government*, edited by Elaine Jeffreys, 125-150. New York: Routledge.

Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff. 1991. *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism, and consciousness in South Africa (Vol. 1).* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2009. *Of revelation and revolution: The dialectics of modernity on a South African frontier. (Vol. 2.).* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

CPC Central Committee's Party Literature Research Office. 2011. *Zhongguo Gong Ghan Dang Li Shi [History of the Communist Party of China] (1949-78).* Beijing: Central Party School Press.

Crabb, Mary W. 2010. "Governing the middle-class family in urban China: Educational reform and questions of choice." *Economy and Society* 39, no. 3, 385-402.

Davidson, Arnold I. 2011. "In praise of counter-conduct." *History of the Human Sciences* 24, no. 4, 25-41.

De Certeau, Michel. 1984. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press.

De Groot, J.J.M. 1892. *The Religious System of China: Its Ancient Forms, Evolution, History and Present Aspects, Manners, Custom and Social Institutions Connected Therewith*. Leiden: Brill Archive.

———. 1912. *Religion in China: Universism, a key to the Study of Taoism and Confucianism*. New York: GP Putnam's Sons.

De Jong, G. F. 1992. *The Reformed Church in China, 1842-1951*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing.

Dello-Iacovo, Belinda. 2009. "Curriculum reform and 'quality education'in China: An overview." *International Journal of Educational Development* 29, no. 3, 241-249.

Duara, Prasenjit. 1996. *Rescuing history from the nation: Questioning narratives of modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2005. "The legacy of empires and nations in East Asia." *China Inside Out: Contemporary Chinese Nationalism and Transnationalism*, edited by Pál Nyíri and Joana Breidenbach, 35-54. Budapest: Central European University Press.

Dunch, Ryan. 2008. "Christianity and 'Adaptation to Socialism.'" *Chinese religiosities: afflictions of modernity and state formation*, edited by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, 155-178. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2012. "Chinese Christianity." The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions, 261-282. New York: Wiley-Blackwell.

Dunn, Emily C. 2009. ""Cult," Church, and the CCP: Introducing Eastern Lightning." *Modern China* 35, no. 1, 96-119.

———. 2015. *Lightning from the East: Heterodoxy and Christianity in Contemporary China*. Leiden: Brill.

Dutton, Michael. "Passionately governmental: Maoism and the structured intensities of revolutionary governmentality." *Postcolonial Studies* 11, no. 1, 99-112.

———. 2003. *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*. Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield.

Eng, David L. 1999. "Melancholia/postcoloniality: Loss in the floating life." *Qui Parle,* 137-150.

Engelke, Matthew. 2007. *A problem of presence: Beyond scripture in an African church*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fällman, Fredrik. 2013. "Calvin, culture and Christ?. Christianity in Contemporary China." *Socio-cultural Perspectives* 5, 153.

Farquhar, Judith. 2002. *Appetites: Food and sex in post-socialist China*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Farquhar, Judith, and Qicheng Zhang. 2012. *Ten thousand things: Nurturing life in contemporary Beijing*. Boston: MIT Press.

Fei, Xiaotong. 1992. *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Feuchtwang, Stephan. 1992. *The Imperial Metaphor: Popular Religion in China*. London: Routledge.

Foucault, Michel. 1997. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth (Essential Works of Michel Foucault),* edited by Paul Rabinow. New York: New Press.

———. 2009. *Security, Territory, Population*. New York: Macmillan.

Fulton, Brent. 2015. *China's Urban Christians: A Light that Cannot be Hidden*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press.

Gaetano, Arianne. 2014. " 'Leftover women': postponing marriage and renegotiating womanhood in urban China." *Journal of Research in Gender Studies* 4, no. 2, 124.

Gal, Susan. 2002. "A semiotics of the public/private distinction." *Differences*: *a journal of feminist cultural studies* 13, no. 1, 77-95.

Goossaert, Vincent. 2005. "The concept of religion in China and the West." *Diogenes* 52, no. 1, 13-20.

———. 2006. "1898: The beginning of the end for Chinese religion?" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 2, 1-29.

———. 2008. "Republican Church engineering: The national religious associations in 1912 China" in *Chinese religiosities: Afflictions of modernity and state formation*, edited by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, 209-232. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goossaert, Vincent, and David Palmer. 2011. *The religious question in modern China.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Graham, Billy. 2007. *Just as I Am: the Autobiography of Billy Graham.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

Greenhalgh, Susan, and Edwin A. Winckler. 2005. *Governing China's population: From Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Griffiths, James. 2016. "China's WeChat is censoring group chats without user's knowledge." CNN Tech. Accessed July 26, 2017. http://money.cnn.com/2016/12/01/technology/china-wechat-censor-group-chats-text-tencent/

Gupta, Akhil. 2005. “Narratives of Corruption: Anthropological and Fictional Accounts of the Indian State.” *Ethnography* 6, no. 1, 5–34.

Handman, Courtney. 2010. “Events of Translation: Intertextuality and Christian Ethnotheologies of Change among Guhu-Samane, Papua New Guinea.” *American Anthropologist*, 112(4), 576-588.

Harding, Susan F. 2000. *The book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist language and politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Harkness, Nicholas. 2015. “Basic Kinship Terms: Christian Relations, Chronotopic Formulations, and a Korean Confrontation of Language.” *Anthropological Quarterly* 88, no. 2, 305-336.

Harvey, David. 2000. *Spaces of Hope*. Berkeley: Univ of California Press.

Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The ethical soundscape: Cassette sermons and Islamic counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hsing, You-tien. 2010. *The great urban transformation: Politics of land and property in China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hunter, Alan, and Kim-Kwong Chan. 2007. *Protestantism in contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Present pasts: Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Jacka, Tamara. 2009. "Cultivating citizens: Suzhi (quality) discourse in the PRC." *positions* 17, no. 3, 523-535.

Jiaohui [Church China] Editorial Board. 2015. “Xinyang chuancheng zhong de ‘xin er dai’” [The ‘second generation’ in the transmission of faith]. Church China 60, 3-19.

Johnson, Ian. 2017. *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*. New York: Pantheon.

Josephson, Jason Ananda. 2012. *The invention of religion in Japan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kang, Jie. 2016. *House church Christianity in China: from rural preachers to city pastors*. New York: Springer.

Keane, Webb. 2003. "Semiotics and the social analysis of material things." *Language & Communication* 23, no. 3, 409-425.

Keane, Webb. 2007. *Christian moderns: Freedom and fetish in the mission encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Keck, Zachary. 2014. "Why is China nationalizing Christianity?" The Diplomat, August 12. Accessed July 26, 2017. http://thediplomat.com/2014/08/why-is-china-nationalizing-christianity/

Kenner, Angus. 2017. *Against the Tide: the Unforgettable Story of Watchman Nee.* Fort Washington: CLC Publications.

Kindopp, Jason, and Carol Lee Hamrin, eds. 2004. *God and Caesar in China: Policy Implications of Church-State Tensions*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press.

Kipnis, Andrew B. 1997. *Producing guanxi: Sentiment, self, and subculture in a north China village*. Durham: Duke University Press.

———. 2001. "The Flourishing of Religion in Post-Mao China and the Anthropological Category of Religion." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 1, 32-46.

———. 2006. "Suzhi: a keyword approach." *The China Quarterly* 186, 295-313.

Kuo, Ya-pei. 2009. " 'The Emperor and the People in One Body': The Worship of Confucius and Ritual Planning in the Xinzheng Reforms, 1902-1911." *Modern China* 35, no. 2, 123-154.

Lambert, Tony. 1999. *China's Christian Millions*. London, England, and Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch Books.

Leese, Daniel. 2011. *Mao Cult: Rhetoric and Ritual in China's Cultural Revolution*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Liu, Lydia He. 1995. *Translingual practice: Literature, national culture, and translated modernity: China, 1900-1937*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Liu, Tongsu. 2010. "Zhongguo chengshi jiating jiaohui de dinyi" [Definition of China's urban house church.] Accessed on July 26, 2017. http://www.liutongsu.net/?p=130

———. 2011. "Jiating jiaohui gong kai hua de nei bu yao su" [Internal factors in the opening up of the house church." *Church China* 29. Accessed July 26, 2017. https://www.churchchina.org/archives/110502.html.

Liu, Tongsu and Wang Yi. 2012. *Guan kan zhongguo chengshi jiating jiaohui [Observations on China's Urban Churches]*. Taipei: Christian Arts Press.

Luo, Zhufeng, ed. 1991. *Religion under socialism in China*. Translated by Donald E. MacInnis and Zheng Xi'an. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Madsen, Richard. 1984. *Morality and power in a Chinese village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

MacInnis, Donald E., comp. 1972. *Religious policy and practice in Communist China: a documentary history*. New York: Macmillan.

———. 1989. *Religion in China today: policy and practice*. New York: Orbis Books.

Magaña, Rocio. 2008. "Bodies on the line: Life, death, and authority on the Arizona-Mexico border." PhD Diss., University of Chicago.

Mahmood, Saba. 2015. *Religious difference in a secular age: A minority report.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mao, Zedong. 1953. *Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.

———. 1986. *The Writings of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976 (January 1956-December 1957*), edited by Michael Y.M. Kau and John K. Leung. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Marx, Karl. "On the Jewish Problem." 1978. *The Marx-Engels Reader (2nd Edition),* edited by Robert C. Tucker. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

McDougall, Debra. 2009. "Rethinking Christianity and anthropology: A review article." *Anthropological Forum* 19, no. 2, 185-194.

Mitchell, Timothy. 1991. "The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics." *The American Political Science Review* 85, no. 1, 77–96.

Mitman, Gregg, Michelle Murphy, and Christopher Sellers, eds. 2004. *Landscapes of exposure: knowledge and illness in modern environments.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nedostup, Rebecca. 2009. *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity.* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center.

Overmyer Daniel. 1989. "Attitudes Toward Popular Religion in Ritual Texts of the Chinese State: The Collected Statutes of the Great Ming." *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5, 191-221.

Palmer, David A. 2007. *Qigong fever: Body, science, and utopia in China*. New York: Columbia University Press.

———. 2008. "Heretical Doctrines, Reactionary Secret Societies, Evil Cults: Labelling Heterodoxy in 20th Century China." In *Chinese religiosities: Afflictions of modernity and state formation*, edited by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang, 113-134.

———. 2011. “Chinese redemptive societies and salvationist religion: historical phenomenon or sociological category?” *Journal of Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore* 172, 21-72.

Petryna, Adriana. 2013. *Life exposed: biological citizens after Chernobyl*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Qiuyu zhifu Jiaotang. 2015. *Wo men dui jiating jiaohui lichang de zhong zhong (jiu shi wu tiao) [95 Theses: The Re-affirmation of our Stance on the House Church.”* http://www.chinapartnership.org/blog/2015/08/95-theses-the-reaffirmation-of-our-stance-on-the-house-church?rq=95%20theses. Accessed on July 26, 2017.

Resolution on Opposing Evil Cults and Resisting Heretical Beliefs. 2002. Amity News Service 11, 5-6. Accessed June 10, 2017. http://www.amitynewsservice.org/page.php?page=674

Robbins, Joel. 2003. “What is a Christian? Notes toward an anthropology of Christianity.” *Religion* 33, no. 3, 191-199.

———. 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2008. "On not knowing other minds: Confession, intention, and linguistic exchange in a Papua New Guinea community." *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, no. 2, 421-429.

Rojas, Carlos, and Ralph A. Litzinger, eds. 2016. *Ghost Protocol: Development and Displacement in Global China*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Rofel, Lisa. 2007. *Desiring China: Experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Rose, Nikolas. 1999. *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rutherford, Danilyn. 2003. *Raiding the Land of the Foreigners: The Limits of the Nation on an Indonesian Frontier*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sahlins, Marshall. 1996. “The sadness of sweetness: The native anthropology of Western cosmology.” *Current anthropology* 37, no. 3, 395-428.

Sangren, P. Steven. 1983. "Female Gender in Chinese Religious Symbols: Kuan Yin, Ma Tsu, and the" Eternal Mother".” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9, no. 1, 4-25.

Scott, David. 2004. *Conscripts of modernity: The tragedy of colonial enlightenment.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like the State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shahar, Meir, and Robert P. Weller, eds. 1996. *Unruly gods: Divinity and society in China.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Sharma, Aradhana, and Akhil Gupta. 2006. *The Anthropology of the State : a Reader*. Malden: Blackwell Publishers.

Sigley, Gary. 2009. "Suzhi, the body, and the fortunes of technoscientific reasoning in contemporary China." *positions* 17, no. 3, 537-566.

Simmel, Georg. 1906. "The sociology of secrecy and of secret societies." *American Journal of Sociology* 11, no. 4, 441-498.

Starr, Chloe. 2016a. *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 2016b. "Wang Yi and the 95 Theses of the Chinese Reformed Church." *Religions* 7, no. 12, 142. Accessed July 26, 2017. doi: 10.3390/rel7120142

Steele, David. 1901. "History of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (General Synod)." *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society (1901-1930)* 1, no. 1, 41-55.

Sutton, Donald S. 2000. "From Credulity to Scorn: Confucians Confront the Spirit Mediums in Late Imperial China." *Late Imperial China* 21, no. 2, 1-39.

Taussig, Michael T. 1997. *The Magic of the State*. New York: Routledge.

Tiedemann, R. G., ed. 2010. *Handbook of Christianity in China: 1800-present*. Leiden: Brill.

Tomlinson, Matthew A. 2009. *In God's image: the metaculture of Fijian Christianity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tong, Daniel. 1993. *Ancestral Veneration: A Handbook for Christians*. Singapore: Christian Library Limited.

Tsin, Michael. 1997. "Imagining 'society' in early twentieth-century China," in *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920,* edited by Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow, 212-231. New York: M.E. Sharpe.

Tu, Wei-ming. 1985. *Confucian thought: Selfhood as creative transformation*. New York: SUNY Press.

Warner, Michael. 2002. "Publics and counterpublics." *Public culture* 14, no. 1, 49-90.

Wakeman Jr, Frederick. 1998. "Boundaries of the public sphere in Ming and Qing China." *Daedalus* 127, No. 3, 167-189.

Wang, Gungwu. 2003. "Secular China." *China Report* 39, no. 3, 305-321.

Wang, Hui. 2003. *China's New Order : Society, Politics, and Economy in Transition*. Translated by Thomas Hunters. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Weber, Max. 1964. *The Religion of China. Confucianism and Taoism*. Translated and edited by Hans H. Gerth. London: Collier Macmillan.

Wickeri, Philip. L. 2015. *Reconstructing Christianity in China: KH Ting and the Chinese Church*. New York: Orbis Books.

Woronov, T. E. 2009. "Governing China's children: Governmentality and 'education for quality.'" *positions* 17, no. 3, 567-589.

Wu, Yiching. 2014. *The Cultural Revolution at the Margins*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Xi, Jinping. 2016. "Comprehensively Improve the Level of Religious Work under the New Situation" [Xi jinping: quanmian tigao xin xingshi xia zongjiao gongzuo shuiping.] Xinhua, April 23.

Xü Jia. 2014. "Jie du xie jiao wei he ai da ji du jiao qi hao: nong cun ji du tu wen hua di" [Understanding why cults fly under the banner of Christianity: rural Christians have low culture]. *Feng huang zhou kan [Phoenix Weekly]*, September 18.

Yang, Fenggang. 2005. "Lost in the market, saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in urban China." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 4, 423-441.

———. 2006. "The red, black, and gray markets of religion in China." *The Sociological Quarterly* 47, no. 1, 93-122.

Ying, Fuk-tsang, Hao Yuan, and Siu-lun Lau. 2014. "Striving to Build Civic Communities." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 1, no. 1, 78-103.

Zhang, Jingxiang, and Fulong Wu. 2008. "Mega-event marketing and urban growth coalitions: A case study of Nanjing Olympic New Town." *Town Planning Review* 79, n. 2-3, 209-226.

Zhang, Li, and Aihwa Ong. 2008. *Privatizing China: Socialism from Afar*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Zheng, Yongnian, and Sow Keat Tok. 2007. Harmonious society and harmonious world: China's policy discourse under Hu Jintao. *Briefing Series*, 26.

Zito, Angela. 1997. Of Body and Brush: Grand Sacrifice as Text/Performance in Eighteenth-Century China. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 2006. “Bound to be represented: Theorizing/fetishizing footbinding” in *Embodied Modernities: Corporeality, Representation, and Chinese Cultures*, edited by Fran Martin and Larissa Heinrich, 29-41. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Zuo, J. (1991). “Political religion: The case of the cultural revolution in China.” *Sociological Analysis* 52, no. 1, 99-110.