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IN TRANSNATIONAL CHINA

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes how the politics of being Catholic in China intersects with aspirations to upward, transnational social mobility. Overlapping spiritual and material motivations, made possible by flexible alignment with “official” and “underground” churches, afford Chinese Catholics of rural extraction new urban and transnational futures. Lived out as vocations, or religious callings (e.g., to the priesthood, to marriage, or to an entrepreneurial life overseas), these futures are achieved via a confessional style of mobility that “calls” people from the village to the city, and from China to overseas Chinese communities. These callings are regimented by an axis of differentiation between listening (to God) and scheming (for self-gain). Christian contrasts (sacred/secular, heavenly/earthly, listening/scheming) structure how priests and parishioners move up, often in ways that align with state norms and class ideologies of vocational transparency, national identity, urban renovation, and rural/urban difference.

Based on fourteen months of fieldwork in Hangzhou and New York from 2017 to 2018, this dissertation argues that callings to urban and transnational futures are among the affordances of Catholic minoritarianism in China. This claim intervenes in scholarly studies of Chinese Catholicism as a largely village-based phenomenon still trying to come to terms with global modernity and the chronotope of the secular city. Three priests and a wealthy family at a Catholic parish in Hangzhou – or rather, between China and the United States – are the upwardly mobile interlocutors through which this dissertation examines Catholic politics and mobilities. As they advance, Christian contrasts become more difficult, yet more important, to distinguish. By “listening to God’s voice” and “following God’s plan,” people called by God defer their personal agency while navigating the participant frameworks of hospitality and *renqing* (human feeling). They incur spiritual and economic loss if they fail to detect, or detect too late,

scammers and “false angels.” Entangling moral and economic forms of capital, they turn to confessional mobility as the solution to ecclesial “impurity” and socioeconomic stagnation.

Keywords: mobility, Catholicism, transnationalism, axis of differentiation, chronotope, China

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Introduction: contrasts and mobilities

This dissertation examines Chinese Catholics as a religious minority in China as well as their migration between China and the United States. While still about China, the focus on Christianity responds to the call to destabilize perspectives that reaffirm the centrality of mainland China over a “residual” China in transnational contexts (Ong and Nonini 1997, Louie 2000). It does this by looking not only at China, but also at transnational systems of Chinese connection. Moreover, because Christianity also comprises global systems and networks no matter its local variations, it too exists as a network of taken-for-granted centers (e.g., the West) and peripheries (e.g., “overseas missions”). Chinese Catholics thus occupy two “transnationalisms” often taken to be at odds with one another: “China” and “Christianity.” How do they harness, move between, and leverage both? I show how the “in-between” space presumed by both Chinese and Catholic transnationalism is problematized in each other’s terms. Catholicism, in particular its global corporate structure, becomes a strategic lens through which transnationally mobile Chinese can coherently “place” themselves in the midst of disparate geographies and overlapping chronotopes (Bakhtin 1981).

In examining styles of mobility, I find two concepts particularly useful. “Transnationalism” refers to the social field created by migrants as their identities – ethnic, racial, national, religious – multiply and become fluid within and between nation-states (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992). “Cultures,” ideas, and material goods are likewise caught up in the flows of global capitalism (see Appadurai 1991) in ways that are expressible through the border crossings of religion and ritual (Heo and Kormina 2019). While the borderland positions of transmigrants-in-motion would seem to undermine the concepts of place and locality, transnationalism does not refer to an abstract, deterritorialized “in-betweenness” that is “neither

here nor there” (Guarnizo and Smith 1998:11). Rather, I show how Chinese Christians create new boundaries among themselves in accord with their vocation or divine calling, religious genealogy, and participation in parish life. Catholic transmigrants thus re-classify themselves into categories such as sacred and secular factions, “true” and “false” disciples.

A second useful concept is that of “confessional mobility.” As proposed by Liesbeth Corens (2019), it characterizes English Catholics who left for the European mainland in the seventeenth century, during the Counter- or Catholic Reformation. Corens argues that they ought not be understood as exiles or refugees, but rather as active members of a borderless English Catholic community. The English identity of this community was strengthened, not diluted, by the transnational mobility of its members. A similar experience occurs among some Catholic migrants from China, in how they understand their mobility. This mobility is confessional because it is grounded on a specifically Catholic ecclesiology of collaborative salvation, as opposed to the Protestant notion of the predestination of the elect. It draws on an understanding of the inherent transnationalism of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” church (Corens 2019:29ff.).

Confessional mobility applies not only to Catholic expatriates, but to those who remain in their home country. Those who do not emigrate are far from immobile; emigration is a serious consideration and real possibility for many Chinese who never leave China. The horizon of relocation lies ahead as an ever-moving destination. It is imagined as an upwardly mobile destination. My dissertation asks: what is the relationship between confessional mobility and upward social mobility? As others have argued for other regions (Chu 2010, Dick 2018), there are discourses of migration among those who stay, discourses that can be tracked empirically. As for discourses about social mobility, the connections between ethnic and religious identity and

migration have long been studied (Bankston and Zhou 1995, Platt 2005, Das 2016). Taking a semiotic approach, I start with the insight that both kinds of discourse are based on the making and maintaining of differentiation through contrast. Contrasts organize relations between signs and their objects, making them identifiable through their differentiating qualities as well as through the boundaries constructed and displayed in discourse (Gal and Irvine 2019:183).

Upward mobility defines itself against the “lower” site from which one moves “up” on the social ladder. In China as in the United States, this traditionally occurs through higher education. As an ideology, upward mobility justifies the ethical costs incurred by individuals who raise themselves at the expense of their communities (Morton 2019). Because confessional mobility often leads one “upward” socially and economically, it can appear, to a cynic, to provide ethical cover for selfish gain. The upwardly mobile trajectories available to or enabled by a confessional stance or calling comprise a vocational economy. This dissertation asks what “confession” means in the context of Christian discourses about upward and transnational mobilities in China.

The word “confession” has several interrelated usages, from the autobiographical disclosure of one’s interior life, to the Roman Catholic sacrament of reconciliation, and from the legal admission of guilt to the differentiation of denominational identity. Joining these usages is a discursive and semiotic process, the articulation of the confessant’s stance toward the object confessed or professed (e.g., the self, faith, sin, allegiance). Affixing the label “confession” to discursive practices in the Chinese context poses at least one immediate problem. Because confession and the assemblage of related concepts – guilt, conscience, the self, and the like – are the specific products of Western Christianity (Hepworth and Turner 1982), they may not be found in their most pristine forms elsewhere. How then to study “confession” in China?

Answering this question involves two clarifications. First, the confessionality that qualifies a style of mobility pertains to the ecclesial sense of denominational identity based on a confession of faith. In referring to the Protestant and Catholic confessions, for example, one is distinguishing religious communities by the creeds, consisting of declarative sentences whose recitation entails assent, that they profess. Here, I am interested in confessionality as performative membership in and moral alignment to a credal community. In the secular Chinese context, such confessionality can be risky enough to motivate members to emigrate. Thus, Chinese emigrants citing human rights violations as reasons for moving overseas mobilize discourses of risk as well as international networks of co-religionists. Second, I do not situate this dissertation alongside “red peril” literature on socialist genres of confession.¹ In short, I am not analyzing either confession or mobility “with Chinese characteristics.” Extant accounts of what could be considered “confession” in China date from the late second century CE (Wu

¹ The initial goal of “red peril” literature was to examine why American POWs in the Korean War so easily “confessed” anti-American sentiments and the merits of communist brotherhood. Provocatively called *xinao* (‘brainwashing’), this “lenient, *laissez-faire* technique” (Hepworth and Turner 1982:1) of thought reform or remolding has captured the attention and imagination of many US-based scholars ever since. Lifton (1989:3) claims that brainwashing was first used to describe Chinese indoctrination procedures; Mao, however, attributed the origins of the term *xinao* to the United States (Hu 2012:13). In a 1947 report on *suku* (‘speaking bitterness’), one of the recommended steps is *shua naojin* or ‘washing the brain’ (qtd. in Sun 2013:47). From here, the links to coercion and confession are easily made. During the Hundred Flowers Movement (1956-1957), those who “spoke out” (*mingfang*), often reluctantly and under great pressure, were identified as “rightists.” Intellectuals were encouraged to “confide in” or “open their hearts to the Party” (*xiang dang jiaoxin*) in a related but separate campaign following the Anti-Rightist Movement. “It’s as though this very term *jiaoxin* (‘to offer one’s heart’) triggers me greatly,” wrote an associate dean in a self-criticism (*jiantao*) from this time. “Confessing [*tanbai*] my loyalty to the Party is something I’d happily do anyway, so why nakedly turn it into *jiaoxin*?” (qtd. in Ni 2012:57). Those who could most divulge and self-flagellate for their “old” (bourgeois, rightist) errors of thought could best express their sincerity towards the Party; it was an operation of de-bourgeoisising the depths of the soul (Yang 2005:155).

1979).² Indeed, since such accounts of forms of speaking that are quite similar to “confession” exist, there is no need to privilege confessionality as an essentially European quality adapted to the Chinese context.

As a matter of definition, those said to be practicing confessional mobility neither lose their “original” national affiliation nor adopt the cultural identity of the receiving country. Corens’s English Catholics find rather their English identity strengthened by living abroad. Like Corens, I find the analytics of transnationalism and confessional mobility useful because they foreground migratory processes without projecting expectations of cultural assimilation and other homogenizing processes of globalization. Many of my interlocutors, for example, have no intention of becoming American citizens or “Chinese-Americans.”

That said, the interconnectivity of global capitalism as well as the top-down implementation of the Chinese state’s religious supervision and urban renovation (especially when relevant to churches), entail a particular vision of the nation, not to mention the transnational: the usual notion of nations as bounded, both territorially and demographically, is problematical in this case. On the one hand, the narrative of “Greater China” draws from early 20th-century constructs of Chinese nationalism – Han ethnicity and Confucian culturalism – and is in no small way sustained by the capital investments made by transnational Chinese in China (Duara 1997). On the other hand, I argue in this dissertation that the deterritorialized ideologies

² Self-disclosure of wrongdoings was practiced among Taoist healers and Neo-Confucians alike; Buddhists observed their own confessional rite, *uposatha* or *chanhui* (忏悔). Self-stricture (Wu 1979) or the penning of confessions labeled “self-reproach” (*zize* 自責) or “self-indictment” (*zिसong* 自訟), in which wrongs were repented and better behavior promised, was a practice limited to upper-class men. Buddhist and Daoist teachings tended to be more popular among the lower classes; Buddhists were known to confess in groups, with all confessants following a standard text; some Daoist sects also held public confessions. The individual confession seems to have been an exception (Eberhard 1967).

of race, culture, and religion that facilitate Chinese urban development and mobility through the recruitment of transnationals and their capital also precipitate the reterritorialization in China and overseas of ethnic, religious, and class constructs. Migrants' moral stances continue to index claims to belonging that are based not only in specific territorial histories but also in the Chinese state-mediated politics of insiders vs. outsiders, rural migrants vs. urban professionals. From the moral superiority claimed by a Hangzhou native vis-à-vis Chinese others (see Chapter 2) to the battle over land claims between the Hangzhou city government and a local Catholic church (see Chapter 3) and to the surprise appearance, in a Brooklyn parish, of a Chinese state-proscribed "cult" (see Chapter 4), "transnational China" is continually beset by the removing and remaking of boundaries (see below for chapter summaries).

Throughout the dissertation, I argue that Christian self-identification and Chinese state policies together shape the politics of crossing borders and building families within China and in diasporic Chinese communities. This politics is organized by the overlapping axes of differentiation between the categories of kin/stranger and the heavenly (or sacred)/earthly (or profane, or secular), the latter a master trope of Christian thought most famously articulated in Augustine's *City of God*. I examine these contrasts within the sphere of taken-for-granted Chineseness; they do not apply to perceived differences between China and the United States or "the West." Further, the axes of differentiation I have identified cannot be defined solely by textual features or thematic characteristics of texts. As semiotic phenomena, tropes and axes of differentiation are to be analyzed in the context of a community and its communicative resources and practices (Hymes 1964:3). After all, these characteristics are embedded in, and acquire value through, a communicative repertoire.

The “Christian tradition” or the “Chinese tradition,” taken alone, far exceeds the systematic treatment a single dissertation can provide. Attempts to take them together are haunted by the charge of being either insufficiently “about China” or “about Christianity.” I take as my site of inquiry several ethnographic case studies of Chinese uptakes of Christian contrast. Augustine’s metaphor of the two cities, the City of God (*civitas Dei*) and the Earthly City (*civitas terrena*), distinguishes them by their loves: the love of self and the love of God (*De civ.* 24.28). This heavenly/earthly contrast is taken up by my interlocutors as a contrast between two activities: listening (*ting*) and scheming (*mou*). Listening is an activity directed toward – and by – God, while scheming is an activity directed toward worldly ambitions. Christians self-differentiate and enact contrast by means of a communicative repertoire that distinguishes forms of communication as God-directed (listening) or self-directed (scheming). Listening/scheming is also in tension with the state’s distinctions between religions vs. “cults,” “underground”³ vs. “official” churches. At the same time, both the “heavenly” and the “earthly” are in tension with state-imposed divisions between national borders and between land ownership and land-use rights. I show how the listening/scheming contrast shapes responses to Chinese state policies both at home and abroad, stretching the affordances of what it means to “be Chinese” and what it means to “be Christian.”

In unfolding these meanings, I turn to two semiotic and linguistic anthropological themes: contrast and chronotope. In thinking about contrast, I rely on the concept of the axis of

³ The term “underground church” (*dixia jiaohui*) typically describes a non-state-registered church in China. It is often used interchangeably with the term “house church” (*jiating jiaohui*). Between the mid-2000s and the mid-2010s, Protestant house churches reached new levels of public visibility and urban growth, moving out of “underground” houses to commercial offices (Ma and Li 2014:12). For Catholics, the underground church refers to the portion of the Chinese Catholic population that rejects the state-registered church (i.e., the Patriotic Catholic Association) and professes communion with Rome.

differentiation, or the schema of division that maps qualitative contrasts between signs onto the objects they index, like a map that diagrammatically represents territorial boundaries (Gal and Irvine 2019:18-19). In the case of linguistic registers and sociolects, differentiation is a social process mediated by Goffmanian footing and role alignment (Agha 2007a:85, 132-136). The Christian rhetoric on display in homilies and biblical metaphors indexes paradigmatic Christian social types (listeners or schemers, e.g., the Good Samaritan, the deceiver) just as professional registers, e.g., “legalese,” evoke the personae and patterns of conduct associated with professional social identities (Agha 2007a:163-165). Enregisterment presumes the projection of qualitative contrasts between registers to characterological contrasts between their speakers, or what Peirce calls a diagrammatic icon (Gal 2016:121). For example, the “childlike” simplicity of an immigrant parishioner’s confession, which consists entirely of the number and kind of rules that were broken, is taken by Fr. Guo in Chapter 4 to reflect the stunted, undereducated, and “traditional” nature of the rural migrant. Though such reflections, Fr. Guo, himself a rural migrant, may be constructing himself as more modern than the congregants he serves (cf. Pigg 1996:160-161).

Second, the chronotope, or time-space envelope of narrative events and characters (Bakhtin 1981, Silverstein 2005), shapes how representations of personhood are taken up by participants. These representations of personhood, along with the agency they attribute to the participants that they represent, are experienced within a participation framework (Agha 2007b), or social regimentation of all participants in a textual encounter (Goffman 1981, Goodwin 1999). For Christians, the challenge is to include God as a participant within a chronotope. Protestants and Catholics presume different understandings not only of how God acts in a time-space-personhood container (or chronotope), but also of how humans ought to act in a world that

includes God as an active participant. They thus have different chronotopic ideologies. A chronotopic ideology explains and validates how time, space, and personhood are connected or divided. Just as a language ideology regiments persona-register relations, a chronotopic ideology regulates time-space-personhood configurations.

My focus on chronotopes and chronotopic ideologies builds off of the theme of contrast by examining how different chronotopic ideologies are taken up by Protestants and Catholics as ways of producing contrast between themselves. While Protestant Christianity continues to be associated with modernity and progress in China and elsewhere (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Keane 2007, Lian 2010, Cao 2011, van der Veer 2014, Harkness 2014), scholarship on contemporary Chinese Catholicism has either focused on its rural and village manifestations (Lozada 2001, Harrison 2013) or questioned its contribution to civil society (Madsen 1998).⁴ These inferences would seem to reproduce commonplace expectations of the Protestant ethic. It is worth noting, too, that the development of the concept of the private, from guilt to private property, has classically been associated with “advanced” societies⁵ and the birth of the modern, sovereign, and self-differentiating individual – the very same associated with the Protestant ethos. That the “average person” (*yiban laobaixing*) in China, both Protestants and Catholics say, neither notices nor cares to notice the difference between them is a cause of frequent misunderstanding. By organizing and regimenting what they deem to be a theo-politically

⁴ The sympathetic character of Catholic monographs, in contrast to the more critical edge of ethnographic work on Protestant churches, itself reifies the stereotype that Protestantism is elected, Catholicism inherited. It consequently gestures toward a lower degree of intellectualization among Catholics than Protestants.

⁵ Cf. the relative advancement of so-called “guilt cultures” over “shame cultures” as articulated in Ruth Benedict’s *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (1946) and developed in E. R. Dodds’s *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951).

appropriate relationship between time, space, and personhood, Protestants and Catholics mobilize different stances toward the state.

Together, the concepts of contrast and chronotope inform the communicative practices of minoritarian Chinese Catholics, shaping how they self-differentiate as listeners, not schemers; how they negotiate, via a chronotopic ideology, obligations to God and the state; and how they enact rural/urban social differentiation by “listening” for the Christian contrast between the heavenly and the earthly. The discursive and ethnographic analyses I propose in this dissertation also rely on my interpretation of scholarly discussions about “religion” in China and about Catholic politics as it is positioned within the anthropology of Christianity. I take up each of these scholarly debates in turn, signaling how my arguments engage with them.

“Religion” in China

Behind the contemporary division between the “religious” and the “political” lies a historically contingent moral-political organization of social categories. The post-Reformation European concept of religion, introduced to late nineteenth-century China via the Japanese neologism *shukyo* (宗教, *zongjiao* in Hanyu Pinyin), was deployed by modernizers to stigmatize indigenous devotional practices now collectively known as “Chinese popular religion” (Poon 2011:118-119). After the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the Confucian system that had until then reigned supreme was replaced by an ideology of religious freedom seen to befit a modern nation-state, the new Republic of China. The Gregorian calendar was adopted and enforced. Anything deemed “superstitious” (*mixin*)⁶ was suppressed. Originally associated specifically with Christianity (Goossaert and Palmer 2010:50), *zongjiao* now refers to any system of

⁶ The terms *zongjiao* and *mixin* were popularized by journalist and reformer Liang Qichao (1872-1929) in 1901 (Goossaert and Palmer 2010:50).

spirituality with a sacred canon, formal dogma, and the other accoutrements of organized, institutional religion. Like the terms “science” and “religion” (see Harrison 2015), *zongjiao* has always been a politically motivated category. Christians are more comfortable saying that what they have is *xinyang* (‘faith,’ ‘belief’), not *zongjiao*.

The People’s Republic of China inherited and adopted the Republic of China’s religious policy, recognizing the same five orthodox “religions” of Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Protestantism, and Catholicism, and establishing for each a supervisory council of representatives.⁷ During the Cultural Revolution, however, all religious activity was prohibited and all supervisory councils disbanded. Given this not-so-distant history of suppression, the unexpectedly precipitous religious revivals, in particular the growth of Protestant Christianity,⁸ following the restoration of religious toleration in 1982 have incurred much popular speculation⁹ and sociological investigation (Yang 2006, Yang 2011, Stark and Wang 2015).

Outside of churches and sociological circles, such growth has not been as well received. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, state-registered or “official” churches were outraged by Zhejiang

⁷ Namely the Buddhist Association of China (est. 1953), Islamic Association of China (est. 1953), Chinese Daoist Association (est. 1954), Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (est. 1956), and the Protestant *lianghui* or ‘two councils,’ the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (est. 1951) and the China Christian Council (est. 1980).

⁸ Of the five state-recognized religions, Protestant Christianity is among the fastest-growing, accounting for 1.8% (or 23,050,000 in 2010) to 5% of the population; unofficial estimates are much higher. Catholicism has experienced more modest growth, with adherents numbering around 12 million (Madsen 2003), 5.3 million of whom (according to China’s State Administration for Religious Affairs) congregate at registered churches. (Sources: [1] Chang Hong, 宗教蓝皮书:我国 2305 万人信仰基督教. *Renmingwang* 人民网, August 12, 2010, <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/1026/12423792.html> [2] <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>)

⁹ E.g., Tom Phillips, “China on course to become ‘world’s most Christian nation’ within 15 years,” *The Telegraph*, April 19, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/10776023/China-on-course-to-become-worlds-most-Christian-nation-within-15-years.html>.

Province's 2013-2016 "Three Rectifications, One Demolition" (*san gai yi chai*) campaign over the removal of rooftop crosses from church buildings. Motivating this campaign was the perceived encroachment of Christian affiliation – what ought to be one's private confession of faith – into secular public space. But for Christians, confessions of faith *are*, ideally, public acts of reaffirming and witnessing one's faith. For the Chinese Communist Party, too, a similar discursive labor of alignment can be seen in the demand to perform one's national, or rather party-state, identity. In 2014, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection advised that "criticism and self-criticism" (*piping yu ziwo piping*), a Soviet form of confession,¹⁰ be revitalized. While its Bolshevik roots are well known, what is less acknowledged is its Christian heritage: Communist self-examination can be traced back to Augustinian notions of interior life and subjective time. Incorporated in the politically polar discursive practices of Christians and

¹⁰ Designed to correct the oppressive consciousness of the pre-socialist past, a self-criticism, colloquially called *jiantao* or *jiancha* ('[self-]examination'), expressed contrition for errant thoughts and behaviors and was "passed" by a committee after multiple rounds of revision. This compulsory rite spread across China during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). A broad spectrum of Chinese citizenry was taught to enact and perform class-consciousness, at regular intervals, to extirpate the doxa of a feudal past. The priority given to thought reform testified to the anxiety over the mental and spiritual interior of a people much too inured to oppression. Even if they had been externally liberated with respect to the means of production, were they internally liberated? How could one know? How was one to prove it? Popularized by Lenin's pamphlet "What is to be done?" (1902), *soznatelnost'* or 'consciousness' – or, more pointedly, 'conscience' – very rapidly became a key objective, the attainment of which, in Bolshevik discourse and in Socialist Realist literature, was framed as a process of conversion (Kharkhordin 1999:58-59). By 1935, *kritika i samokritika* or 'criticism and self-criticism' (which first appeared as the one-word slogan *samokritika* in 1928) was already well established as a purging strategy and a staple of party practice in the Soviet Union (Kojevnikov 2004:202). Central to criticism and self-criticism was the revelation (*oblichenie*) of wrongs (often those committed by government officials against workers), an operation through which one's self was constituted by the party and thus made known to oneself (Kharkhordin 1997:342). Mao's Yan'an Rectification Movement in the 1940s saw the perfection of confession as a technique of self-(re)fashioning able to extract from counterrevolutionary repression the consciousness of "New China."

Communists alike, ritualized confession has endured as a technique of truth production, self-repair, and social transformation.

The absence of liberation theology or its Chinese equivalent may perhaps come as a surprise, but one must remember the wholly different context of Christianity in China as a minority religion that by its very existence manifests a critical challenge to the dominant cultural-economic-political milieu. This is a stance that draws moral force from minoritarian exceptionalism – even more so for underground churches – rather than from the economic exclusion of the (majority Catholic Latin American) masses from the spoils of global capitalism (see Dussel 2001). Christian differentiation, whether Catholic or Protestant, is thus itself a means of signaling one’s critical, but not always nonconformist, stance. I was moreover reminded on multiple occasions by local informants and academics alike that the Western association of “liberal” and “conservative” with “left” and “right” is flipped in China (where to be “left” is to be politically conservative), and that the non-mainstreamness of Christianity makes it quite unlike contemporary Evangelicalism in the United States or Roman Catholicism in Latin America.

The Chinese state’s adoption of the notion of religion as a formal, belief-oriented, rule-bound textual tradition modeled after Protestantism contributes to the currency of confessionality and the mobility it makes possible: interior alignment with and verbal assent to a group identity bound by shared beliefs are understood to commit people to (or forbid them from taking) certain actions. The state’s denigration of “superstition,” too, is important for understanding a religious sphere consisting of official “religions,” their “underground” versions, and proscribed “cults.” The history of the category of religion in China thus provides the already transnational context in which Christian contrasts circulate.

On Catholic politics and the anthropology of Christianity

The Roman Catholic Church is by design a transnational, hierarchical institution; its extraterritorial influence, suspected and actual, in the politics of national jurisdiction is a recurring theme in much of European and Latin American history. In China, too, this is no trivial theme. Central to Catholic emigration is the semi-schismatic status of the Chinese Church.¹¹ After the Sino-Vatican split in 1951, the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association (or PCA) became the official representative of all Catholic institutions in China. From the Communist Party's point of view, local Catholics were reclaiming their church in the context of a broader revolution against Western imperialism. The roots of the movement can be traced back to 1914, when Catholic "patriots" in Tianjin opposed the construction of Catholic churches by French authorities, seeing it as a pretense for scaling up the French concession's unreasonable demands. From within the church, like-minded activists and intellectuals repudiated the "imperialists" during the May Fourth Movement. So did the Catholics join the ranks of the patriots. In 1950, the Holy See warned that participation in certain Communist Party-sponsored organizations would result in excommunication.¹² The two sides split after the Chinese government deported the apostolic nuncio from Nanjing to Hong Kong in 1951.

¹¹ I capitalize *C* when referring to the Church as an official, institutional body. When referring to a church in its local (i.e., not national or international) context (e.g., "a neighborhood church"), *c* is not capitalized.

¹² In response, revolutionary initiatives such as Fr. Wang Liangzuo's "Guangyuan's Declaration of Catholic Self-Reformation" (廣元天主教自立革新運動宣言), which called for "becoming self-reliant, establishing a new self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating church" (自立更生, 建立自治、自養、自傳的新教會), won greater popular support. Antonio Riberi, the apostolic nuncio to China, circulated a letter opposing these "three-self" reforms. In March 1951, Fr. Li Weiguang and a group of 783 priests, nuns, and laypeople cosigned a declaration denouncing Western imperialism and Vatican interference. Charged with espionage, Riberi was expelled from China that November. Undeterred, the Vatican continued to "slander" the anti-imperialist movement by labeling it "persecution" (教難). Counterrevolutionaries such as the Bishop of Shanghai (later Cardinal) Ignatius Kung Pin-Mei (龔品梅) received due punishment

Since then, the Church in China has been divided into an official PCA church and an underground church. This division itself is contested, especially by PCA priests. “It’s one church with two sides,” they would say. The PCA is notorious for appointing its own bishops without approval from Rome. Automatically excommunicated upon ordination, many of these bishops either applied for recognition or were later recognized by the Vatican. Vatican recognition of Chinese state-appointed bishops was a part of the terms of a controversial and now likely defunct “deal” with China.¹³ In return, papal approval was to be integrated into the PCA’s process of episcopal selection. Critics of the PCA, most notably Joseph Zen, Cardinal Emeritus of Hong Kong, have likened the “deal” to a betrayal of the underground church. In attempting to “unify” the church, they say, Pope Francis instead directly handed over underground Catholics to the

for treason. In July 1956, the first Chinese Catholic congress of representatives met in Beijing and founded the Chinese Patriotic Catholic Association. When the priests of Hankou and Wuchang elected their own bishops in 1958 – in accordance with Church rubrics, they claimed – the Vatican declared the appointments invalid and threatened excommunication. Chinese representatives protested this condemnation; henceforth, each diocese would elect and ordain its own bishops. By 1962, there were 50 such bishops across China. That same year, the PCA held its second congress, which presented plans for a new seminary in addition to the old calls for autonomy. (The Second Vatican Council was also convened in 1962.) The PCA’s third congress, held in 1980, added the goals of uniting the clergy and laity and contributing to the Four Modernizations. After the Holy See “illegally” appointed Dominic Tang Yee-Ming Archbishop of Guangdong in 1981, several PCA committees promulgated the “Resolution concerning the Chinese Catholic Church firmly proceeding along the path of independence and self-management” (關於中國天主教堅持走獨立自主自辦教會道路的決議) (1983), which called once more for the Chinese Church to resist colonial recidivism, foreign influence, and to remain autonomous, self-reliant, and patriotic.

¹³ See Jason Horowitz, “Vatican Extends Deal With China Over Appointment of Bishops,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 20, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/22/world/europe/vatican-china-bishops.html>, “Holy See and China renew Provisional Agreement for 2 years,” *Vatican News*, Oct. 22, 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-10/holy-see-china-provisional-agreement-renew-appointment-bishops.html>, and “Report: Vatican not mentioned in China’s new rules on bishop appointments,” *Catholic News Agency*, Feb. 21, 2021, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/246500/report-vatican-not-mentioned-in-chinas-new-rules-on-bishop-appointments>.

government.¹⁴ Although church affiliation – PCA or underground – has consequences for (confessional) mobility, one’s “choice” of membership is usually accidental: you affiliate with whichever church your family happens to attend. If your family is not already part of an underground network, it is unlikely that you will “switch sides” and go underground. Church choice is less an indicator of personal piety or religious purity than it is of one’s social network. Little wonder, then, that no parishioner at the PCA church in which I conducted fieldwork celebrated the Beijing-Vatican “provisional agreement” or “temporary pact” (*linshi xieyi*).

This dissertation is inspired by a reflexive anthropology of Christianity that takes into consideration the context-dependency of local Christianities without essentializing them as tokens of a Christianity¹⁵ inseparable from Western modernity (Asad 1993, Goossaert and Palmer 2010). What is the Christian contribution to modern techniques of worldmaking, from the rise of capitalism to the construction of ethnic difference? This question grounds many an examination of the making of global modernity, from colonial and postcolonial ideologies of language and communication to the formation of the modern nation-state (see Robbins 2004, Cannell 2006, Keane 2007, Errington 2008). Max Weber’s thesis on the elective affinities between Protestantism and modern capitalism undergirds implicit assumptions about the residually but fundamentally Christian (or post-Christian) nature of the global economy. This is

¹⁴ See Joseph Zen Ze-Kiun, “The Pope Doesn’t Understand China,” *The New York Times*, Oct. 24, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/24/opinion/pope-china-vatican-church-catholics-bishops.html> and “Cardinal Zen rues ‘betrayal’ of China’s underground church,” *UCA News*, Sept. 28, 2018, <https://www.ucanews.com/news/cardinal-zen-rues-betrayal-of-chinas-underground-church/83483>.

¹⁵ The single term “Christianity” is used in two ways in this sentence (and throughout this dissertation): as (1) an object of study or localized practice and as (2) a generalized framework or covert ideological analytic. One goal of the anthropology of Christianity is to more finely delineate and clarify these two usages of “Christianity.” Arguably, the very concept of secularism or secular society presupposes an understanding of “Christianity” in the second usage.

an economy whose moral basis is founded on Enlightenment notions of human rights, autonomy, and labor, and whose driving force has been attributed, imperfectly but nontrivially, to the spirit of the Protestant calling.

Conscious of the inbuilt and arguably unavoidable Eurocentrism of most treatments of Christianity and the modern world, historians and anthropologists have tended to highlight the indigenization of various forms of Christianity in “receiving” societies. Translation is no longer a straightforward process of transmission and passive (or coerced) reception, but the active, reflexive work of creation and adaptation (Tomlinson 2020), and established Catholic lineages, for example, have persisted long after the cessation of missionary contact (see Harrison 2013). Even Weber has been absorbed: prosperous “boss Christians” in Wenzhou are said to read *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as a how-to manual (Cao 2008). Migration and the rise of what is called “global Christianity” or “world Christianity” may be shifting the European “center” of Christianity southward both numerically and theologically (Jenkins 2002). In China, this shift is inseparable from rapid urbanization and the migration of rural workers, including rural Christians, to urban areas.

The turn to indigenization is stronger yet in anthropological studies of Catholicism, where stereotypes of Catholic difference are reaffirmed in descriptions of blended rites and iconographies; consider the pride of place given to ritual, “magic words,” holy objects, and Marian devotions. At the same time, Catholic thinkers have been at pains to undermine the stigma of perceived non-modernity, positing the existence of a “Catholic ethic” as a corrective to the Protestant ethic (see Novak 1993, Tropman 1995). Exactly how “Protestant” – more specifically, Calvinist or Puritan – the Protestant ethic is has not been settled. The greater prosperity of Protestant territories in the nineteenth century may be correlated but not credited to

Protestant doctrine (Viner 1978), and snappy Ben Franklin quotes, which Weber generously uses to illustrate this “ethic,” make for tenuous evidence; Franklin hardly viewed himself as a Puritan (Novak 1993:6). Put simply, the Catholic counter-challenge is that Catholicism has, or can have, elective affinities with capitalism too.

The disenchantment of the religious calling (see Weber 2001[1930]:123-124]) would appear to be a logical result of capitalist development. The presence of religious migrants, however, complicates this projection. It also complicates reigning models of centers and peripheries, such as that of the Catholic hierarchy in multicultural Rome vis-à-vis the much-vaunted strength of the Latin American Church (Napolitano 2016:97-98). For Catholic Chinese, the question of centers and peripheries is reproduced in different ways at different scales: within China, as a contrast between the PCA and the underground church; transnationally, first as a contrast between the People’s Republic of China and the Chinese diaspora, second as a contrast between all ethnic Chinese and non-Chinese. The overlap of these networks makes apparent the tension between access and belonging and the uneasy shift from belonging as a religious minority in China to becoming an ethnic minority in the United States. To keep their options open, migrants must be able to translate or realign social (or spiritual) capital from one political context to another (Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton 1992:12). Confessional mobility thus opens up a multiscalar, transposable semiotic field of international access and accessibility.

My dissertation argues that the transnational politics of Christian contrast informs the communicative resources and mobility of minoritarian Chinese Catholics. No matter how widely dispersed across Europe (Salerno 2021) and North America, the “borderlessness” of this confessionally mobile community contributes to, and is partly enabled by, the reterritorialization of the ethnic and religious constructs of hospitality, rural piety, and filiation ecclesiology in

China. Filiational ecclesiology is a church's self-structuring as a social group organized by generational continuity, geographic provenance, and family membership (see Harrison 2011, Li 2018). As communicative resources, these constructs help guide the relationships of Catholics with Chinese government officials as well as with overseas church-mediated networks. Through the local specificity of these networks, migrants' judgments about trustworthiness, expectations of hospitality, and demands of reciprocity take shape. The chapters of this dissertation examine the territorial emplacement (or its disavowal) of different facets of Sino-Catholic politics in China and the United States: vocations and upward mobility (Chapter 1), hospitality and kinship (Chapter 2), chronotopic ideologies (Chapter 3), and the association of rurality with religiosity (Chapter 4).

Field sites and methods

The central field site of this multi-sited ethnography is a seventeenth-century Jesuit chapel in Hangzhou, where national and transnational routes of travel intersect and emanate. As an urban destination, it offers to nuns and seminarians from less affluent northern villages the promise of social mobility and spiritual capital. As an institution through which they can pursue further training overseas, it is, as well, a fraught gateway to a future life in the United States. This chapel, now called Midtown Catholic Church, formally the Cathedral of the Assumption,¹⁶ was founded in 1660 by the Jesuit missionary Martino Martini during the residual tide of the Counter-Reformation's appetite for proselytization.¹⁷ Here I spent two summers (2015, 2016) prior to the formal start of fieldwork in November 2017.

¹⁶ The names of all churches in which I conducted fieldwork are pseudonymous.

¹⁷ My M.A. paper and coursework (completed in 2016) afforded me the opportunity to explore supplementary historical context related to this dissertation; I wrote about the literary techniques of cultural commensuration in a 1654 account of the Jesuit mission in China, composed in Latin by Martino Martini (1614-1661). In 2015, I visited Hangzhou to see the chapel Martini built in

Hangzhou is an intriguing site because of its relevance to the state as a site of both economic prosperity and Christian contestation. Even as Zhejiang, one of the more Christian provinces in China, was attracting recognition for economic growth and openness toward entrepreneurship,¹⁸ it was simultaneously becoming notorious for clamping down on religious activity.¹⁹ The years after the cultural and economic liberalization of the 1990s to the mid-2010s (see Zhang and Li 2008 and Chau 2019), but before the COVID-19 pandemic, mark a transitional period in church-state relations: weakened collusion between Christian elites and local officials, the removal of crosses from churches, and hints of warming ties between Beijing and the Vatican. These years mark, as well, changes in Chinese views of the United States: with Donald Trump as president, many Chinese professionals began to reconsider their ambitions to travel to or work in the United States.

As I will relate in greater detail in Chapter 1, my entry into this site was facilitated by a former family friend and Midtown priest, Fr. Lü, who since the early 2010s has resided in southern California. I met several of my most important interlocutors, in particular my host mother, through his enthusiastic WeChat²⁰ introductions. Despite our later antagonism and abrupt cessation of contact, Fr. Lü remains an important person in this dissertation.

1660 and to initiate contact with priests and parishioners in preparation for future ethnographic research. Partly out of desire for continuity with my prior work, I selected Hangzhou, the city in which Martini ended his days, as my field site for Ph.D. research. Hangzhou Catholics will also proudly inform visitors that two of the “Three Pillars” of Chinese Catholicism (*Shengjiao san zhushi*), the late Ming scholar-officials Li Zhizao and Yang Tingyun, were from Hangzhou.

¹⁸ E.g., Sue-Lin Wong, “Hangzhou shows the way to China’s new economy,” *Reuters*, May 20, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/china-economy-hangzhou-idUSL3N0Y360G20150520>.

¹⁹ E.g., “Proposed rule in China bans prominent Christian symbol,” *CBS*, May 7, 2015, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/china-proposal-bans-rooftop-christian-crosses-zhejiang-province/> and Edward Wong, “Pastor in China Who Resisted Cross Removal Gets 14 Years In Prison,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/27/world/asia/china-zhejiang-christians-pastor-crosses.html>.

²⁰ WeChat is the ubiquitous instant messaging app in China.

As a Mandarin-speaking Taiwanese American of *waisheng* or Mainland Chinese descent on my father's side, I was not "really" foreign. When asked, I referred to myself as *huayi*, a catch-all term for ethnic Chinese of non-Chinese nationality. Many of my interlocutors were accustomed to people of my social category and were themselves desirous of visiting or moving to the United States, Canada, or Australia. They often told me, very approvingly, that it was exemplary of me to be interested in China and that I spoke good Chinese "for an ABC," or "American-born Chinese." As my host mother said to me, "Before, Chinese people just wanted to get out. Now look, you want to come back, right? Life is good here too." I would obligingly list the usual conveniences and quality-of-life attractions: high-speed rail, Taobao, Alipay, no fear of gun violence, and so on. My purpose for being in Hangzhou was not clear to everyone – prolonged participant-observation is not always easy to justify – but nobody thought (as far as I know) or made me feel that I wasn't supposed to be there. Nor was my religiosity ever questioned, even though I was often clueless about ritual norms and internal politics, because of how flatteringly I was introduced (by a priest, no less) to several leading members of the parish. The more I endeavored to be liked and to live up to Fr. Lü's introduction and the piety that I imagined was expected of me, the more apparent it became that I was "out of practice." The embarrassment, for example, I felt upon being asked, after substituting for a pianist at Mass, why I played a May hymn in the month of August, still causes me to cringe. I had selected it because it was the easiest to play and I was prone to making nervous mistakes.

The confessional bind of my subject position did not concern my birth in the U.S. but had to do with my cross-strait ties, which were not without some religious resonance. Acquaintances who were critical of the Communist Party, or who had relatives and friends in the underground

church, often attributed a natural sympathy to me.²¹ Some had contacts in Taiwan; did I too? Having been sternly warned by concerned scholars of Christianity not to meddle, I was careful to keep my distance from activities that could bring attention or scrutiny to the underground community. A few acquaintances noted that there was something curious about me opting not only to attend, but also to build connections in, a church that was staffed by priests who “listened to the Party” and that was headed by a bishop who had been ordained without a papal mandate; it was one thing to have no option other than Midtown, but it was quite another to choose Midtown when other options were available. And if it had to be Midtown, why venture out from the friendly international, English-speaking fellowship that met on Saturdays? My apparent readiness to really “be Chinese,” demonstrated by my choice of friends (not expats) and choice of language (not English), lent itself to playful testing. These friends would up the ante from mimicking a high-pitched, “ditzzy” Taiwanese accent to forecasting military invasion “in five years.” In their eyes, my father modeled a kind of elite, transnational Chinese masculinity whose privilege it was to enjoy the advantages of multiple worlds: to be born in Shanghai, to settle in California, to marry a Taiwanese woman.

In spite of all ritual and musical incompetence, my eagerness to make myself useful did, I like to think, endear me to a few parishioners. Altogether, I spent 14 months immersed in parish life at Midtown, attending Masses, Bible study groups, house blessings, fellowships, weddings, catechism classes, memorial services, and the like. At the suggestion of my host mother, I taught an English class on Saturday afternoons at Midtown; in this endeavor I must credit the help of a co-teacher, Luke, a hapless parishioner I dragged into volunteering, and two then-undergraduate

²¹ Because the Vatican has no formal relations with China, instead recognizing Taiwan as the “Republic of China,” cross-strait religious visits are sometimes thought to be aligned with underground sympathies.

Fulbrighters also in Hangzhou. I led this course for three months before handing it off to a student from Ghana. For a time, I substituted for one of the regular pianists at Mass.

During most of these months, I also endeavored to acquaint myself with a nearby Protestant church, the better to grasp the official or “open” (i.e., registered with state authorities) Christian ecology of Hangzhou. I call this site Lian’an Church. Constructed in 1927, Lian’an traces its history back to the American Presbyterian Mission’s inland expansion in 1859.²² I was aided in my efforts by a convenient coincidence: a mid-career pastor at Lian’an happened to be acquainted with my China-based faculty sponsor, an anthropologist of Christianity at a university in Shanghai. Not only did he think well of him, but this mid-career pastor also related to my “plight”: he too was completing a graduate degree from a distance (his advisor was in Hong Kong). Every now and then, I helped out with English translation and proofreading work. I sampled a range of activities at Lian’an and other Protestant churches, but kept my ambit to a lively fellowship for young professionals at Lian’an. In terms of the respectability of my social network and justification for (sometimes aimlessly) hanging out on church grounds, I felt much more at ease at Lian’an because my credibility derived in part from the charisma of a known and nearby senior academic.

²² In missionary records, (proto?-)Lian’an is referred to as “Bi-Z Church,” possibly because the street on which it is located used to be called *Pishi Lane* (皮市巷, ‘leather market alley’). Later, a larger building was purchased near Fengle Bridge. According to Lian’an Church’s own version of its history (as of 2016), this later church replaced Bi-Z. The 1895 Jubilee Papers of the Central China Presbyterian Mission mention both a church on “Leather Market Street” and a “*Fong-loh-gyao* [Fengle bridge] chapel.” The real “Lian’an Church” is in fact named after its first Chinese pastor, X-X-X (fl. 1860s, name redacted). However, I am not sure when it was renamed, as no missionary seems to have used (or heeded?) the renaming. I found mention of a pastor named Z-Z-Z (local dialect and an older Romanization system rendering the identity between Z-Z-Z and X-X-X uncertain) in a few Presbyterian records, but I am not sure that this is the same X-X-X; I would like to think that it is. The American missionaries connected to Lian’an Church were J. L. Nevius, Samuel Dodd, D. D. Green, and J. H. Judson.

My life at Midtown was different. Personal conflict with my former host mother was a major and unfortunate reason. In Chapter 2, I explore the politics of ethnographic rapport/failure through this experience. Meanwhile, the parish itself was reeling from a short but intense bout of conflict with the city government over the forced and uncompensated requisition of church land for commercial development. I relate how the Midtowners interpreted this event in Chapter 3.

Finally, I opted to redirect the final two months of fieldwork to New York City. As it turned out, Fr. Lü was only the most recent Midtown priest to go abroad for further training and not return. I met Fr. Chen and Fr. Guo – Fr. Lü’s predecessors – at churches in Chinese neighborhoods in Queens and Brooklyn. Although the New York data occupy two chapters and therefore almost half of this dissertation, my time in New York – a mere two months – in no way matches my time in Hangzhou. I argue that this is not a major disadvantage. This is not, after all, a dissertation about Hangzhou or New York City. This methodological step led me to borrow a transnational lens in order to better capture the shared and mutually resonant commitments of an ethnic and religious community spread across nation-states. In sum, the main characters and churches featured in this dissertation are:

(1) Fr. Lü, born in 1970 in a Catholic village in Shaanxi, recruited by the Archdiocese of Hangzhou. He entered the seminary at the age of 19, after graduating from high school. He was trained at Sheshan Seminary in Shanghai. After finishing his studies there in 2001, he served at Midtown Catholic Church for two years. He was ordained in 2005. He then undertook further study in the Philippines, spending seven years there altogether. On July 28, 2014, he arrived in the United States. For the next four years, he would be working toward a master’s degree in theology at a Catholic university in southern California. He said that he had applied to and received funding from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to cover his living expenses; his tuition

had already been waived. During this time, he assisted at several Chinese parishes, one of which my father attended. Through Fr. Lü, I was introduced to Therese Zhou Fang, a prominent parishioner at Midtown who hosted me when I arrived in Hangzhou in late 2017. At the time of my fieldwork, Fr. Lü was running out of time in the United States: he had to graduate soon, and he was hoping to be incardinated into the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. He was anxiously waiting for a letter of excardination from the Archdiocese of Hangzhou. Worried about being unable to return to the United States if he went back to China to procure it, he at one point suggested that this letter be handed to me for safekeeping, so that I could pass it to him upon my return to California.

(2) Fr. Chen, also from Shaanxi and also formerly at Midtown Catholic Church. He left China in 2004. He studied abroad in the Philippines for six years. He said he arrived in the United States with less than \$100 in his pocket; he had left the rest of his savings with his parents. At the time of my fieldwork, he was serving at St. Anthony's Church as parochial vicar; his main duty was to celebrate Mass in Mandarin Chinese. Like Fr. Lü, he too had fraught ties with the Archdiocese of Hangzhou. He is featured in Chapter 1. He has since been reassigned to St. Cecilia's Church.

(3) Fr. Guo, the first of the three Midtown priests to leave China, and the only one of the three to have joined a religious order. He is a much more private individual than Fr. Lü and Fr. Chen; all that can be disclosed of his province of origin, migration history, and status is that his background is similar to that of Fr. Lü and Fr. Chen. He holds a graduate degree from a Catholic university in New York City. At the time of my fieldwork, he was a parochial vicar at St. Cecilia; he has since been reassigned to another Brooklyn parish. He is featured in Chapter 4.

(4) Therese Zhou Fang, a well-known parishioner and volunteer at Midtown Catholic Church, and my host mother in Hangzhou from mid-November to mid-December 2018. Her estranged husband Kang Jianxin had relocated to California one or two years ago. Their son Kang Shengli had recently graduated from Purdue University. Zhou Fang and Kang Jianxin had applied for so-called “millionaire’s visas” through the EB-5 program²³ and were hoping to establish a home base in the San Gabriel Valley. With Fr. Lü as their informal immigration advisor, they were planning on opening a franchised Japanese restaurant. My father and I were introduced to them by Fr. Lü as useful contacts, my father because his single-family home could house them, and I because I was an advantageous match for their son Shengli. As I relate in Chapter 2, these plans went awry.

(5) Midtown Catholic Church, a Patriotic Catholic Association (PCA) church in downtown Hangzhou. According to the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee of Zhejiang Province, attendance hovers at 600 on Sundays. However, this number has not been updated since the 1990s, and it is difficult to estimate the total number of parishioners.

(6) Lian’an Church, a Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) church also in downtown Hangzhou. Lian’an claims to have around 3,000 members.

²³ The EB-5 program provides green cards to foreign nationals who invest in a project (prior to November 2019, \$500,000 in rural or high-unemployment areas and 1 million USD in metropolitan areas) that creates 10 U.S. jobs See “About the EB-5 Visa Classification,” *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services*, May 27, 2022, <https://www.uscis.gov/working-in-the-united-states/permanent-workers/employment-based-immigration-fifth-preference-eb-5/about-the-eb-5-visa-classification>, Alec Macfarlane, “Why wealthy Chinese are lining up to pay \$500k for U.S. visas,” May 8, 2017, <https://money.cnn.com/2017/05/08/investing/china-eb5-visa-trend/index.html>, Javier C. Hernandez and Jesse Drucker, “How to Woo Chinese Investors: With Visa Offers and the Trump Name,” *The New York Times*, May 19, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/19/business/kushner-trump-china-green-cards.html>, and Robert Frank, “For Millionaire Immigrants, a Global Welcome Mat,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 35, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/25/your-money/wealth-immigration-millionaires-australia-canada.html>.

(7) St. Anthony's Church, a Roman Catholic church in a Queens neighborhood. Chinese Mass attendance ranges from 60 to 70 in the morning (7:00 AM) to 150 to 250 in the afternoon (3:30 PM). In comparison, the Spanish Mass draws 300 to 500 in the morning (10:30 AM) and 200 to 300 in the afternoon (1:30 PM).²⁴ The estimated Catholic percentage of the “Asian/Other” ethnic group in the Diocese of Brooklyn, which includes the borough of Queens, was 16% (165,000 out of a million) in 2016; the total population of the “Asian/Other” ethnic group in the Diocese of Brooklyn grew from 718,256 in 2000 to 1,038,692 (a 45% increase) in 2016.²⁵

(8) St. Cecilia's Church, a Roman Catholic church in a Brooklyn neighborhood. At St. Cecilia as at St. Anthony, most of the Chinese in attendance are from Fujian Province. According to the parish secretary, St. Cecilia's Church serves 800 to 900 people: on Sundays, up to 300 people – if there is a festivity – show up to the Mandarin Chinese Mass; about 100 attend the English Mass, and 300 to 400 attend the Spanish Mass. Attendance records from 2018 show that Chinese Mass attendance hovers between 150 to 200, in comparison to the Spanish Mass's 500 to 600.

Chapter summaries

This dissertation claims that contemporary Chinese uptakes of Christian contrast emerge as strategies of negotiating the state-imposed divisions of national borders, land ownership vs. use rights, underground vs. official churches. Christian self-identification and Chinese state policies together shape the mobility of Chinese Catholics. This mobility can be called

²⁴ These numbers are based on the parish's 2021 and 2022 Mass attendance records; at the time of my fieldwork in late 2018, attendance was likely higher. I thank Fr. Vincentius Do for providing attendance records for St. Anthony's Church and St. Cecilia's Church. Mass attendance is recorded four times each year, on two weekends in May and two weekends in November.

²⁵ From V Encuentro, “Key Demographic, Social, and Religious Statistics for the Diocese of Brooklyn,” 2018, available at <https://vencuentro.org/results/>.

“confessional” because crossing borders and building families within China and in diasporic Chinese communities are viewed as religious callings. It is also organized by the overlapping axes of differentiation between kin and stranger and the heavenly (or sacred) and the earthly (or profane, or secular), a master trope in Christian theology. The heavenly/earthly contrast is taken up by my interlocutors as a contrast between two activities: listening (*ting*) and scheming or deliberating (*mou*).

The dissertation is divided into two parts, each consisting of two chapters. The chapters are organized thematically. Part I, “Strangers at the door: making contact, marking contrast,” explores how Christian contrasts are taken up in ways that shape transnational mobility. In **Chapter 1, “Confessional mobility and the migratory vocation,”** Fr. Chen Sheng’an, a Midtown priest now in New York City, leverages the supranational authority of the Catholic Church against the Canadian border agents that would seek to restrict his mobility. He recounts a time he was detained at an airport because he had unwittingly used up all his visa entries. How did he manage to get through? He claims that he did not have to “manage” at all: the mobility afforded by his vocation is enacted through the blithe disavowal of agency and intention. He exhibits the characterological qualities (e.g., fearlessness, carelessness) that contrast with the fastidiousness of planning (or scheming). The border agents grant him an exception, then confess – “we are letting you in, we are also of course breaking the law,” Fr. Chen recalls them saying – thus not only taking up the listening/scheming contrast he introduced, but also taking it to its conclusion, interpellating Fr. Chen as one who listens – to confessions. This border crossing also serves to authenticate his calling to the priesthood by making transparent the vocational economy of the Chinese state-sanctioned Patriotic Catholic Association vis-à-vis the unofficial routes taken by members of underground churches. By recruiting border police as converts, Fr. Chen

reenacts the departure of Paul and Silas from the Philippian jail and the conversion of the jailer (Acts 16:25-34), turning a feat of mobility – presented as foolhardy trust in God, the very opposite of a scheme – into a vehicle of salvation for others, myself (his listener) included.

How does the vocation, in the Catholic sense of a calling to the priesthood, to religious life (as a nun or other type of consecrated person), or to lay life (most preferably, marriage and children), make upward social mobility attainable? Chinese priests are typically of humble, rural backgrounds; like priests elsewhere, they are often the second sons of rural families with multiple children. The priesthood provides rural men the opportunity to relocate from a village to a metropolis. In China (as elsewhere), vocations have been retooled into vehicles of social, educational, and physical mobility, at times with the United States as a final destination. These trajectories are not just ambitious examples of upward mobility. They are also confessional: discursive deployment of Catholic affiliation drives them forward. Through what they understand as their divine calling, three priests formerly at Midtown – Fr. Chen, Fr. Lü, and Fr. Guo – now reside in the United States.

In **Chapter 2, “Notes on Christian hospitality and cross-strait kinship,”** I examine how ideologies of Christian hospitality, ethnic kinship, and patriarchal ownership intersect with the building-up and breaking-down of ethnographic rapport across Hangzhou and southern California. This chapter seeks less to advance an argument about how kinship categories are negotiated than to describe how they are situated in a Christian social field organized by Chinese norms of patriarchal ownership. What happens when these norms intersect with ideologies of Christian love and hospitality? I first came to know Midtown as an extension of the Catholic Chinese diaspora in Los Angeles and the San Gabriel Valley. That is where my father (and later, I) met Fr. Lü, and where the ethnographic groundwork for this dissertation was laid.

What kinds of proximity and distance are indexed by the ostension of hospitality or charity, such as the offer to host a guest? Fr. Lü had arranged for Therese Zhou Fang, a wealthy and very pious middle-aged woman at Midtown, to be my host mother. Her generosity was unstinting. I recount how the reciprocal hospitality, arranged by Fr. Lü, that my father later provided her and her husband in California, broke down. The spectacle of this rupture, narrated by Zhou Fang in a series of WeChat posts, became a meta-site of moral differentiation between charity, exemplified by Zhou Fang's deployment of the parable of the Good Samaritan, and premeditated staging, compounded by stereotypes of dishonest outsiders (*waidiren*) and cross-strait untrustworthiness. It was through this uncomfortable spectacle that I was able to locate *mou* as a term of contrast. "Got accused this time of scheming, it's really too much" (*zhe ci beishuo you yumou, zhen shoubuliaole*), Zhou Fang wrote on WeChat after our falling-out. As we competed for attention from interested spectators, mutual acquaintances, and the WeChat public at Midtown, we resituated ourselves within the boundaries dividing neighbors (or strangers) from kin (co-religious or co-ethnic) that we had once fancied we were crossing. Zhou Fang publicly interpreted the betrayal as a spiritual trial of love, whereas I, egged on by bias-confirming feedback from Taiwanese friends and family and miffed that Zhou Fang had in her online references to me demoted my class status from transnational ABC to mere *waidiren* or internal migrant, privately viewed the affair through the lens of cross-strait grievance. The ways in which we made contact and marked contrast thus aligned with Chinese class ideologies of transnational mobility and cross-strait relations.

In the chapters that comprise Part II, "Uncrossings: responses to state and supernatural interference," the specifically urban challenges of mobility – experiences of forced urban renovation in Hangzhou, encounters with a Chinese "cult" in New York City – are navigated

through contrasting chronotopes and social personae that reflect an uneasy relationship with rurality. **Chapter 3, “Housing God, losing ground: Protestant and Catholic chronotopic ideologies in urban China,”** examines chronotopic ideologies, specifically ideologies of chronotopic partibility, at Midtown and Lian’an. By chronotopic ideology, I mean the ethnometapragmatic understanding of how time, space, and personhood are connected or divided. At Midtown and Lian’an, these ideologies emerged in response to the politics of demolition and development. The presence of Christianity in the state imaginary of the modern cityscape has been challenged by urban renovation projects ranging from Zhejiang Province’s 2013-2016 cross-removal campaign to the construction, beginning in 2018, of a massive commercial complex on land partially expropriated from a Catholic church in Hangzhou. Protestants made sense of cross removals by organizing time, space, and personhood according to qualities associated with the home, separating warmth and sociality (e.g., *renqingwei’r*) from the buildings in which they are experienced. Catholics protested the city government’s requisition of a part of their “house” by demanding in its place the *renqing* or human feeling, mediated by money, that is God’s in perpetuity. The heavenly/earthly contrast is thus reimagined in terms of obligation (the *renqing* owed to God) vs. possession (the land owned by the state). Chronotopic partibility or time-space-personhood fracture is both a symptom of dispossession and an ideology that makes possible moral exchange between church and state.

In **Chapter 4, “Becoming urban discerners: ‘listening to God’ as social differentiation at a Chinese church in New York City,”** Enming Guo, another former Midtown priest now in New York City, turns the exhortation to “listen to God” into a method of social differentiation. I take as a case study a homily in which he equates “listening to God” to telling apart “true” from “false” Christians. Because the false Christians in his homily are “false

angels” from a Chinese state-proscribed “cult” who prey upon naïve rural Chinese immigrants, knowing how to not be “tricked” means knowing how to attend to the heavenly/earthly contrast in the midst of the distractions of urban life. Implicit in the homily, the Augustinian heavenly/earthly contrast grounds the dangers posed by the “false angels” identified by Fr. Guo. As Fr. Guo layers biblical and political events of transformation onto one another, he renders them diagrammatically parallel to the interwoven, overlapping societies of Augustine’s metaphor of the two cities, the City of God and the City of Man. The site of overlap is the “wilderness,” a biblical trope often associated with the settler-colonial myth of the American frontier. Here, it is figured as a deterritorialized, transnational space in which the “nations” in question are the followers of Christ and the fallen angels who scheme to draw them away.

Moreover, layered onto these narrated events is the narrative event of the homily itself. In beckoning the congregation to cleave to the church (and church-sponsored events), Fr. Guo acknowledges the vulnerability of immigrants in need of a supportive community. His treatment of the wilderness projects urban, institutional Chinese stereotypes about rurality onto first-generation Chinese immigrants. It assumes their rural susceptibility to religious (and economic) deception and reaffirms the Chinese state’s enforcement of the sacred/secular contrast and the credibility of the global, institutional church. By enabling Fr. Guo to self-differentiate as someone who *can* distinguish between the heavenly and the earthly, in contrast to his more rural parishioners, “listening to God” emerges as a practice of rural-to-transnational social differentiation and, through the thematic parallelism in his homily, a way of using Christian contrast to delineate social difference.

This dissertation aims to show how the semiotic concepts of contrast and chronotope clarify how members of a religious minority move between ethnic and religious

transnationalisms. Chinese Catholics are both a minority in China and a minority among Catholics worldwide. This condition of double “in-betweenness” destabilizes national boundaries even as it reaffirms spiritual and territorial axes of differentiation. The heavenly/earthly contrast becomes the axis of differentiation through which the practical challenges of crossing national borders, enacting kinship (or strangerhood) through hospitality, contesting the state seizure of church property, and differentiating between “true” and “false” Christians are negotiated. Through this schema of contrast, these challenges are discursively reconstructed – and resituated – as replicas of biblical allegory, becoming the very media through which confessional mobility is achieved.

PART I

STRANGERS AT THE DOOR: MAKING CONTACT, MARKING CONTRAST

Chapter 1

Confessional mobility and the migratory vocation

Does God help you get to where God has called you to be? A religious professional – a Roman Catholic priest, for example – would likely say yes. In this chapter, Chinese Catholic priest Chen Sheng’an attests that God “planned” his mobility. Describing how he once passed through airport security with an invalid visa, Fr. Chen figuratively transforms his unlikely passage into a vehicle of salvation for his listeners, the airport security personnel of the narrated event and the addressee (i.e., me) of the narrative event. After all, his recollection of this airport experience reenacts the biblical narrative of Paul and Silas’s divinely enabled departure from the Philippian jail and the conversion of the jailer (Acts 16:25-34).

By boldly deploying the Catholic Church’s international authority against the Canadian border authorities that would seek to restrict his access, Fr. Chen mobilizes both his calling and the supranational and supernatural authority of his divine caller. This feat of mobility makes transparent the vocational economy of the Chinese state-sanctioned Patriotic Catholic Association (PCA) vis-à-vis the more hidden, unofficial routes that members of underground churches must take. The contrasts identified by Fr. Chen – PCA vs. underground, listening vs. planning, scholars vs. soldiers – manifest in how he makes sense of and confessionalizes his mobility. The interwoven upward, transnational, and confessional styles of this mobility have made possible his journey from a village in China to New York City.

On the frosted November morning of my interview with Fr. Chen Sheng'an, I sat waiting in the tiny lobby of the rectory of St. Anthony's Church in a Chinese neighborhood in Queens. Another young woman was waiting to meet with him. Tired and shivering, we passed the time with chit-chat. She told me she was there to ask for a character reference to include in her green card application. She had been brought over from Fuzhou to be reunited with her family only very recently, she said. Her younger sister, born in the United States, was an American citizen. I recall I was surprised at her openness; she seemed more wistful than envious. As she showed me her sister's sunny college snapshots on her smartphone, the door to Fr. Chen's office swung open, a visitor walked out, and Fr. Chen called her in. The door shut. They didn't take very long. I didn't hear anything she said, but I distinctly overheard him haranguing her in a piercing voice:

我们中国人要按照法律，移民要正规一点。

We Chinese have got to follow the law [and] immigrate in a more legitimate way.

I would like to think that she got the letter she needed, but who knows? When it was my turn to be shown into the office, Fr. Chen remarked that he was regularly and relentlessly approached with requests to put in a good word for a new arrival with few connections. His tone did not sound promising. He had no ties to Fuzhou, and he must have heard, over and over again, the same story about an unbaptized person who grew up in a non-practicing Catholic family that had been Catholic for three, four, five, six generations. The young woman had related this very story to me while we were waiting; it was a story I too had frequently heard. Fr. Chen, however, affirmed mutual membership only at the broadest level of "we Chinese," and he did so, it seems, to chide her for asking a favor. His statement contains the presuppositions (1) Chinese people tend to break the law and (2) Chinese people do not immigrate legally.

And yet, as he would soon go on to relate, his own experience with border police at a Canadian airport would seem to confirm these very presuppositions. How does the secular politics of upward mobility intersect with the Catholic vocation or religious calling? Material security, comfort, and travel are no minor considerations for a discerning seminarian, whether in Sri Lanka (Brown 2020) or China. In everyday Catholic parlance, the vocation – *shengzhao* or “holy summons” in Mandarin Chinese – refers to one’s calling to religious life, usually the priesthood. “We’ve been low on vocations for years,” a parish administrator might say, referring to the dwindling number of new priests. Max Weber distinguishes the English word *calling* in the sense of “a person’s specialized and sustained activity that is normally his source of income and...the economic basis of his existence” (2001[1930]:179, fn1) as a broadly Protestant, specifically Lutheran, invention; prior to the Reformation, *vocatio* and other ascetic terms referred to the evangelical call to otherworldly salvation. This was a calling *away* from the this-worldly work of “making a living,” which involves embedding oneself in the contemporary social and political order.

For Fr. Chen as for the young woman he chided, the connection between being Catholic and being upwardly, transnationally mobile is not without tension. What kind of passage does the religious vocation foreclose and afford through the “iron cage” (trans. Parsons) or “steel-hard casing” (trans. Kalberg) of global capitalism? In contexts where Catholicism is associated with femininity and poverty, as in Mexico, “Protestant values” often emerge in opposition as modern, masculine, and American (Lester 2005:12, 297ff.). In urban China, the Protestant-Catholic opposition is sometimes emblemized by the contrasting rural-urban images of the male religious professional: the homely, stiff Catholic priest from a northern village whose Mandarin is tinged with a countryside accent versus the handsome, married, eloquent Protestant pastor

whose polished demeanor and picture-perfect family reflect a wholesome, urbane modernity. As a Chinese anthropologist of Christianity once casually told me, “You need to know that Chinese priests aren’t like those impressive, well-educated foreign priests. Totally different.” This contempt is shared by many urban and peri-urban parishioners. Priests are often rural outsiders (e.g., from villages in Shaanxi, Shanxi) in their own dioceses, respected for little apart from their sacramental function. No urban family, no matter how devout, would easily let a son enter the priesthood (see Madsen 2003:481). On the one hand, the priestly vocation reaffirms the inexorability of class divisions by having a man “withdraw” from the global capitalist cage or casing to pursue higher status in an alternative, divine order. On the other hand, it subverts class rigidity by permitting him to move through the interstices of the rural/urban divide.

Trained as catechists and confessors, priests are skilled in the art of discernment in the Catholic sense of figuring out God’s will and discovering how best to pursue God’s plan for their lives. In the case of Fr. Chen, now a priest in New York City, “following God’s plan” is a way of negotiating risks and roadblocks by discursively deferring one’s own agency. Fr. Chen situates his calling as the migratory, supranational will to follow. I borrow Liesbeth Corens’s (2019) concept of confessional mobility. Despite the difference in context, confessional mobility is a productive lens through which to explore the affordances of Catholic emigration. English Catholics who left for the European mainland during the Counter-Reformation, for example, have traditionally been depicted as exiles and refugees. Such characterizations neglect their agency, active participation in, and considerable influence on the English Catholic community. Corens argues that these expatriates’ English identity was strengthened, not diluted, by their transnationalism. What makes their mobility confessional, however? The Catholic ecclesiology

of collaborative salvation and the inherent transnationalism of the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic” church (Corens 2019:29ff.) make it so.

Central to many Catholic justifications of emigration is the semi-schismatic status of the Chinese Church. After the Sino-Vatican split in 1951, the Patriotic Catholic Association (PCA) became the official representative of all Catholic institutions in China. State suspicions of compromised loyalty have followed Catholics in China, as they often have elsewhere, more fixedly than they have followed Protestants, who usually confess nondenominationality or nondenominational evangelicalism, and whose choice of fellowship tends less to be viewed as symptomatic of foreign collusion.¹ The “Three-Self” principles (self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation) shared by all state-sanctioned churches in China are structurally easier for Protestants unaffiliated with any transnational denomination to practice, whereas the orthopractic condition of being in communion with Rome can be, and has been, politically compromising. Protestants citing religious persecution from the Chinese government focus mainly on persecution and the curtailment of religious expression; Catholics will add to these the impossibility of practicing their faith at all, from receiving valid and licit sacraments to being coerced, before the One-Child Policy ended in 2016, to using contraceptive and abortive measures (Guest 2003:142).

Whether at state-affiliated churches in China or their underground counterparts, choice of church membership is generally acknowledged to be determined by social accident: you go to whatever church your family and friends go to. Attending a Patriotic, not an underground, church

¹ Because many underground Protestant churches are affiliated with a denomination or organization endemic to China, membership in an underground Protestant church is associated not so much with overseas loyalties and unpatriotic sentiment as with “superstitious” thinking and “cultish” tendencies.

is no mark against your piety. To many observers outside China, however, choice of church corresponds to your degree of persecution, firmness of faith, and stance toward the state. In her monograph *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Rey Chow views China and the West as “collaborative partners” whose transactions make of human beings, abstracted into the form of “human rights,” the prime commodity of global late capitalism (2002:20). Chow claims that it is through the moral register of protest that “ethnics” can be heard, and can get ahead, in the global market: “protesting constitutes the economically logical and socially viable vocation for them to assume” (2002:48). Once in the United States, your choice of church is transformed from social accident into ethical stance.

Human commodity-trafficking sets up tolerance as the condition of possibility for the moral maintenance of boundaries, ethnic and otherwise (Chow 2002:28-29). Relatedly, Christian discourse on migration has largely been concerned with the hospitality – how much, of what kind, and for how long – due to refugees (see Pohl 2003, Cruz 2011, Campese 2012, Phan 2020). According to Chow, American humanitarians and the Chinese state alike are complicit in the traffic in Chinese political prisoners and dissidents because these subjects perform, by virtue of their Chineseness and proven record of protest, their moral and economic value. But states are not the only or always primary agents. “Dissidents” themselves are also movers and collaborators (both with and against the state), and the risk that inheres in their actions and stances is, under this same logic of trafficking, a kind of capital that can be exchanged for refugee status and legal security. This risk (e.g., of arrest, imprisonment) can at times be mobilized against the state regimes that produce it.

Like other advocacy networks, churches alter the relationship individuals can have with the state by providing them the promise, in theory if not in practice, of transnational resources

and attention (Keck and Sikkink 1999). Pun aside, Rey Chow's protesting ethnic has little direct interaction with Christianity, the concepts of "soul" and "humanity" notwithstanding, that is distinguishable from the all-consuming captivity of capitalism. How might migrant ethnics themselves make sense of and manage – or confessionalize, to take up the Christian connection – their own routes? For a minority to take up a self-referential gesture, writes Chow,

is often tantamount to performing a confession in the criminal as well as noncriminal sense: it is to say, 'Yes, that's me,' to a call and a vocation – 'Hey, Asian!' 'Hey, Indian!' 'Hey, gay man!' – as if it were a crime with which one has been charged; it is to admit and submit to the allegations (of otherness) that society at large has made against one. [Chow 2002:115]

Recall Fr. Chen's uncharitable presuppositions about new arrivals from China. "We Chinese have got to follow the law [and] immigrate in a more legitimate way," he says. Is it possible for the migrant to "confess" in terms not already overdetermined by the self-ethnicizing lens of captive otherness? This chapter responds to this question by turning to an interview with Fr. Chen Sheng'an, a "runaway" priest from Hangzhou's Midtown Catholic Church. I examine confessional mobility in action by exploring how Fr. Chen leverages ecclesial authority against the guardians of border entry.

A case study of confessional mobility

Fr. Chen Sheng'an is a lively man in his early 50s. Originally from a village in Shaanxi Province, he now works as a parochial vicar at St. Anthony's Church in New York City. He is tasked with serving the Chinese-speaking community in Queens. He left China in 2004 to pursue advanced theological training in the Philippines. Longtime parishioners at Midtown Catholic Church, one of the oldest churches in Zhejiang Province, remember him as a good talker, taller and handsomer and more extroverted than the other priests. Capable and charismatic, he was

driven by an insatiable yearning for further study. Ten years later, he would be pursuing a postsecondary degree in the United States. Now safely settled in New York City, Fr. Chen has neither contact nor desire for contact with former superiors and coworkers at Midtown.

How did Chen Sheng'an, a peasant without the affluent urban background, family connections, or white-collar skills get into the United States at all? How does the priestly vocation provide an alternative path to becoming the type of “high-quality”² Chinese with the educational and economic means to make it overseas as the high-skilled worker that American policymakers claim to welcome (see Brunner and Pate 2016)? By vocational economy, I refer to the ways in which confessional and upward mobilities intersect. Getting out of the countryside and into the city is the first step. Priests at churches across China – urban churches especially – are often not native to their diocese. It was no different at Midtown when I conducted fieldwork there in 2017 and 2018. The typical priest hails from a Catholic village³ in Shaanxi or Shanxi, where “the Faith is firm, not lukewarm like it is here [in Hangzhou].” Spoken of with great admiration and romantic yearning, these villages are nostalgic sites of spiritual purity and rustic simplicity. Many priests and nuns, possibly the majority,⁴ come from villages like these (see Madsen 2003).

² Among the many representative works on *suzhi* or human “quality” are Andrew Kipnis’s 2007 article “Neoliberalism reified: *Suzhi* discourse and tropes of neoliberalism in the People’s Republic of China” (JRAI 13:383-400) and Tamara Jacka’s 2009 article “Cultivating Citizens: *Suzhi* [quality] Discourse in the PRC” (Positions 17[3]:523-535).

³ See Henrietta Harrison’s *The Missionary’s Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (2013) and Eriberto Lozada’s *God Aboveground: Catholic Church, Postsocialist State, and Transnational Processes in a Chinese Village* (2001). Harrison’s book is about a Catholic village in Shanxi, Lozada’s is about one in Guangdong.

⁴ I have never personally encountered a Chinese priest, seminarian, or nun who was not of a rural background. One of Midtown’s seminarians told me that he had one classmate who was “from Shanghai.” Madsen observes that “at the seminary at Sheshan, close to Shanghai, one of the best seminaries in China that draws its students from across the nation, most seminarians in the 1980s



Figure 1.1. A Catholic village in Shaanxi Province, a few hours from Xi'an by bus. This is not Fr. Chen's natal village, but that of a seminarian at Midtown. The dome of the village church is visible behind the newer two-story homes on the right. Photo taken by the author, February 2018.

Like rural migrants elsewhere in China, they are eager to seek their fortunes in distant cities. The typical priest is a younger son, often a second son, in a family with multiple children.⁵ (The eldest son, of course, is expected to marry and pass on the family name.) Signing away his future

came from Shanghai itself. Now, very few come from there. Almost all come from rural areas" (2003:481, fn. 38).

⁵ Prior to the end of the one-child policy in 2016, many village families had multiple children to meet the demands of agricultural labor, to guarantee the survival of at least one child, or to obtain a son (Greenhalgh 1993).

after high school to a diocese – say, one in an affluent metropolis like Hangzhou or Shanghai – is a practical way of ensuring a secure (albeit humble) financial future and higher (albeit alternative) social status. In an article discussing vocational motivations in Sri Lanka, Bernardo Brown vividly asks his readers to “consider this for a moment: if you enter the Seminary, you will have *nothing* to worry about, *everything* will be taken care of” (2020:636). Chen Sheng’an signed away his future to the Archdiocese of Hangzhou and was sent to be trained at a seminary in Shanghai, all expenses paid.

Midyear in 2018 I was informed unprompted, during one of many increasingly convoluted sessions of church gossip, that not one, and not two, but *at least three* priests formerly at Midtown were now living in the United States, two of them, Fr. Chen and Fr. Guo, “somewhere in New York” and one of them, Fr. Lü, in Los Angeles. Fr. Lü, of course, I already knew. All had left under questionable circumstances. Fr. Chen and Fr. Lü were on very poor terms with Midtown. On paper, they still belonged there: Midtown was their formal *danwei* or work unit. Fr. Guo had cut off, and been cut off from, all contact. Everyone at Midtown surmised that the three intended to remain in the United States.

A few of the older Midtowners who remembered Fr. Chen, vaguely and only by surname (“taller and handsomer than this Fr. Huang we’re left with, and much better at talking,” Therese Zhou Fang had said), had given me a single hint about his whereabouts: that he was “somewhere in New York.” None, however, was still in contact with him. Curiosity got the better of me. After a few VPN-enabled Google searches, I confidently narrowed down his location to St. Anthony’s Church in New York City; I figured that he would be somewhere with many Chinese immigrants. Aware that the situation was sensitive, and that in contacting him out of the blue and without an introduction I was certainly behaving very questionably, especially given the

touchiness of his relationship with Midtown – but that there was no way to be introduced without Midtown being mentioned, which I feared would cause him to decline a meeting – I flew to New York later that year, in 2018. It was a gamble. One Sunday afternoon in November, shortly after he had finished celebrating Mandarin Mass, I introduced myself by saying that I had just arrived in New York from Hangzhou, where friends at Midtown had told me that one or two of their priests were now here. I was in town to visit a few friends from college, I said. This was true. Of course, it wasn't the whole truth. I was in my own words “a Ph.D. student researching the Catholic situation in China”; would he be interested in being interviewed about it? To my surprise, he immediately lit up when I mentioned Hangzhou. I handed him my business card and asked if he had time to talk; the present moment – he had just celebrated Mass and hastily baptized a baby – was clearly not a convenient one. He asked if I was “from the media.” I said I was not. He gave me his phone number, said he had Wednesdays off, and instructed me to call in a week.

I could well have been an informer. Fr. Lü, another one of the three priests formerly at Midtown, had mentioned that agents of the Chinese government had been trying to track him down. Unfamiliar accounts had attempted to befriend him on WeChat. Perhaps Fr. Chen, aware of this risk, had played up his respectability by aptly admonishing, in preacherly fashion, the young woman who had waited with me in the rectory earlier that day.

After she left, and as Fr. Chen closed the door, he asked me where in Hangzhou I was from (*ni shi Hangzhou nali de?*). I explained myself: I wasn't actually from Hangzhou; I was just an “ABC” or “American-born Chinese,” but I had been in Hangzhou for a year. “Since you were there for a year,” he said, “what did you think of Midtown?” I sensed that he was angling for a critical opinion. I didn't know how to respond. Afraid to accidentally offend, I repeated a dull

truism I had often heard: that churches in the northern parts of China were livelier, and that the faith in the south, such as in Hangzhou and such as at Midtown, felt rather lukewarm – or so I was told.

“That’s not it,” he said. “The Hangzhou situation is really messy. It’s really bad there, really complicated. Nothing’s changed there in twenty years. What were your feelings?”

I said I didn’t know. He asked me whom I had met. I listed the parish priests and “some other people, of course.” I admitted that despite how welcoming everyone was, I felt like I could never really become one of them (*jiushi ganjue rongbujinqu*).

“*Of course* you couldn’t. *You* of course couldn’t become one of them! I was there for over ten years, and *I* couldn’t become one of them!”

“But you worked there,” I countered, “and you’re a priest.”

“They have their ways of keeping you out. They’re very exclusionary (*paiwai*). If you’re not a *Hangzhouren*, you’ll never become one of them. I’m a very frank (*zhishuai*) person. I don’t know how that suits you, but I’m a lot like Joseph Zen – again, I don’t know what you think about that.”

I quickly and nervously said that I admired Joseph Zen. That seemed to put him at ease; I thought I had passed the litmus test. Cardinal Joseph Zen, the outspoken anti-Beijing, pro-democracy bishop emeritus of Hong Kong, was a name often cited by human rights activists, the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong, and critics of China’s religious policy. Fr. Chen went on to say that the Patriotic Catholic Association was “very strong” in Hangzhou, that the Midtowners worked for the government, not for the Church. “What the pope says never changes,” he said, referencing the then-recent agreement by the Vatican to recognize the legitimacy of bishops appointed by the Chinese government and ordained without a papal

mandate.⁶ “But the [Chinese] government...and Trump, too – one day it’s this, the next day it’s that. Of course the Vatican and Beijing’s provisional agreement is a good thing, but it’s useless. ‘*Xiucai yudao bing*’ – do you know what comes next?”

I didn’t.

“Ah, you are an ABC after all,” he said. “I really thought you were a *Hangzhouren*. It’s ‘*you li shuo bu qing*’: ‘*Xiucai yudao bing, you li shuo bu qing*.’ Do you understand?”

I was embarrassed that I didn’t know this couplet and sorry to have disappointed Fr. Chen; in that moment, I heartily wished that I really were from Hangzhou. The gist of the couplet was that you couldn’t argue with idiots or reason with brute force: “A scholar meeting a soldier has no means of reasoning [with him].” I felt as though I had failed Fr. Chen’s vetting. At the same time, it was hard for me to believe that Fr. Chen really thought that I, whose Mandarin was passable but still a little shaky, was from Hangzhou. In her interview with Melvin Campbell, a protégé of fundamentalist pastor Jerry Falwell, Susan Harding finds that there is no neutral space in the world of her interlocutors: she is either lost or saved. Campbell slips into the register of witnessing, narrativizing his conversion and coopting her as a lost listener (Harding 2001:33-47). For Fr. Chen, too, the Patriotic Catholic Association and the underground church would appear to permit no neutrality. In practice, this is of course not true, as membership in an official or underground church is typically either inherited from one’s parents or explained by some other social accident. This was not a matter of piety; whether or not I was pious or even practicing was inconsequential. It was a matter of confessional alignment: one side (the scholars) had reason, the other (the soldiers) only brute force.

⁶ See Jason Horowitz and Ian Johnson, “China and Vatican Reach Deal on Appointment of Bishops,” Sept. 22, 2018, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/22/world/asia/china-vatican-bishops.html>.

Fr. Chen *was*, on paper, a Patriotic priest; he was not formally a priest of the Diocese of Brooklyn, which serves the boroughs of Brooklyn and Queens. By definition, then, he was not underground, not persecuted, not a dissident, not a conscientious objector, not any of the ethno-ethical types of persons whose political suppression and suffering mark them as deserving of passage to and refuge in the United States. In the following transcript of a four-minute excerpt from my interview, Fr. Chen recounts to me a time he entered Canada on his way back to the United States. Having unknowingly used up, on his way out, the single entry on his Canadian visa, he could not pass through Canada on his way back. Indirectly addressing the widespread sentiment among many Chinese Catholics that the Patriotics are fakes whose fear of the Communist Party overrides their loyalty to the pope, Fr. Chen slips into a narrative of confessional mobility: caught at the border, he takes up the listening/scheming contrast, enacting the persona of a guileless dependent of God and testifying to the futility of human planning.

Excerpt from an interview with Fr. Chen, Sections 1.1 to 1.23⁷

1.1	Fr. C: 我还（可）再告诉你一件事情。我到了美国来，我没有签证我就进来了。 (pause: 4 seconds)	I (can) ⁸ tell you yet another thing. [When] I got [here] to America, I got in without a visa. (pause: 4 seconds)
1.2	A: 这是哪一年啊?	What year was this?
1.3	Fr. C: 哈，最近几年的事情。所以一天-（最关键的是）天主安排。你不得不辅助天主安排的。你在美国你可	Ha, it happened in the past few years. So-God- (the most important thing is) [that] God plans. You cannot help but assist what God has planned. In America you probably can't

⁷ This excerpt of about four minutes occurs over an hour into the interview, from 1:16 to 1:20 in the audio recording. It took place in his private office at the parish office of St. Anthony's Church, on November 21, 2018.

⁸ Following a few conventions of conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), words inside single parentheses are words that were not entirely clear to me during transcription; they are close approximations or my best guesses. Empty parentheses represent recorded speech that is indiscernible, or that I am not able to transcribe. Words inside double parentheses indicate non-verbal behaviors or sounds, e.g. ((laugh)). The equal sign (=) indicates the seamless continuousness of different speakers' speech. Bracketed words are added to improve the grammatical flow or tone of the English translation.

	能找不到像我这样的一个- 很少找到的, 没有签证还可以进来的。	find someone like me- a seldom found, [who] can even get in without a visa.
1.4	A: 嗯, 是啊。所以- 你现在是, 签证是有。	Yeah, true. So- now you are, [you] do have a visa.
1.5	Fr. C: 虽然- 现在我签证是有签证。对啊, 现在有签证。但是我曾经是没有签证跑进来了。海关说, 诶你怎么, 没有签证可以跑回来啊?	Although- now my visa, [I] do have a visa. Yeah, I have a visa now. But in the past [it was the case that] I got in without a visa. The customs said, <i>ai</i> how could [you], without a visa [how] could you get back?
1.6	A: ((laugh))	((laugh))
1.7	Fr. C: () =	() =
1.8	A: = 他还是让你 =	= they still let you =
1.9	Fr. C: = 他还是让我进来啦! 对! 是我出去, 没有签证, 就跑回来了。我不知道的。我说, 我(也)不知道, 我去朝圣了嘛- 我回来以后, 教区说, 欸, 你怎么()当时是这样子的。是我, 我, 我到了加拿大。加拿大的签证, 它是有三个月的有效期嘛, 然后我拿了这个签证就跑出去了。跑到欧洲去了。回来的时候, 我说, 欸我不是有签证? 他说, 你那签证在哪里啊? 我说我这是签证, 我是从加拿大, 回来我拿- 他说这上面写了「一次出入」。你回来你就把你那个入进已经用过了。你到其他国家会- 必须要在- 从哪个国家的签证再签回来。这是他们的要求啦。	= they still let me in! That's right! [It's that] I left, without a visa, [and] got back. I had no idea. I said, I (also) have no idea, I went on a pilgrimage- after I got back, the parish said, <i>ai</i> , how could you () At the time it was like this. [It was that] I, I, I got to Canada. The Canadian visa, it's valid for three months [right?], then I took this visa and off I went. Ran off to Europe. When I got back, I said, <i>ai</i> don't I have a visa? They said, your visa, where is it? I said I, this is my visa, I [left] from Canada, on the way back I took- they said on top here [it's] written "single entry-exit." [When] you came back you had already used up your entry. [When] you get to other countries- [you] absolutely have to- from that country's visa reapply [to] return. This is their requirement.
1.10	A: 哦明白了。	Oh, understood.
1.11	Fr. C: 对不对? 他说你那个签证在哪里? 我说这就是啊! 我说还有有效的! 他说, 有效的你已经用过了。入进, 出入进是一次, 你已经用过了。所以他没到到这个()...我在机场等了三个小时, 三四个小时的。	Right? They said, your visa, where is it? I said it's right here! I said it's still valid! They said, you already used up the validity. Entry, exit-entry is one time, you already used it. So they didn't come to this ()...I waited at the airport for three hours, three to four hours.
1.12	A: 真的啊?	Really?
1.13	Fr. C: 真的啊。	Really.
1.14	A: 后来是有面试对不对?	Later there was an interview right?
1.15	Fr. C: 面试- 人家问我了。我就说, 我是神父, 我出去了朝圣了。然后我	Interview- they asked me already. I just said, I'm a priest, I went on pilgrimage. [And] then, well, I didn't know this, that I couldn't

	也不知道我这不能进来了。然后他们就说了，好，神父啊，他说，我们这次给你特别的允许，但是你千万以后不敢这样的说。因为你没，你，你这样做违反了我们的法律的。那我，我们让你进，我们本来也（）违反法律了。但是我们是通-通融你，（既然）你是神父。我们只让你进来。但如果其他人，一定让-回去了。	enter. So then they said, OK, Father, they said, we'll give you special permission this time, but you better not ever dare to say it like this. Because you didn't, you, this way you are breaking our law. So we, we are letting you in, we are also of course () breaking the law. But we are accommodate-accommodating you, (after all) you are a priest. We are letting only you in. But if [it were] someone else, [we'd] definitely send-[that person] back.
1.16	A: 是。	Right.
1.17	Fr. C: 知道了吧。他们（上）- 这个里面的不是他们一般的普通的那一些- 那个，就是那个入进，那个，那那些警察啦。是高级的人员来给我说的。所以以后千万不敢再出去。如果你这样的话 ((taps table to emphasize each word)), 不敢出去。知道了吧？所以我，我，我可能是很少有的几个人，没有签证就跑回来了。	[Now] you understand [right?]. They- these inside ones aren't those normal ones those, those entry- those, those-those-those police [I mean]. [It's] upper-level personnel [that] came to talk to me. So in the future [I] better not dare exit again. If you[r situation is] such ((taps table to emphasize each word)), don't [you] dare exit. [Now] you know [right?]. So I, I, I'm possibly one of very few, [who] got back in without a visa.
1.18	A: 是啊是啊是啊这个很难的。	Right right right this is very hard.
1.19	Fr. C: 所以就是说，曾那个到意大利去，也是朝圣，回来，不让进来。回去在-就禁了。因为如今只是我-是只这个警察有权力让你进来，让你，可以把你赶出去的。他只要怀疑你，他就让你出去了。所以你看，在我身上发生的事情都是很奇迹性的事情。（）- 本身不想出去，结果出去了。也没想来，就来啦。啊。然后回来的时候没有签证也进来了。呵，呵，呵！ ((slowly)) 有些人在机场...有绿卡- 都被赶回去的。	So that's to say, formerly that one [other priest] that went to Italy, also on pilgrimage, on the way back [he] wasn't allowed to enter. On the way back- barred. Because nowadays it's only me- only the police have the right to let you enter, to let you, [but they] can kick you out. All they need is to doubt you, [and] they can have you leave. So you see, the things that happened to me personally are all matters of a miraculous nature. ()- for my part I didn't want to leave, but it turned out that [I] left. And didn't want to come, [and yet] came. Ah. And then when I came back I didn't have a visa and still got in. Ha, ha, ha, ha! ((slowly)) There are even some people at the airport... with green cards- [who] get kicked out.
1.20	A: 哎有绿卡-	Ai with green cards-
1.21	Fr. C: 对啊！有绿卡的被赶出去的！当场被收没，回去。(pause: 3 seconds) 呵！	Exactly! With green cards, [and] kicked out! Confiscated on the spot, sent back. (pause: 3 seconds) Huh!

1.22	A: 对你那个- 我是从来没听过 =	Yeah your, this – I’ve never before heard =
1.23	Fr. C: = 对 啊, 哈! 哈! 所以, 天主安排的。 所以我把一切交在天主手里, 我就不怕。	= Exactly, ha! Ha! So, God arranged it. So I put everything in God’s hands, [thus] I do not fear.

From Fr. Chen’s point of view, God arranges all things. “You cannot help but assist what God has planned,” he says in 1.3. My responses in 1.2 and 1.4 are off the mark. Where something like “Really?? But how can that be?” would have been desired after a showy statement like “I can tell you yet another thing: when I got here to America, I got in without a visa” (1.1) – followed by a determined pause, no less – the best I could come up with, after four full seconds, was an inquisitional “What year was this?” (1.2). Fr. Chen cuts himself off from a vague answer and assumes the confident air of a homilist: “So – God – the most important thing is that God plans. You cannot help but assist what God has planned” (1.3). He then tries a yet more momentous version of 1.1: “In America you probably can’t find someone like me...who can even get in without a visa” (1.4). However, I fail again to provide the desired-for pair part, angling instead for a confirmation of his current legal status:

1.4	A: 嗯, 是啊。所以- 你现在是, 签证是有。	Yeah, true. So- now you are, [you] do have a visa.
1.5	Fr. C: 虽然- 现在我签证是有签证。 对啊, 现在有签证。[...]	Although- now my visa, [I] do have a visa. Yeah, I have a visa now. [...]

Fr. Chen swaps out my conjunction “so” (*suoyi*) with “although” (*suiran*). It is a correction: not “so, my visa” (end of story), but “although my visa...” (the start of a story). He then launches back into the opening of his narrative, this time no longer waiting for me to respond with a potential derailment. I had implicitly and patronizingly assumed that the goal of his journey was the material reward, in the form of a visa, of legal residence in the United States. Fr. Chen

accepts my acknowledgment of his (now-)legal status and disarms an assumed end, the obtainment of a visa, by pitting against it the border-bending, will-bending sway of the calling.

You li shuo bu qing: the scholar converts the soldier?

How do you get to where God has called you to be? Fr. Chen had led me to understand that Midtown did not want him back, that his prospects in China were as lost as a scholar attempting to reason with a soldier. The contrast between scholar and soldier is scaled up to the contrast between the Vatican and Beijing, between the supranational authority of the Church and the arbitrary policies of secular governments. Seen through this contrast, the truth or logic (*li*) of confessional mobility is unintelligible to the guardians of the border; there is no use in trying to reason with state functionaries.

Fr. Chen sounds nonchalant about bureaucratic entry laws and even gleeful about beating the odds when he insists that “you cannot help but assist what God has planned” (1.3). Perfectly legal and law-abiding green card holders are sometimes turned away for no known reason, he says later in 1.19. Fr. Chen’s naïve trust in his vocational mobility (“I said, I [also] have no idea, I went on a pilgrimage...” [1.9], “I just said, I’m a priest, I went on pilgrimage” [1.15]) indexes a sacred, alternative locus of authority against which secular legality loses its bite. Fr. Chen indirectly appeals to the international jurisdiction of the Catholic Church in order to blur the borders between sovereign states. In doing so, he bounds the border agents within the range of hearers – myself included – for whom ecclesial jurisdiction trumps and subsumes secondary earthly divisions. He does so in a disarmingly natural, matter-of-fact way: “I just said, I’m a priest, I went on pilgrimage.” This simplicity suggests a characterological indisposition to scheming and cheating: how could somebody like me, he seems to be asking, be cunning enough to go anywhere I was never meant to go?

Fr. Chen does not want to look like he fought hard or labored greatly for his passage. That might make him seem acquisitive, ambitious, and scheming. Rather, he submits to God, who does the work *for* him: “God arranged it,” says Fr. Chen, “[s]o I put everything in God’s hands, [thus] I do not fear” (1.23). The gloomy socioeconomic subtext of Fr. Chen’s passage across the border may be that working hard and following the rules do not necessarily get you very far. If lawful green card holders can be arbitrarily denied entry, why bother trying if you are just a poor peasant? Urbanites seldom deign to accept you as one of them anyway (see Han, Huang, and Han 2011, Zhan 2011). Only God can get you somewhere: the vocation is a way out of the low status and unstable quality of life associated with agricultural work and migrant labor. And as for getting somewhere, the border agent’s discretionary authority would appear to be surer authentication of one’s vocational calling than a valid visa because it leaves room for divine intervention.

By claiming to be an exception to the rule (see 1.3, 1.17,1.19), Fr. Chen shows that he is not entirely naïve: he underlines the strict rationality, partly exaggerated and partly desired, of the border control that he has nevertheless managed to evade. As Rihan Yeh observes in metapragmatic talk about U.S. visa interviews among upwardly mobile Mexican applicants, the belief that the would-be visitor’s authentic identity is transparent to and recognized by the American state is belied by the class habitus the successful applicant has spent years cultivating (Yeh 2018:162-4). In fact, the ideal applicant is the one who can get away *without* the necessary documents (Yeh 2018:162) – not unlike Fr. Chen, whose apparent trustworthiness, heightened by his priestly status, is recognized by state agents in spite of his invalid visa.

At first glance, there may appear to be a blunt face-off between the optical, evidentiary logic of authentication held by the aspirationally middle-class visa applicant and the ostensibly

anti-rational, divine pull of the vocation. But as Fr. Chen goes on to relate, the logic of authentication is undermined by the very agents, the border police, designated to ensure its functioning. The fact that border agents practice some level of discretionary authority (see Côté-Boucher 2015) in cases such as this one is never acknowledged. Notice how Fr. Chen answers, or rather brushes off, my derailing question about the “interview” (1.14): “they asked me already” (1.15), he says. Fr. Chen’s simple profession suffices: “I just said, I’m a priest, I went on pilgrimage” (1.15). Asserting the innocent irreducibility of his priestly person against the “data-double” of the airport-tested, surveilled, and filtered passenger (Adey 2008:145), Fr. Chen rejects the exam-like dissection of self, biography, and motive by Canadian border security even while confirming its authenticating gaze. Under the scholar/soldier contrast, the border agents’ discretionary authority is erased and transferred entirely to God.

Behind the urgent prayer requests in Midtown’s chatgroups on WeChat, rumors about someone who gets in trouble with Chinese or foreign authorities often spawn off-group speculations that said person wasn’t intelligent enough, was too naïve, or was perhaps not actually called. According to these chatgroup members, however unjust, unfair, and corrupt the Chinese or American governments may be, they are rarely “stupid.” They are “very smart,” “very formidable” (*hen lihai*), and their actions “always have a reason.” The way forward, vocationally, is to respect the law and work through its channels; all will fall into place “if it is in God’s will.” The insinuation may be that those who scheme, as opposed to those who listen, are the ones who have to justify themselves. Those called by God have only to declare the simple truth: “I just said, I’m a priest, I went on pilgrimage” (1.15). They often don’t even have to pay out of pocket: fellowships and financial aid from overseas schools and churches, along with generous donations from the faithful, see their journeys through. Thus is Fr. Chen’s confessional

mobility enabled not by middle-class prosperity, but by one of its most tangible privileges: the ease, if not the swiftness, of legal passage. As Fr. Chen goes on to relate, it is “upper-level” airport security (1.17) who decide to break the law and then confess, to a priest, the crime that they are at that moment committing!

1.15	Fr. C: 面试- 人家问我了。我就说, 我是神父, 我出去了朝圣了。然后我也不知道我这不能进来了。然后他们就说了, 好, 神父啊, 他说, 我们这次给你特别的允许, 但是你千万以后不敢这样的说。因为你没, 你, 你这样做违反了我们的法律的。那我, 我们让你进, 我们本来也 () 违反法律了。但是我们是通- 通融你, (既然) 你是神父。我们只让你进来。但如果其他人, 一定让- 回去了。	Interview- they asked me already. I just said, I'm a priest, I went on pilgrimage. [And] then, well, I didn't know this, that I couldn't enter. So then they said, OK, Father, they said, we'll give you special permission this time, but you better not ever dare to say it like this. Because you didn't, you, this way you are breaking our law. So we, we are letting you in, we are also of course () breaking the law. But we are accommodate- accommodating you, (after all) you are a priest. We are letting only you in. But if [it were] someone else, [we'd] definitely send- [that person] back.
1.16	A: 是。	Right.
1.17	Fr. C: 知道了吧。他们 (上) - 这个里面的不是他们一般的普通的那一些 - 那个, 就是那个入进, 那个, 那那些警察啦。是高级的人员来给我说的。所以以后千万不敢再出去。如果你这样的话 ((taps table to emphasize each word)), 不敢出去。知道了吧? 所以我, 我, 我可能是很少有的几个人, 没有签证就跑回来了。	[Now] you understand [right?]. They- these inside ones aren't those normal ones those, those entry- those, those-those-those police [I mean]. [It's] upper-level personnel [that] came to talk to me. So in the future [I] better not dare exit again. If you[r situation is] such ((taps table to emphasize each word)), don't [you] dare exit. [Now] you know [right?]. So I, I, I'm possibly one of very few, [who] got back in without a visa.
1.18	A: 是啊是啊是啊这个很难的。	Right right right this is very hard.

Is this really as irrational and miraculous a turn of events as Fr. Chen would like it to appear?

The reported speech of the upper-level personnel would seem to buttress the claim that airports are not just sieves that sort and filter difference – that is, “wanted from unwanted flows and high- and low-risk identities” (Adey 2008:148) – but that they are also places where such difference is intentionally created (Adey 2008:146). “We are letting only you in” (1.15), say the personnel,

singling him out. Fr. Chen's used-up entry is not a matter of doubt to anyone. He was to have been rationally filtered out. But when he *does* get in, it is not through a loophole or system error, nor through the last-minute discovery that his visa has in fact one entry remaining, as might be expected in a "that was close!" tale of luck. Instead, he claims that he is arbitrarily given "special permission" by the "inside ones" (1.17).

Nor did he, as he tells it, knowingly take his chances. Why does he present himself as an exception to the rule, as a foil to the judicious subject of risk who is "responsible, knowledgeable and rational" (O'Malley 1996:202)? Risk implies a modern conception of agency that responds to and self-limits according to calculable uncertainties. What is Fr. Chen doing by unapologetically performing a kind of naïve irresponsibility and ignorance about his own travel documents? Later in the interview, he tells me that he neglected to do his visa paperwork in a timely manner, unlike the *ordinary* visa applicant who no doubt would have filed all forms right away. Instead, he let his invitation letter sit for several months. Passage to America was not, the message is clear, an objective he had plotted. *If it were, he would not have taken such chances.* It would have been far too risky. He would have promptly filed his paperwork and meticulously reviewed his documents. But in being called to take these very chances, there is, ironically, none left for him to take. For if an all-knowing God has arranged all things, does there still exist such a thing as risk?

Fr. Chen invokes the presence of risk through the voices of social superiors: customs officials, parish administrators, upper-level airport security, and police (1.5, 1.9, 1.11, 1.15, 1.17, 1.19). These are the characters that create the gap necessary for potential peril. They articulate Fr. Chen's place in the bureaucratic organization of human transit, expressing surprise ("*ai* how could [you], without a visa [how] could you get back?" [1.5]), asking for his visa (1.9),

informing him that he is now illegally entering (1.9, 1.11), and finally, making explicit the exceptional favor they grant him (1.15). Instead, state agents – those Fr. Chen might classify as soldiers, not scholars – are the ones converted. Fr. Chen’s narrative harks back to the biblical account, in Acts 16:25-34, of the imprisonment of Paul and Silas in Philippi:

But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and every one’s fetters were unfastened. When the jailer woke and saw that the prison doors were open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, supposing that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul cried with a loud voice, “Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.” And he called for lights and rushed in, and trembling with fear he fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out and said, “Men, what must I do to be saved?” And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” And they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their wounds, and he was baptized at once, with all his family. Then he brought them up into his house, and set food before them; and he rejoiced with all his household that he had believed in God.⁹

Airport security does not merely bend the rules; they break the law for Fr. Chen and confess to him about it. He passes through unchanged, and even proclaims the very thing he is expressly instructed to not do: “you better not ever dare to say it like this” (1.15). It is the airport security apparatus that is thus compromised, its iron sieve ruptured, and changed. The arbiter of legality has become, in Fr. Chen’s story, the illegal actor and converted jailer.

Like Melvin Campbell witnessing to Susan Harding, Fr. Chen launched into a tale of conversion, not (in my view) to convert *me*, but nevertheless to embody and share the Word of God and transform his divinely enabled passage into a vehicle of salvation for his listeners, both the “jailers” and the interviewer. He goes as far as to voice the request of the customs officials and recruit them to the role of the Philippian jailer: “OK, Father, they said, we’ll give you special

⁹ Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition

permission this time, but you better not ever dare to say it like this” (1.15). In the face of the scholar’s reason, simple as it is, the soldier attempts to self-destruct and is eventually reborn as a Christian. Fr. Chen does exactly what he is asked not to do: he “say[s] it like this” while my audio recorder was turned on. Before the interview began, I had handed him an Institutional Review Board handout describing the protections in place for interviewees and the information they disclosed. Many interviewees had instructed me to keep certain pieces of information private. At the end of the interview, however, Fr. Chen folded up the two pieces of paper and handed them back to me. He said he didn’t need them.

“God arranged it”: moving across contrasts and vocational economies

Fr. Chen bases his vocational way forward on a performance of transparency: he neither hides anything, nor has anything to hide. His effort, labor, and even his will, is erased. As he goes on to imply, one can have the requisite work ethic, the ascetic appetite for profit never to be enjoyed, all documents and credentials in order, and still be turned away (“All they need is to doubt you, [and] they can have you leave” [1.19]). Without any of the above, the economically nonproductive ascetic is instead granted entry and upward mobility. This turn of events is “of a miraculous nature” (1.19) because it makes light of all human effort and volition: without trying, wanting, or scheming, Fr. Chen succeeded at making it over to North America. And in triumphant retort, perhaps, to the unflattering and ever-present comparison with the better known and more widely credited need of underground Catholics to seek refuge and religious freedom abroad, Fr. Chen concludes his story as follows:

1.19	Fr. C: 所以就是说，曾那个到意大利去，也是朝圣，回来，不让进来。回去在-就禁了。因为如今只是我-是只这个警察有权力让你进来，让你，可以把你赶出去的。他只要怀疑你，	So that’s to say, formerly that one [other priest] that went to Italy, also on pilgrimage, on the way back [he] wasn’t allowed to enter. On the way back- barred. Because nowadays it’s only me- only the police have
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	他就让你出去了。所以你看，在我身上发生的事情都是很奇迹性的事情。 () - 本身不想出去，结果出去了。也没想来，就来啦。啊。然后回来的时候没有签证也进来了。呵，呵，呵，呵！ ((slowly)) 有些人在机场...有绿卡- 都被赶回去的。	the right to let you enter, to let you, [but they] can kick you out. All they need is to doubt you, [and] they can have you leave. So you see, the things that happened to me personally are all matters of a miraculous nature. ()- for my part I didn't want to leave, but it turned out that [I] left. And didn't want to come, [and yet] came. Ah. And then when I came back I didn't have a visa and still got in. Ha, ha, ha, ha! ((slowly)) There are even some people at the airport...with green cards- [who] get kicked out.
1.20	A: 哎有绿卡-	Ai with green cards-
1.21	Fr. C: 对啊! 有绿卡的被赶出去的! 当场被收没, 回去。 (pause: 3 seconds) 呵!	Exactly! With green cards, [and] kicked out! Confiscated on the spot, sent back. (pause: 3 seconds) Huh!
1.22	A: 对你那个- 我是从来没听过 =	Yeah your, this – I've never before heard =
1.23	Fr. C: = 对 啊, 哈! 哈! 所以, 天主安排的。 所以我把一切交在天主手里, 我就不怕。	= Exactly, ha! Ha! So, God arranged it. So I put everything in God's hands, [thus] I do not fear.

The addition of the barred priest compensates for the one critical detail that has made Fr. Chen's journey possible: that he is a Patriotic priest – and thus by definition not underground, not a dissident, not a conscientious objector. Fr. Chen's brisk candidness ("I just said, I'm a priest, I went on pilgrimage" [1.15]) is made possible by his official, Patriotic status. That is to say, every underground priest would have had to scheme: he would have had to "hide" his priestly occupation on his Chinese passport and visa applications. Fr. Chen's former associate Fr. Lü used to often tell my father and me that he never once had to lie about being a priest in China, "unlike what you Americans like to think." Fr. Lü said it was *because* he was open about his priestly status that he never gave any reason for the Chinese government to target him. He always accurately filled out all forms for his passport and visa, confidently wrote "priest" in the "current occupation" box, and – lo and behold – got all his documents in good time and left

China without a hitch. When I visited him in 2015 in Los Angeles, he stressed that “Chinese today aren’t like before, the ones that came to America to do manual labor (*zuokugong*). They dress nicely, their clothes have quality.” PCA priests like Fr. Lü, Fr. Chen, and Fr. Guo struggle to convey both an ambivalent sense of pride in their home country’s economic rise as well as firmness in the legitimacy of their priesthood.

In order to curry favor with their new American and diasporic Chinese associates, however, PCA priests must also position themselves as sympathetically aligned with the underground church. Because they are often neither connected to nor trusted by underground Catholics, this alignment is typically achieved by professing allegiance to the Vatican. For a PCA priest, the calling to live overseas entails performing solidarity with the underground church without completely disavowing the official church through which he has been ordained, and through which his overseas calling was enabled and realized. Highly sensitive to this impossible dilemma of alignment, priests like Fr. Chen and Fr. Lü are the first to problematize the construct of boundaries: “We don’t say ‘official church,’” said Fr. Lü back in 2014, “we say ‘open church’ (*gongkai jiaohui*) because anyone can come. It’s one church with two sides.” Even so, both Fr. Lü and Fr. Chen claim that they had privately arranged to be ordained by a bishop who was loyal to Rome and not a member of the PCA¹⁰ – in other words, an underground bishop outside the Archdiocese of Hangzhou. By doing so, they automatically fell out of favor with the Hangzhou bishop who was set to ordain them. They say that this is the reason why they are on bad terms with Midtown – and not at all because, as the Midtowners pointed out, the Archdiocese incurred financial loss when the three priests (in whom it had invested ever since

¹⁰ Fr. Lü has always stood by this claim. However, Fr. Chen claims that while *he* had made alternative arrangements for his own ordination, Fr. Lü was ordained at Midtown.

they were seminarians) reneged on their promise to return. This “betrayal” of a lifelong investment is then justified and erased by the ethical contrast between the PCA and the Vatican or, as Fr. Chen puts it, the incommensurability between the logics of the scholar and the soldier.

For PCA priests like Fr. Chen, then, the boundary between official and underground churches, and between Beijing and the Vatican, is flexible and mobile. While one can gain moral capital (and make a case for permanent residence in the United States) by positioning oneself as a dissident, doing so may also invite legal, mobility-related trouble. Diocesan priests like Fr. Chen and Fr. Lü are accountable to their bishop and diocese, after all, and until incardinated or formally transferred into another diocese, a step which cannot proceed without their original diocese’s approval, they remain precariously tied to their original diocese. On the one hand, the way forward is to be what Rey Chow calls a protesting ethnic. On the other hand, the way forward is to counter-protest, to openly throw oneself at the mercy of bureaucratic legality, profess the power of transparency, and work through its channels. One’s affiliation – PCA or underground – is an important consideration in how one attempts to achieve confessional mobility.

Conclusion

The vocation makes upward social mobility attainable for rural men, providing them the opportunity to relocate from a village to a metropolis. Fr. Chen has retooled his vocation into a vehicle of social, educational, and physical mobility, with the United States as a final destination. His trajectory is not just an ambitious example of upward mobility. It is also confessional: discursive deployment of Catholic affiliation drives it forward. The Catholic Church’s international authority can be leveraged against the policing of state borders to facilitate transnational mobility. The apparent contradiction of discerning one’s religious calling while

freely choosing one's vocation (and location) is answered by the Catholic view that human freedom is most perfectly expressed in being freely willing to follow, or surrendering to, divine will (Hahnenberg 2010:60). That a man's calling to the priesthood should coincide with his own volition to become a priest, and to go wherever he is called, is taken for granted as the proper end of religious discernment. In other words, he does not scheme; he *listens*.

"We Chinese have got to follow the law [and] immigrate in a more legitimate way," Fr. Chen had said to the woman who preceded me on the November morning of our interview. Against whatever scheme he may have suspected of her, or whatever favor she may have asked, he speaks from the righteous, transparency-valorizing point of view afforded by his vocational economy. Those who listen, as opposed to those who scheme, have nothing to hide (on paper) to any person or government; recall Fr. Lü's claim that he confidently wrote "priest" in the "current occupation" box on his passport and visa application forms. If it is God who calls and not man who decides, then one ought to proceed without fear or dissimulation.

At the same time, Fr. Chen distances himself from the PCA by introducing the soldier/scholar contrast to describe relations between the Chinese state and the Vatican. The soldier/scholar contrast depicts this relationship as one of incommensurability. Those truly called by God need only to witness to the truth – "I just said, I'm a priest, I went on pilgrimage" (1.15) – and the truth will set them free. It may even set the hearers – the Philippian jailer and the Canadian border personnel – free. This chapter has sought to explore how confessional mobility is enacted via the listening/scheming contrast in the legal, official terms of the vocational economy of the PCA. In the next chapter, I discuss in counterpoint another biblical metaphorization of another transnational encounter, this time a falling-out between me and my host mother, Therese Zhou Fang. This vignette of interactional failure, aggravated by none other

than Fr. Lü and inflated by mutual accusations of scheming, explores how the discursive construction of “scheming” is folded into ideologies of hospitality and cross-strait kinship.

Chapter 2

Notes on Christian hospitality and cross-strait kinship

In this chapter, I show how transnational Catholic relations between guests and hosts are situated in a transformative participant framework that assigns to actors either the social obligations of kinship or the charitable “good works” that index the social distance between givers and receivers. Catholic hospitality is a high-stakes framework of engagement in which participants emerge as either kindred (in spirit or in law) or as strangers. Via a communicative repertoire organized by the kin/stranger contrast, this chapter’s guests and hosts deploy two metapragmatic texts – the parable of the Good Samaritan and the ideology of cultural affinity between the Han populations of China and Taiwan – to enact the building and breakdown of ethnographic rapport. Specifically, I recount the fracturing of relationships between my “host mother” of one month, myself, our families, and the priest who introduced us. My aim is not to absolve or justify my involvement, but rather to explore, by examining an instance of how ethnographic rapport broke apart, the participant framework through which it was interpreted by actors and spectators alike. By participant framework, I mean the role regimentation of participants in an interaction (Goffman 1981).

The actors involved made sense of the duties and reciprocal expectations of hospitality through a shared model of guest-host relations. I note that this chapter is not, given my subject position, an objective reconstruction of what “actually” happened, but rather an analysis of interpretations by participants and spectators occupying different subject positions. The experience I recount was never intended to have protruded from the matrix of the “context” that made my fieldwork possible: well-connected acquaintances and “friends of friends,” a number to call in case of trouble, eager hosts. As I would too lately learn, the boundaries of context, in this

case the social ties that made legible my presence at Hangzhou's Midtown Catholic Church, my primary field site, extended far beyond my supervision. The partial feedback of spectators and spectating participants helped to "write" what later appeared to be the overdetermined texts, one sacred and one secular, of Good Samaritanism and cross-strait betrayal. These interlocutors-turned-analysts thus shaped the direction in which this "failure" continued to fail. By attending to how participants deploy and overlap geopolitical and Christian texts to negotiate the guest-host relationship's interpersonal dynamics, this chapter hopes also to unsettle "rapport" as a naturalized element of anthropological folk theory (see Goebel 2019).

The actors are born

Hotel manager Zhou Fang lives alone in an immaculate two-bedroom apartment in Camellia Court, an elegant cluster of minimalist high-rise apartments east of Wulin Square, a busy commercial quarter in downtown Hangzhou. She looks young for her fifty years. Wavy black hair cascades over her back. She prefers muted, neutral tones and form-fitting dresses. A Roomba vacuum makes daily rounds over the wood-patterned vinyl flooring of her apartment. She had brought it over from the United States a year or so ago, when she visited her son Kang Shengli, then an undergraduate at Purdue University.

I lived with Zhou Fang from mid-November to mid-December 2017. Prior to moving in, I had met her once in Hangzhou, in the summer of 2015, through Fr. Lü, a Midtown priest who had moved to California. She had taken me out to lunch with her son, Kang Shengli, and had encouraged us to become friends. "Purdue isn't that far from Chicago – he goes to Chicago often," she said of her son, who was quiet and no doubt (in my mind) bored to death. "Maybe the two of you can meet up and do something together. Shengli says Chicago is a lot of fun."

“She...definitely had hopes,” said Sichun, my honorary cohortmate at the university in Shanghai where I was institutionally based. There, we shared the same supervisor and had become fast friends. Like me, she was an anthropology student who worked with Christians. Throughout my time in Hangzhou, she was an indispensable source of advice. Our supervisor had informally assigned her to me, in case I needed assistance setting up a local bank account, filling out university forms, and the like. I had discussed with her the advisability of taking up Zhou Fang’s offer to host me. Fr. Lü had been messaging me about staying with Zhou Fang, “a very wonderful, very kind, very pious person” I was to contact in case of any trouble. He said that Zhou Fang’s son had graduated from Purdue in 2017 and then moved to California instead of returning home; the point was that she had a spare bedroom. Sichun and I agreed that staying with Zhou Fang made sense: I needed a place to stay while looking for housing, and it would only be for a short while.

“There’s no better way to get started,” declared Sichun. She went on about how ideal it would be to be immersed, under the wing of a well-connected leader and volunteer, in the tight-knit community into which I was seeking entry. I too thought it made good ethnographic sense.

“Would I have to pay her?”

“Absolutely not! Christians love to host. I stayed with them all the time, every week with a different family. Just get her one of those Christian bookstore knickknacks, something with ‘Emmanuel’ on it. She won’t take your money. This woman, it sounds like she doesn’t need your money anyway. She would be insulted if you made it about money.”

As I would later discover, the pragmatics of hospitality was not to be accomplished by token gift or token gesture; nor did I, as Sichun had done, stay only for a week, as perhaps I ought to have made sure to do, despite all polite entreaties to stay as long as I liked. With Fr. Lü

as insurer, Zhou Fang trusted me immediately, even aggressively: “This is your home,” she said, handing me a smart key and a credit card the afternoon I moved in. “You can use this credit card for the bus and for whatever else you need. The bank has a promotional discount with all city busses right now. I don’t use it, so just take it. Make sure to use it on the bus, OK?”

My rental apartment was not available until one month later. During this in-between month, I had grown to genuinely enjoy living with Zhou Fang. The dinner conversations, the television bingeing, the nightly ritual of picking out her clothes for the next day – these were fun activities, and I took up the role of substitute daughter with ease. I was included in all family functions; I was asked to run errands for her parents, her younger sister, and her niece.

In the evenings, we’d watch the television program *The Actor Is Born* (*Yanyuan de dansheng*), an acting competition in which all the contestants were already famous actors. In one particularly memorable episode, actress Yuan Li, known best for playing Du Xiaoyue in the period drama *The Eloquent Ji Xiaolan*, was eliminated by the judges. Like Zhou Fang, Yuan Li was a middle-aged but still girlish Hangzhou native. Zhou Fang was perplexed. “I like Yuan Li,” she said, “because she’s a good person. She’s also a *Hangzhouren*. She does a lot of charitable work. She’s Christian, too, and she’s married to a *laowai* [a white man],¹ also a Christian. I think the judges aren’t being fair. They’re probably jealous. Yuan Li is better and prettier than Zhang Ziyi. You can see that they blurred Zhang Ziyi’s skin.” Zhang Ziyi was one of the judges. And indeed, we both later learned that Yuan Li went on social media to expose her unjust treatment on *The Actor Is Born* (see Figure 2.1, below).

¹ Zhou Fang was unaware that they had divorced in 2015.



Figure 2.1. Yuan Li's December 9, 2017 Weibo posts. (1) "I'm not watching! From what I heard, post-production editing had me cut into a crazy person! Yep, this [editing] is retaliatory. So let the story continue..."; (2) "I watched it, the post-performance interview was cut was all over the place, the dialogue was randomly pasted, the directors' expressions were also randomly tacked on. The one goal was to make the ignorant melon-eating masses hate me, to make people think I'm insane. You people begged for forgiveness, promised [me] countless times on WeChat! Next thing I know, [you] took this cruel shot. Fine then, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, when I've a moment, I'll take my time exposing [all this]."²

Zhou Fang's keen awareness of lens filters and indignation at Yuan Li's treatment express metapragmatic attunement to viewer reception. Zhou Fang was far from alone in posting selfies or, just as frequently, photos of dishes she prepared and artfully arranged on her dining

² Screen grabs from <http://news.sina.com.cn/o/2017-12-12/doc-ifypsvkp2221970.shtml>.

table. The selfies she shared on WeChat were often humorously but flatteringly filtered. As savvy social media users know, the pressure to “perform” can spill over into a kind of “behind-the-scenes” authenticity enactment (Ross 2019) that self-deprecatingly and thus morally excuses the “fakeness” of curated glamour: one saves face by knowingly enacting loss of face. “Do you know what *choumei* means?” Zhou Fang once asked me while filing her toenails in front of the TV. I had been teasing her for “youthfully” playing with filters and posting selfies. “It’s not that I’m young – it’s that I’m very *choumei*!” *Choumei* is to brazenly flaunt one’s good looks. By deliberately over-filtering her selfies and self-identifying such behavior as *choumei*, Zhou Fang practiced an ironic humility. Our shared awareness of the manipulability of self-presentation unsettled the border between strangerhood and familiarity (see McDonald 2018). She could in fact flaunt her good looks – we her semi-public knew she was shapely and attractive. The heavy-handed photo-editing pre-sets were larger-than-life overlays, several complete with extravagant period hairstyles, that drew attention not to any flaws underneath, but rather to their own superfluity.

Hospitality and private property: can Christians be strangers?

With WeChat-mediated sociality in mind, I examine the relationship between hospitality, estrangement, and kinship. Several anthropological treatments of hospitality and guest-host relations have centered, *sec.* Simmel, the figure of the stranger (e.g., Beidelman 1989, Samanani 2017), most capaciously understood to be a “potential wanderer...whose element within the group involves both being outside it and confronting it” (Simmel 1971[1908]:143-144). Christian discussions of the stranger-guest often implicitly assume the stranger-guest’s non-Christian identity, for example in the statement that “Christians bear witness to their identity by expanding their hospitality from supporting one another to demonstrating that we are one human family”

(Walczak 2021:93). That is to say, hospitality is the code of conduct through which “one human family” – indexing, of course, the biblical *origo* of creation and all human origin – is metapragmatically achieved. From this perspective, the stranger is a person who has not yet been interpellated by Christian hospitality. People who are already Christians, then, including Christians of other denominations, cannot be strangers in quite the same way.

Simmel’s stranger, however, is not a total outsider; although no insider, this stranger is a member of the group, and is recognized to partake in similarities of the most general sort: “nationality or social position, of occupation or of general human nature” (1971[1908]:147). Although Simmel’s prototypical stranger is in great part distinguished by ethnoreligious difference, Simmel does not address the possibility of intra-religious estrangement. (Yet as Martin Luther King Jr. famously observed, “eleven o’clock on Sunday morning is one of the most segregated hours, if not the most segregated hour, in Christian America.”³) Are Christians of different races (or nationalities) strangers to one another? Guests? Neighbors? Estranged kin?

The ambiguity of neighbors and strangers has spawned a vast ethical quandary in which the boundary between hostility and hospitality is indistinct (Freud 1961[1930], Žižek, Santner, and Reinhard 2013). Is it in the neighbor’s proximate strangeness (for the neighbor is neither friend nor enemy) that one misrecognizes one’s own alienation (Blurton and Houlik-Ritchey 2020:181)? In Matthew 22:37-39 (and Mark 12:31, Luke 10:27), Jesus tells the querying lawyer that the greatest commandment is, as well as to “love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind,” to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (see also Leviticus 19:18). In the *Sigao* Bible or the Studium Biblicum Version, the standard Chinese

³ King, Martin Luther, Jr. 1960. Interview on “Meet the Press,” <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/interview-meet-press>, accessed Oct. 14, 2021.

language Catholic Bible, “neighbor” is translated as *jinren* (近人), a literal albeit nonstandard term for a “proximate person.” In more standard usage, *jinren* denotes either a contemporary (i.e., a person proximate in time) or an intimate, one who is near (and dear)⁴ – the very opposite of a neighbor-stranger.

Hospitality is self-limiting or self-contradicting because it presumes a necessary distance between self and other – what could be called “hostipitality” (Derrida 2000) – such that the invitation to “make yourself at home” reaffirms the host’s mastery of the house. The Christian perspective likewise acknowledges this assessment: by appointing man (made, crucially, “in His image”) to be caretaker of His creation – in other words, to “make himself at home”– God reaffirms His ultimate ownership of creation (Janzen 2002:5). The sin of disobedience is thus “the human attempt to be owners rather than guests” (Janzen 2002:6) or, put semiotically, an improper kind dicentization, namely the process whereby an interpretant sign posits or creates a contiguous or causal relationship with another sign (Ball 2014). Here, divine sanction of human stewardship is (mis)taken for an index of human ownership. The *imago Dei* or (man in) God’s image is a dicent sign insofar as it is taken to be that which grants to man ownership of the earth.

If only the owner can give, like Abraham to his (divine) guests (Genesis 18:1-16), something to someone (Walczak 2021:89), then what of the hospitality extended by the caretaker – if not quite owner – of private property? At stake in my impending fall-out with Zhou Fang is the boundary between reciprocity and charity. As will be seen, the rupture of reciprocity is interpreted by the caretaker-host not as a consequence of material insufficiency owing to paternalistic relations of ownership, but of a feminized, charitable excess. Zhou Fang is the

⁴ In Leviticus 19:18, however, *jinren* is not used; the command is simply rendered 愛人如己, “love another as [your]self.”

manager of a (defunct) hotel near Wulin Square; she is well versed in the business of hospitality, and she was, as I have stated, aggressively trusting and hospitable to a fault. She seemed to me a vulnerable and lonely empty nester who sought to fill her leisure time with as much church and volunteering as possible. I am embarrassed to admit that I, having neglected to take note of my role in the participant framework of Christian hospitality, imagined that we had become friends.

Kinzoned

I moved out of Camellia Court in the middle of December. Two months later, in February, I was notified by Fr. Lü that my father would be hosting Zhou Fang and Kang Jianxin, her wealthy, estranged husband, for a week. Although Zhou Fang was looking forward to seeing her son in California, she was anxious about the trip. She was due for a perfunctory re-entry into the United States in order to keep her green card active. Shengli had graduated from Purdue last summer and was looking for a job; he had no desire, according to his mother, to return to Hangzhou, but had moved to southern California to be closer to Kang Jianxin, who was helping him look for employment.

A month before Zhou Fang flew to Los Angeles, Shengli had in fact found a job through one of Kang Jianxin's friends. It was at a hotel near LAX, and he was hired specifically to communicate with Mandarin-speaking guests. "It's not a great job, nothing to do with his education, but at least he found something. I didn't think that he'd also be working at a hotel," said Zhou Fang, relieved but unimpressed.⁵ Much to her chagrin, however, Shengli had not only

⁵ Even among Chinese graduates of hospitality education programs, hospitality and tourism careers are not considered desirable, and the turnover rate is high (Wen, Li, and Kwon 2019). Moreover, more than half of all general managers of hotels in mainland China – Zhou Fang included – do not hold bachelor's degrees. Zhou Fang expected a bachelor's degree from an American university to lead to higher-status employment for Shengli. (See Tong Linge, "Hotel industry faces talent dilemma: 50% of new hotel managers don't have bachelor's degrees," *The*

found a job, but also a girlfriend, and they had moved in together. “I can’t see any of his WeChat activity anymore,” she said, showing me her Moments feed. “I don’t know how he did it, but he did something to his WeChat so I can’t see anything. And when I ask him how he’s doing, he says everything is fine, that work is hard, that he’s busy, he’s trying to improve his English. He won’t say anything about the girlfriend, and I don’t know where they live. He knows I don’t approve.”

“But *of course* she doesn’t like her!” said Sichun when we talked it over. “She [the girlfriend] is [a] Chinese [national]. She’s not an ABC like you. She’s useless – she has at most a work visa.” Even though Zhou Fang refrained from pressing Shengli for more information about his girlfriend, her messages (by her own account) revolved around his weight, lack of exercise, and poor English. I frequently had to reassure her that Purdue was in fact a decent school, and that Shengli was hardly the only college graduate who had trouble landing a first job. “Can you see anything he posts on WeChat?” she asked me every now and then. I couldn’t either. My very few messages to Shengli, sent at her gentle insistence, had been met with short, polite replies such as “Thank you, elder sister [*jiejie*], welcome to Hangzhou!” My vague impression of Shengli was positive: he seemed like a good kid, and I suspected that he was uneasy about his mother’s impending arrival as well as anything to do with me.

Familism and “family culture,” on which extensive expository and critical analyses have been written (e.g., Cheng 1944, Davis and Harrell 1993, Greenhalgh 1994, Yan 2021), is said to structure Chinese discursive practices of politeness. Conspicuous among these practices is the use of kinterms for non-kin, for example calling nonintimates “uncles” and “aunts” and

Economic Observer, Nov. 3, 2017, <http://www.eeo.com.cn/2017/1103/316047.shtml>, accessed Oct. 17, 2021.)

addressing classmates by occupational kinterms such as “senior/junior academic brother/sister” (Chen 2019). Chinese and Korean Protestants are known to deploy status-equalizing, specifically Christian kinterms for “brother” and “sister” (Cao 2011:22, Harkness 2015) that do not indicate seniority or juniority. Harkness has observed that the use of Christian forms of address often uncomfortably mixes the divergent scalar structures of “absolute social conversion” and everyday social relations (2015:309-310). Although exceptions of course occur, such forms of address are seldom used by Catholics. Far from being hailed into a new chronotope of modernity as an equal, in the eyes of Zhou Fang (whom I addressed simply as *ayi* or “aunt,” the all-purpose term for an older but not elderly woman) and Fr. Lü, I inhabited a position of low rank in a paternalistic structure of overlapping, multi-scalar kin-like (or at the very least kin-worthy) relations: co-ethnic (*yi jia qin*, “close as a family”) but junior (*wanbei*, “younger generation”), co-religionist (*dou shi jiaoyou*,⁶ “[we] are all church-mates) but lay (*pingxintu* or *xiao jiaoyou*, “little church-mate”).

But when Fr. Lü informed me, in February, that my father was to host Zhou Fang and Kang Jianxin for a week in late February to early March, I was stunned. My father confirmed it: Fr. Lü had arranged it, telling him how generously Zhou Fang had hosted me; it was his turn to reciprocate. But why didn't I know? The last thing I wanted was to involve family with fieldwork. My father didn't know and had never met any of these people. Perhaps it was the height of arrogance to assume that I could ensconce myself in another family while being cagey about my own. After all, I had met Fr. Lü through my father. I was perturbed, too, that my father hadn't thought to mention anything to me, and was more involved than he had let on. And

⁶ The word *jiaoyou* ‘church’/‘religion’-‘mate’ combines the meanings of “fellow churchgoer,” “parishioner,” and “Catholic.”

although Zhou Fang continued to invite me to weekly dinners with her parents, younger sister, and niece, she kept mum about these behind-the-scenes arrangements. Wouldn't it have made more sense for Zhou Fang and my father to communicate through me?

Of course not: put simply, I belonged to a junior generation; neither my consent nor input mattered. My father knew Fr. Lü, then assisting at a Chinese parish in Monterey Park (and later, Rowland Heights), and Fr. Lü had been friendly with Zhou Fang and her extended family back when he was in residence at Midtown Catholic Church. After his departure, Zhou Fang was one of few friends with whom he remained in frequent contact. Although she and I appear to be central players in my version of events, arguably neither of us had, or were seen to have, much agency. This was a conflict between “real” men: Kang Jianxin and my father, the two players whose machinations were least transparent to me. As much as I had wanted to be a sovereign unit, so to speak, it was the self-exiled Fr. Lü, neither propertied nor familial, who occupied what turned out to be this most unenviable, unstable position. His priestly status⁷ may have afforded him a veneer of respectability, but marriage and fatherhood remain the prerequisites to becoming a “good” or “real Chinese man” (Greenhalgh 2014:360). Fr. Lü may have been itinerant and unrooted, but he had managed to bring two families under one transnational roof – twice.

Zhou Fang returned to Hangzhou on March 5, 2018. As far as my father and I knew, our exchange with her family was at a close. I thought I had learned my lesson: there was no free lunch, and Zhou Fang was to be kept at a distance. I was upset that our “friendship” had taken an openly transactional turn and angry that it resulted in obligatory participation in the private

⁷ Urban families do not encourage sons to become priests. Recall the contempt, mentioned in Chapter 1, that many urban and peri-urban parishioners have for their priests' rural background. Priests are respected mainly for their sacramental function.

affairs of a family I had no intention of joining. It is possible that my prior zeal to be accepted, and to belong, had misled others. It is also possible that Fr. Lü, who had previously commented on my advancing age (I was 28 at the time), had hinted at brokering a potential match, and that my father didn't think it a bad idea, initially, for me to get to know Shengli in a friendlier capacity.

Zhou Fang had also disclosed to Fr. Lü and me that Kang Jianxin had a mistress and a one-year-old daughter in California. My father filled me in: Kang Jianxin did not leave when Zhou Fang left. First, he asked for a few extra days, then a week, and then another, and now he was insisting on paying rent. Nor did he have a car; he needed to be driven everywhere. (Shengli had taken time off to drive his parents around while Zhou Fang was there, but as soon as she left, he resumed working full-time.) Whether Fr. Lü and Zhou Fang knew about Kang Jianxin's plans I do not know. I never did meet with Zhou Fang after she returned. In any case, their knowledge (or lack thereof) was inconsequential because Kang Jianxin's request was a matter over which they had no control. Zhou Fang wanted to see me after she returned, but I gave excuse after excuse.

The break

How my father dealt with Kang Jianxin's request was not, and still is not, entirely clear to me. I suspect he wavered, tentatively yielded, and might well have fully conceded had I not been so adamantly opposed. Zhou Fang and Fr. Lü both mentioned how nice it would be if *Shengli* were to live with my father, but Shengli was not interested. Zhou Fang's invitations to dinner were increasing in frequency, and I was running out of excuses. In hindsight, perhaps I ought to have accepted, but I was certain that Zhou Fang and her husband, although estranged, would do anything for Shengli. Not knowing what to do, I confided – unwisely, from any ethnographer's

perspective – in another parishioner, Marcella (as she liked to be called), a woman in her 30s who sometimes attended the English class I co-taught at Midtown. (Zhou Fang was, to my aggravation, a most regular student.) It was a Saturday afternoon. Marcella and I co-wrote a long and careful message, which I regret I did not retain, expressing my displeasure with Kang Jianxin staying in my father’s house. Marcella edited my Chinese and suggested better phrasings. My recollection is highly partial, the message having long been deleted, but I believe I went on to say that my father had agreed only to host for a fixed period of time (one week), that an indefinite stay was not appropriate, that our home address really wasn’t the right one to put as their default U.S. address, and – the great error – that if this had been her (or her husband’s) plan all along, was *that* why she had hosted me?

After pressing “send,” I put my phone in airplane mode and chatted anxiously with Marcella. About forty minutes later, I turned off airplane mode. My phone blew up with Zhou Fang’s messages. I deleted the chat log without reading any of the messages. Nervous and unwilling to be without company, I went to a mall that evening with another parishioner, an exam tutor named Molly. I told her everything. While I was there, Luke the English class co-teacher called. He said he had just received an earful from Zhou Fang, and that he had never before heard her in such a state. He wanted to hear my side of the story. Before I knew it, I was mired – and a key player – in the small-scale spectacle of Zhou Fang’s WeChat Moments.

On Sunday morning (the next day), I woke up to a call from Fr. Lü, who was in California. I do not recall it in great detail, as I was not prepared for minute notetaking, and moreover it was a very unpleasant half hour. Fr. Lü was shouting with rage. His main points, repeated over and over in (roughly) the following order, were:

1. Zhou Fang called me. I saw what she posted on WeChat. She is kind and generous. How *dare* you. You hurt her.
2. She already has a green card.
3. How *dare* your father accept rent from Kang Jianxin.
4. Your father doesn't understand social relations [*budong renji guanxi*]. He has no friends. I've seen him at church and he's not normal [*bu zhengchang*]. I thought having people live with him would be good for him.
5. Did Zhou Fang cook for you? (Answer: Yes.)
6. You did not pay Zhou Fang. What gifts did you give her? (Answer: A clutch.) How much was it? (Answer: around 75 USD.) She says you knitted a scarf for her. That's worth a few cents. Do you know how rich she is? She doesn't need your trash.
7. She has money. She'd hand me 150,000 USD, immediately, if I asked. As for you, you will never make enough to buy your father's house. [你爸那栋房我看你一辈子也买不起!]
8. You don't understand social relations. You will have no friends in China.

Closing with the refrain “you were wrong, you understand?” (*ni cuole, ni dongma?*), he hung up. I immediately checked my WeChat Moments feed to see what Zhou Fang had posted.

Text 1: biting the hand of the Good Samaritan

Recall that Jesus tells the querying lawyer in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke that the greatest commandment is, after loving God, to “love thy neighbor as thyself.” In response to the lawyer’s question “who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29), Jesus tells the parable of the Good Samaritan. How does Christian hospitality discourse recast ethnographic rupture and the breakdown of reciprocity? In a series of WeChat posts, Zhou Fang presents the painful

experience as a cautionary tale of excessive charity, the compulsion of which was by nature so irrepressible and maternal as to be detrimental to her own self-interest. I found the posts annoying and melodramatic, and in the heat of the moment could hardly stand to look at them, but Tzu-ting, a Taiwanese friend whom I kept apprised of my adventures in Hangzhou, saw something more. She wrote to me in English on Facebook Messenger: “You’re not going to win. Nobody knows you.” I had sent her a screen capture of the first of Zhou Fang’s posts, from the evening of the same Saturday on which I had sent Zhou Fang the message I co-wrote with Marcella.

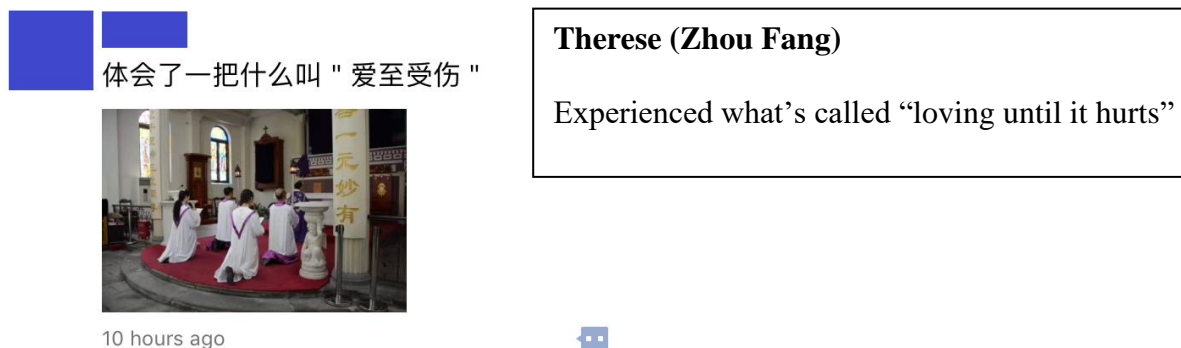


Figure 2.2. Zhou Fang’s WeChat post from May 5, 2018. The photo is of the interior of Midtown Catholic Church.

This must have been the post that Fr. Lü had seen before he called me. In it, Zhou Fang quotes Mother Teresa’s counsel to “love until it hurts.” I was not named or explicitly identified in any of her posts, but I figured that Zhou Fang’s audience – that is, at least half the parish – knew what and whom she was sub-posting about. Tzu-ting had warned me I wouldn’t win; the very assumption that I was competing, however, made me uneasy. Why hadn’t Zhou Fang blocked me yet? Did she not know how, or did she want me to view her posts? (Fr. Lü had blocked me immediately after calling.) And if it really *was* a competition, what was I supposed to do? I made sure to be as invisible as possible on WeChat.

One or two days later, I saw the following post:



Therese (Zhou Fang)

[To have] loved a lover into an enemy, I'm quite impressed with myself. But Jesus sees all, so I have no regrets.

[meme]

silenced by sobs

Comment 1: [3 hug emojis]

Therese: Thank you everyone for your concern, I'm well. Experienced once what Jesus felt at that time, that's all.

Therese: Love is only thing in this world that expects nothing in return; since you don't believe [it], it serves you right to live in darkness, but you didn't have to bite back.

Therese: Even so, I'll treat my wound and still go on loving.

Therese: I have only to meet a *waidiren* and moreover, a young person that's about my son's age, to instantly want to love with the explosive force of a mother's love. Got accused this time of scheming, it's really too much [3 cry-laugh facepalm emojis]

Comment 2: [hug emoji]

Therese to C2: [hug emoji]

Marcella to Therese: Then first love well [your] son. Sister Fang, I see one of your needs.

Therese to Marcella: Okay [OK sign]

Figure 2.3. Zhou Fang's post from May 6 or 7.

No matter how kin-like or kin-worthy I had once fancied myself, I was now unquestionably both stranger and outsider, transmogrified from "lover" to personal enemy (i.e., Schmittian *inimicus*) and demoted from ABC to *waidiren*, from an upwardly mobile American passport holder to a

domestic outsider from a different village, town, or province. Although denotatively neutral, this term often⁸ (but not always) connotes migrant workers; compared to “locals” (*bendiren*), *waidiren* are considered untrustworthy and deficient in *suzhi* or “quality” (Sun 2009). I remembered what Tzu-ting had said: nobody knew me, while Zhou Fang was a real Hangzhou native, rich and respected by everyone at Midtown. I had only Molly and Marcella, and Marcella was on cordial terms with everyone, Zhou Fang included.

For Molly, however, the term *waidiren* was grating, as she too fit the description “a *waidiren* and moreover, a young person that’s about my son’s age.” Molly, who was from Wenzhou, didn’t like Zhou Fang for the simple reason that she had once heard her say, in response to a remark about the many attractive Wenzhounese in Hangzhou (in the context of a conversation about how there were “too many” Wenzhounese around), that they weren’t actually good-looking, but were merely proficient at making themselves presentable (*hui daban eryi*). Partly because she sided with me, and partly because she already disliked Zhou Fang, Molly asked, after reading the above post, if I knew what a *shengmu biao* was. Literally “holy mother bitch” (or “- slut”), *shengmu biao* is an Internet neologism for a holier-than-thou woman. The semantic contrast between “holy mother” and “bitch”/“slut,” seen in other popular *X-biao* formations *guimi biao* and *lücha biao*, evinces “fakeness” and suggests that the woman thus designated is deceptive and hypocritical, often but not necessarily in a sexual sense (Jing-Schmidt and Peng 2018:394). This indecorous (and aptly blasphemous) charge of feminine fakery, meant to strike back at the implied untrustworthiness of *waidiren* and deceitful attractiveness of Wenzhounese, drew my attention to Zhou Fang’s highly dramatized online self-presentation.

⁸ In major cities especially, and of major cities, Shanghai in particular (Ling 2019).

Recall that Zhou Fang's sympathy for Yuan Li on the TV show *The Actor Is Born* hinged on Yuan Li's charitable work, authentic Hangzhouneseness, and Christian faith. Yuan Li had taken umbrage to the show's editing of her segment (see Figure 2.1) and claimed that her clips had been retaliatorily edited in such a way as to make her appear unhinged and crazy (*shenjingbing*). The same three traits of charity, localness, and Christianness were exactly those upon which Zhou Fang now drew. She presented herself as a guileless, good-hearted local easily exploited by wily outsiders. Why would anyone want to retaliate against so benign a person? Zhou Fang had opined that the judges on *The Actor Is Born* were jealous of Yuan Li for her beauty, status, and humaneness. Both Zhou Fang and Yuan Li attributed to their opponent(s) a calculated vindictiveness (Zhou Fang: *fanyao yi kou*, Yuan Li: *zhe yi shou baofu de*) while themselves justly "biting back" by exposing to their public of supporters the betrayal of friendship ("what Jesus felt at that time," according to Zhou Fang) or deceit of editing. Perhaps this is what Tzu-ting meant by "winning." Zhou Fang's and Yuan Li's accusations of retaliation, whether understood as "negative reciprocity" (Schedler 2021) or as an adaptive deterrent against the breaking of conventions in contests over resources (Wiegman 2019:1111), are trenchant. In light of the Christian injunction to "turn the other cheek," not to mention the purported role of Christianity, upon its introduction in non-Christian populations, in ending retaliatory cycles of violence (see Rosaldo 1989 and Boster, Yost, and Peeke 2003), accusing the other party of retaliation is almost tantamount to de-Christianizing the opponent.

In Zhou Fang's final post sub-referencing our falling-out, she recounts feeding and giving alms to a young stranger in need, only to be told afterwards that he was a scammer. I could not but read it as a succinct commentary on our unfortunate relationship.



Therese (Zhou Fang)
 Last night when I was walking down Zhongshan Rd., I saw a lad swaying in front of me. I supported him to the edge of a flowerbed. He said he was faint with hunger, so I bought him a bowl of Zhou Su Zhen [name of a wonton restaurant]. Learned he was penniless, so I gave him 200 RMB [approx. 30 USD]. Just as I was overjoyed, thinking I had helped someone, a parishioner told [me] I probably ran into a scammer [3 frowning faces]

[photo of blossoms, presumably in the aforementioned flowerbed]

Therese: If it was a scam, the ways of scamming people nowadays are too ingenious, performed too sincerely. People who have compassion indeed won't have that much vigilance. But I still hope that he really did chance upon difficulty, because he said he'd contact me after finding work. [2 grinning faces]

Figure 2.4. Zhou Fang’s post from May 10 or 11.

Zhou Fang’s self-attributed naïve indiscretion widens the gap between performance and sincerity. Absent any hint of the socialist “comradeship” that once erased, or sought to erase, strangerhood from the conception of a “people” (Lee 2014), eliminating within it the exclusionary distinction between *bendiren* (“locals”) and *waidiren*, Catholic acts of charity seek neither to address systemic poverty nor to effect social change; acts of charity are oriented toward better loving one’s neighbor (see Scherz 2013). This aim is especially nonintuitive if one agrees that Chinese society falls under “the tyranny of the familial metaphor” and recalls Fei Xiaotong (1992)’s observation that the Confucian tradition has no governing metapragmatic

principle spanning both kinship sociality and stranger sociality (Lee 2014:6-7). Considering the mistrust classically accorded to strangers, the thankless betrayal of a Good Samaritan is no surprise. The implication is that charitable impulses have become so exploited by backstabbing scam artists like myself that no expression of sentiment can be correctly interpreted. Sincere emotions now look fake, if not erratic and crazy (e.g., the actress Yuan Li's behavior when she is *not* acting), and behavior that is in reality an act ("performed too sincerely," in Zhou Fang's words) is deemed genuine.

Momentary lapse of judgment, taken by Zhou Fang to be diagnostic of compassion, is a dicent sign; the sign's object is an instinct toward charity. This lapse of judgment is not unlike the dicent sign of the *imago Dei* in that both rely on the visual (or virtual): the *appearance* of (digitally modified or love-crazed) irrational behavior, the *appearance* of God. And in both cases, looking like an owner, whether of an abundance of emotional or natural resources (namely, charitable feeling or Eden), is taken to index ownership or owner-status. This owner-status reaffirms, as in the case of the hospitable host's mastery over the house, the giver's mastery over the goods given. Dicentization is relevant because it is the semiotic process behind which the mastery of goods, and subsequently the re-mastery of self, is produced. Reframed in the currency of love or charity, Zhou Fang disavowed desiring any recompense. Even if she had been scammed, she had overcome the neighbor-stranger with charity. So was it really about winning? The final message I received from her came shortly after she diplomatically announced, in the English class chatgroup, her withdrawal ("due to personal reasons") from the English class I co-taught with Luke. "Congratulations," she wrote to me privately, "you got what you wished for" (*gongxi ni, ni ruyuan le*).

Text 2: scaling down Chinese annexation

Another element in this kinship-hospitality debacle was my interlocutors' generally polite but sometimes hostile interest in cross-strait politics. The thorny subject of relations between Taiwan and China, from postwar brinkmanship to the touchy entailments of shared language and ethnicity, and to whether or not the term "mainland" itself is prescriptive, exceeds the confines of this chapter. I broach the awkwardness of cross-strait relations because it played into how my relationship with Zhou Fang was taken up by interested spectators. The opinions of these spectators in turn influenced how I conducted myself. To my surprise, most acquaintances in Hangzhou were as interested in, or at least more sympathetic to, my cursory Taiwanese-ness, which I endeavored to downplay, than my more obvious "ABC" identity. Many people saw ABCs, or "American born Chinese," as either the wealthy, spoiled children of elites, or as culturally insecure,⁹ excessively suntanned "bananas" (*xiangjiaoren*) with limited Chinese language ability. I often received backhanded compliments such as "your Mandarin is good for an ABC" and "you don't look *that* ABC."¹⁰ But if it didn't matter much that I as an ABC didn't

⁹ In early May 2018, several students in the English class I co-taught at Midtown Catholic Church confronted me with the clickbait news about Keziah Daum, the Utah high school student who wore a *qipao*/cheongsam or "Mandarin gown" to prom. They asked me if I too thought it was "racist." As I started to explain why *some* Chinese Americans might be put off, a young man interrupted me: "I don't know why you ABCs think it's racist because we think she looks pretty. Chinese people like it. Stop being so sensitive." (See Cho, Kassy, "This Teen Wore A Traditional Chinese Dress To Prom And Caused A Huge Controversy," *Buzzfeed News*, May 1, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/kassycho/keziah-daum-prom-qipao-cheongsam>, and Qin, Amy, "Teenager's Prom Dress Stirs Furor in U.S. — but Not in China," *The New York Times*, May 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/02/world/asia/chinese-prom-dress.html>.)

¹⁰ The then-trending incarnation of the female-identifying ABC was the "ABG" or "Asian Baby Girl." For descriptions, see Tran, Mai, "It was a cultural reset: a short history of the ABG aesthetic," *i-D*, Oct. 7, 2020, https://i-d.vice.com/en_uk/article/4avmem/black-joy-book-extract and "How to: Spot an ABG," *Garb*, Aug. 31, 2017, <https://www.berkeleygarb.com/blog-1/2017/8/31/how-to-spot-an-abg>.

feel connected to China, it mattered very much, and was opprobrious, if I as “Taiwanese” didn’t feel connected.¹¹

As Zhou Fang would lightly but pedantically remind me, “we say *liang an yi jia qin* [‘two shores, one family’]¹² because we share the same culture. We look the same, we speak the same language.” I ask what might be a misleading question: were Zhou Fang’s family and mine kin, or were we strangers? Earlier, I asked if Christians could be strangers. In practice, certainly: Fr. Lü had complained before of racist treatment at a Los Angeles parish (prior to transferring to Monterey Park), and of how every white American priest there had been cold to him. Only among co-ethnics did he find comfort and community. Fr. Lü and Zhou Fang had welcomed me as “one of them”: Chinese, even if “American born.” I was flattered and relieved, during the uncertain period of building connections in the field, to be accepted. Both Fr. Lü and Zhou Fang opined that “cultural exchange” (*wenhua jiaoliu*) between China and the United States, “just like what you and Shengli are doing,” was an objective good.

With this scaling up of kinship, my (and my family’s) rapport with Zhou Fang and her family was perhaps primed to intensify, as though to affirm that we really were a family

¹¹ If not to the nation, at least to a province (e.g., Fujian). Unaware that Chiang Kai-shek is a controversial and unbeloved figure in Taiwan, my landlady told me that “Chiang Kai-shek is Zhejiangnese like us [*women Zhejiangren*], warmer and gentler (*wenhe*), not that kind of coarse (*cucuo*) Hunanese like Mao Zedong.”

¹² A slogan popularized (but not authored) by Taipei mayor Ko Wen-je (pinyin *Ke Wenzhe*) during the 2015 Taipei-Shanghai Forum, arguably as a soft alternative to the hard “One China” policy, which he had repeatedly disavowed. (See “Taipei mayor won’t publicly back ‘One China’, Shanghai forum at risk,” July 30, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-taiwan-china-politics-idUKKCN0Q40ZO20150730>.) It is a formulation intended to leave room open for dialogue. The phrase “close as a family” (*yi jia qin*) appears in other aspirational slogans of unity between non-kin, e.g., “Han [and] Tibetan [are] one family” (*han zang yi jia qin*), “Taiwan [and] Japan [are] one family” (*tai ri yi jia qin*), “all the world is one family” (*tianxia yi jia qin*). The irony is that having to say X and Y are “close as a family” in the first place belies the very union being professed.

separated only by spatiotemporal circumstance. There was a felt pressure to model harmonious relations, to practice a kind of cross-strait cooperation, and to reduce or undermine the daunting breadth of geopolitical conflict by means of the personally manipulable pragmatics of hospitality (see Carr and Lempert 2016:3). Under Chinese state ideology, normative statements like “two shores, one family” lay the onus of diplomacy on fraternal feeling, rendering the project of political identification as precarious and as trivial as a family feud. Indeed, by referring to me as a *waidiren* in Figure 2.3, Zhou Fang simultaneously cast me out as nonequal while adhering to the nationalist “family” ideology (non-Chinese foreigners are *waiyuoren*, never *waidiren*) by dismissing any pretensions to statehood of a “renegade province.”

It is not entirely coincidental that Marcella, when mildly chiding Zhou Fang in Figure 2.3, uses “Traditional” Chinese characters. She tells Zhou Fang to redirect “the explosive force of [her] mother’s love” to her biological child; he, not an outsider, ought to be its primary recipient. Although I took Marcella’s preference for Traditional characters to be a personal quirk, I liked to imagine that her choice of script indexed a sympathetic interest in the politics of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Language ideology behind script choice is shaped by longstanding debates over national identity and Taiwan’s assumed position as a bastion of Chinese cultural authenticity¹³ as well as by tourism and marketing (Su and Chun 2021). My intuition was corroborated on at least two occasions: once, when Marcella asked if I had seen *Seediq Bale*, a Taiwanese film (which she highly recommended) about an indigenous rebellion against Japanese colonists, and at another time in her response to a Midtown chatgroup message asking her what one of the Traditional characters (*fantizi*) she had used in an earlier message meant. “It’s

¹³ An assumption carried forth in the scholarship of an earlier generation of US-based China scholars whose fieldwork was largely conducted in Taiwanese contexts because conducting fieldwork in China was then impractical.

zhengtizi ('orthographic characters'), not *fantizi* ('complex characters')," she wrote in a teacherly tone and before answering the question, "which are 'complex' only when compared to Simplified characters. *Zhengtizi* is how the Chinese language has always been written, which is how Taiwan does it." Correctly or not, I projected onto Marcella a relational sympathy, and although I would have denied it at the time, her use of the Traditional script likely subconsciously factored into my decision to seek her help with composing my complaint to Zhou Fang. In short, I (who, while in China, typed in Simplified) trusted Marcella more because of her choice of script.

The most provocative take on what was "actually" happening came courtesy of Tzu-ting. "If you don't watch out," she wrote to me in English on Facebook Messenger, "they will take over your house. Very Chinese." At the time of her message, I had not yet messaged Zhou Fang except to decline invitations to dinner. Tzu-ting's xenophobic remapping of the threat of Chinese invasion onto my house reframed the danger of takeover as one of proximity: this was no inversion or violation of guest-host relations, but rather its ultimate outcome – one not unlike Michael Lambek's examination of kinship as "a kind of theft or hoarding, of something kept to or for oneself, at the betrayal or expulsion of the other" (2011:2). Lambek looks to the story of Jacob and Esau to reflect on the ethical quandary of succession. One sibling's gain is experienced as another sibling's loss. Tzu-ting's warning intimated that Shengli would inherit "my" house. Had I too usurped his place? A mother had misdirected her love – both freely proffered *and* deceitfully won over, as Zhou Fang's posts would seem to suggest – toward a trickster instead of her own offspring.

From start to finish, my experience of ethnographic rapport and rupture coincided with the norms and stereotypes of cross-strait relations. When we got along, it was because we were

“close as a family.” And when we fell apart, well, were not family fights the most vicious? In the end, Zhou Fang enacted, intentionally or not, the popular, propagandistic representation of China as the loving and treacherously betrayed mother(land). Even the figure of the scammer recalls the trope of the Taiwanese scam caller (*zhapian jituan*).¹⁴ I had been emotionally and economically costly. As for Zhou Fang’s susceptibility to scams, “[p]eople who have compassion indeed won’t have that much vigilance,” she wrote (see Figure 2.4). It was as though we had been animators of a master-text performed for anyone who cared to watch: everyone we knew but no one in particular. The only comments and reactions to Zhou Fang’s posts visible to me were those left by people with whom we were mutually connected on WeChat; the app does not display the comments and reactions of accounts that one’s account has not first added as contacts. The scope of unaddressed recipients is thus hazy. Given that Zhou Fang did not delete me from her contacts until one or two months after the events related in this chapter, it is probable that she had intended them to be viewed by my father and me. At no point were we encouraged by mutual acquaintances to reconcile our differences. One regretful outcome is that my father, who in fact would be considered a “Mainlander”¹⁵ in Taiwan, has harbored openly hostile sentiments toward PRC nationals, co-religionists or not, ever since.

¹⁴ E.g., Martina, Michael and J.R. Wu, “China blames Taiwan criminals for surge in telephone scams,” *Reuters*, Apr. 21, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-telecoms-fraud/china-blames-taiwan-criminals-for-surge-in-telephone-scams-idUSKCN0XJ022>, Blanchard, Ben and Jess Macy Yu, “China jails 44 Taiwanese for fraud in case denounced by Taipei,” *Reuters*, Dec. 20, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-taiwan-crime/china-jails-44-taiwanese-for-fraud-in-case-denounced-by-taipei-idUSKBN1EF078>, and Chang, Lennon Y.C., “New ‘virtual kidnapping’ scam targeting Chinese students makes use of data shared online,” May 21, 2018, <https://theconversation.com/new-virtual-kidnapping-scam-targeting-chinese-students-makes-use-of-data-shared-online-96910>.

¹⁵ I.e., *waishengren*, or “person from an outside province,” as opposed to *benshengren*, or local Han Taiwanese. The *waishengren* are those who fled from China to Taiwan with Chiang Kai-shek after the Chinese Civil War.

“You’ll never make enough to buy your father’s house”

Who “really” hosted me, and to whom was I “really” beholden – Zhou Fang or Kang Jianxin? Zhou Fang’s comfortable Camellia Court apartment had in fact been purchased for her by Kang Jianxin; her parents lived in the much older apartment unit she did own. As caretaker but non-owner, she could not in fact negotiate directly with my father; Kang Jianxin alone had that prerogative. And if Zhou Fang was as wealthy as Fr. Lü insisted, that money too belonged ultimately to her husband, about whom Fr. Lü never had much to say. What little I learned about Kang Jianxin came from my father, who said he was affable, knowledgeable about the stock market, and a pleasant conversationalist.

Because Zhou Fang was not the legal owner of her apartment, she may not have as freely offered hospitality as she had claimed. This was Kang Jianxin’s property, and therefore any satisfactory entailment of reciprocity was due not to her from me but to Kang Jianxin from my father. What she *did* have, and what she *had* performed (e.g., home cooking, which Fr. Lü had asked about in our phone call, and the offer of a credit card), could be said to be a kind of charity more than hospitality. Perhaps she asked for nothing in return because the bulk of what she had given – a roof over my head – was that which she did not own. The remittances of reciprocity were never her due – the *hau* of the gift, in other words, would never return to her – in the first place. Under a normative Chinese participant framework of hospitality, she could not seek redress from either her husband or my father, and my message of complaint to her was, as well, misdirected. As I have stated, neither one of us was considered an agent with adequate means for negotiation at our disposal. Zhou Fang’s capacity as host was as Kang Jianxin’s animator or “sounding box” (Goffman 1981:226). But for the noisome interference of Fr. Lü – here the Goffmanian author of sorts – it appears that Kang Jianxin and my father, the two principals in

this participation framework, ended their negotiation civilly, and Kang Jianxin did eventually leave (after one final attempt to stay, by vacating his person but leaving behind his luggage).

In “lashing out” at Zhou Fang, I had acted as though I owned the resources I sought to deny her and her family. Fr. Lü reminded me that not only was I *not* a decision-maker (for as an unmarried woman I by default still belonged to my father’s household), but that I would never accumulate enough capital to become one. I had clearly failed to “understand social relations.” Prior to my impertinent role transgression, he was confident enough in his relationship with my father to mobilize the promise of my father’s resources. After all, as a still young but no longer youthful woman who must have been in need of a husband, I came with the desirable endowment of a single-family home in a “very Chinese” part of California and a pathway to permanent residency in the United States.

In July, I was invited to lunch by Anna, a former nun and now mother of two. She asked me to stay behind after her other guests left. As I suspected, she wanted to hear about what “really” happened between Zhou Fang and me. She grabbed a big jar of sunflower seeds and opened it. Then she paused, laughing apologetically. “*Chi gua kan xi* (‘eat melon, watch show’), right?” I asked lightly, thinking about the many reaction stickers on WeChat thus labeled, and recalling Yuan Li’s indignation at being edited into a repellent figure for the “melon-eating masses” (*chigua qunzhong*) (see Figure 2.1). “You know this phrase too?” she asked. “Hope you don’t mind, but – ” and we broke down in laughter. She said she was mortified because she had once left the comment “How happy the pair of you have it!” (*nimen liangkouzi zhen xingfu!*) under one of Zhou Fang’s photos of home-cooked dinners – with me. Anna had assumed that Zhou Fang was living with her husband. Despite the melodramatic tone of Zhou Fang’s later Good Samaritan posts, they were fairly circumspect, she said. She then admitted that Fr. Lü had

very highly and very convincingly recommended my father's house as a good home for her children while they attended school in the United States; didn't she want them to grow up speaking English? She said she had declined because her children were still too young. Needless to say, neither I nor my father knew about this offer. Anna and I agreed it was unfortunate that Fr. Lü and I were no longer on speaking terms. She asked if I would like her to send me home with gifts to deliver to him on her behalf, but I declined. "It's his calling to be a bridge," she said.

Transnational kinship and patriarchal ownership help build, and are built by, social relations in the field. What I might well have shelved away as "personal stuff" was seen to be equal parts diagnostic and symptomatic of broader social ills, from feminine fakery and the ubiquity of scam artists to *low-suzhi* outsiders, cross-strait treachery, and the nonobservance of social relations. This chapter has examined Catholic hospitality as a high-stakes framework of engagement in which participants emerge as either commensurated or contrasted: they become kin or they become strangers. I have laid out the stakes of entering into a participant framework that assigns to hosts and guests the social obligations of kinship or the social distance indexed by charity. I cannot claim to have impartially and objectively recounted the fracturing of rapport between my erstwhile host mother, myself, our families, and Fr. Lü. "In writing about the family," writes Lambek, "I too am stealing kinship insofar as I betray confidences. [...] This betrayal is doubled when the ethnography presented is about the intimacy of kinship itself" (2011:6). Among many parishioners, Zhou Fang was evidently an object of jealousy; I knew it was entertaining for some to watch her wealthy, serene, and pious self publicly implode. Unsympathetic but interested spectatorship from the interlocutors-turned-analysts Sichun, Molly, Tzu-ting, and even Anna and Marcella influenced how I came to understand what happened and why it mattered. By attending to how participants deploy geopolitical and Christian texts to

interpret and regiment the guest-host relationship, this chapter has also sought to problematize rapport as an ethnographic value by describing some of the rapidly escalating demands it can entail.

PART II

UNCROSSINGS: RESPONSES TO STATE AND SUPERNATURAL INTERFERENCE

Chapter 3

Housing God, losing ground: Protestant and Catholic chronotopic ideologies in urban China

The second half of this dissertation examines how mobility's urban challenges, for example the Catholic and Protestant experiences of urban renewal in Hangzhou (this chapter) and Catholic encounters with a Chinese "cult" in New York City (described in Chapter 4), are interpreted through contrasting chronotopes and social personae that reflect an uneasy relationship with rurality. Christians make sense of the relationship between time, space, and human agency in different ways. In this chapter, I examine how Protestant and Catholic ideologies of chronotopic partibility, or time-space-personhood fracture, shape Christian uptakes of the politics of demolition and development in China's prosperous coastal province of Zhejiang. Occupying a limited but flexible realm of toleration (see Chau 2019), "official," or state-sanctioned, Protestantism and Catholicism strain to fit within the urban development policies of Xi Jinping's New Era. The imposition of these policies – emblemized by the surveillable and futuristic smart city (see Noesselt 2020), which also happens to be visually secular – has resulted in Christian reconfigurations of time-space-personhood relations.

The chronotope is familiar to linguistic anthropologists as the time-space container of narrative events and characters (Silverstein 2005:6). Each chronotope comes with its own "image of man" (Bakhtin 1981:85) or representation of personhood, which influences how agency, a concept "pertain[ing] to our control over the *next* moment in time" (Morson 2010:93), is understood. More fundamentally, agency involves the ability to interpret the semiotic contexts of

interpersonal interaction (Agha 2007a:230). This interpretive faculty, in turn, shapes one's assessment of one's own agency. Both the "image of man" and its implications for agency are experienced within a participation framework (Agha 2007b), or social regimentation of all participants in a textual encounter (Goffman 1981, Goodwin 1999). But what happens when God is a participant?

According to the Christian tenet of divine omniscience, God (fore)knows everything that was, is, and will be. In the "hard" version of divine predetermination, human action is not dialogically negotiated, but monologically unfolded. If God already knows what you will do before you do it, do you truly will your will? One way to reconcile the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and free will is to place God outside of time altogether: if God is outside of phenomenal time, then the participatory space of an event is decoupled from its unfree unfolding. This workaround is named the "Boethian solution" after the sixth-century Roman philosopher Boethius.

The chronotope according to Bakhtin, however, is precisely the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (1981:84). Time cannot be severed from space. But if God exists outside of historical time, then the Bakhtinian chronotope, as an "intrinsically connected" time-space-personhood compound, is at odds with Christian cosmology. God, the omniscient hearer not only of the prayers of the faithful but of all communication, exceeds the bounded capacity of any time-space envelope. Although time and space are of course analytically detachable, discursive textuality cannot but bind them together (Agha 2007b).

In light of my juxtaposition of Protestant and Catholic ideologies of chronotopic partibility, it is instructive that the Eucharistic rite, with its diagrammatic and chiastic iconism, is

Silverstein's (2004) go-to example of dynamic figuration. God's triune nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is a basic condition of chronotopic partibility. It is because God exists beyond historical time – but also that Jesus existed in historical time – that the here and now of any Eucharistic rite can be dynamically refigured as a re-presentation of the original event.¹ The temporal flexibility of the “persons” of God who, despite their coeternity, have distinct relationships with humanly experienced time, makes possible the ideological decoupling of space from time, time from personhood. The Boethian solution is thus one of chronotopic fissure. Not surprisingly, it has attracted its fair share of dissenters for giving short shrift to God's personhood, arguably a property of greater religious heft than timelessness (see Zagzebski 2018). Such time-space-personhood fissure has consequences for how Christians in China understand God's agency in the turmoil of urban renovation.

This article examines how Hangzhou's Protestant young professionals and Catholic elderly respond to the chronotopic politics of urban renewal. The contrast between an enchanted, hyperritualistic, media-heavy Catholicism and an individualistic, personal, *sola scriptura* Protestantism has long been a cliché; rather than reify these truisms, as even Christian “natives” (e.g., Greeley 2000) are wont to do, I show how Protestants and Catholics take up ideologies of chronotopic partibility descended from but at odds with the Boethian solution. For the young Protestant modern, chronotopic partibility salvages the affective temporality of fellowship from the material vicissitudes of architectural space. In other words, the *chronos* of fellowship appears to be partitioned from the building – the *topos* – that houses it. The removal of rooftop crosses in the name of urban renovation has destabilized the correspondence between

¹ In “average modern” Catholic theology, sacramental representation is the idea that the “historical sacrifice of the cross ... [obtains] a new *ubi et nunc* (‘place’ and ‘time’) in the sacramental world which transcends the laws of space and time” (Kilmartin 1998:187).

the church as fellowship (*jiaohui*) and the church as architectural structure (*jiaotang*). The distinction between *jiaohui* and *jiaotang* organizes a Protestant style of time-space-personhood fractionation. Ultimately, it is a cautious valorization of urban renewal.

For the Catholic filiation subject, chronotopic partibility justifies remuneration for government seizure of church property. The distinction here is not between fellowship and facade, but between possession and obligation: that which belongs to God and that which belongs to Caesar. Parishioners acknowledge that urban renewal is a state prerogative; whether they desire or dislike it is irrelevant. What matters for them is the chronotopic division of ownership into state possession and divine obligation: even though church land by law belongs to the state, to God is owed his due. This demand regiments a time-space-personhood fractionation that sees in the economics of urban renewal the opportunity for moral exchange between God and Caesar. The distinctiveness of Protestant and Catholic ideologies of chronotopic partibility indicates that the bundling of time, space, and personhood in any situation is always a deeply ideological – if not theological – structure of relations.

Challenging churchscapes

As the story goes, a high-level Party official, “probably not Xi Jinping,” was once stunned to see, as he was being driven past the port city of Wenzhou, a landscape littered with red crosses perched atop a sea of spires. Offended by the sight of what ought to have been any other secular cityscape, this official uttered a disgruntled remark. Provincial officials at once put together an urban renovation campaign, “Three Rectifications, One Demolition” (*san gai yi chai*), hereafter TROD, to address the problem of the “over-crossed” cityscape.

“Imagine you’re a big Party official,” I was told by a Zhejiang University professor, “raised on Party principles and atheism. You’re very, very committed. Think about the kind of

country you are working to build. But instead, you see a bunch of crosses! And it's not just that, but they're big, they're red, they're lit up at night – have you seen them? They even flash on and off! That's *got* to be hard to endure, don't you think?"

From 2013 to 2016, under the TROD campaign, an unspecified number of crosses, churches, and other religious and nonreligious structures were removed or demolished. The given reasons were, invariably, structural instability, missing permits, and other banal building code violations. Although not specifically antireligious or anti-Christian in its wording, Christian sites and rooftop crosses were widely known to have been the main targets of the campaign (Cao 2017). According to an internal document obtained by the *New York Times*, “the priority is to remove crosses at religious activity sites on both sides of expressways, national highways and provincial highways.”²

What is known with more certainty is that Xia Baolong, then party secretary of Zhejiang Province, had visited Wenzhou in 2013 and had been displeased in particular by the sight of a towering hillside edifice topped, of course, by a large red cross. This was the brand-new Sanjiang Church, the 30 million RMB construction costs of which had been raised by local Christians. Xia demanded that Sanjiang's cross be removed. Thousands of Christians stood guard. But by late April 2014, the church lay in ruins. To many observers, this event heralded the return of government crackdown after a relatively unhampered period of Christian growth following the economic reforms of the 1980s. Indeed, Wenzhou had famously been dubbed – to the pride of some Christians and the distaste of others – the “Jerusalem of China” (Cao 2011) and Henan, the site of more recent anti-Christian activity, the “Galilee of China” (Liu 2014).

² Quoted in Ian Johnson, “Church-State Clash in China Coalesces around a Toppled Spire,” *The New York Times*, March 29, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/30/world/asia/church-state-clash-in-china-coalesces-around-a-toppled-spire.html>.

The TROD campaign targeted churches registered with the state-authorized Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Patriotic Catholic Association.³ Although TROD's later fadeaway was attributed to the unexpected intensity of Christian resistance and international media coverage, its iconoclastic flattening of the categories "Protestant"⁴ and "Catholic" did not, however, engender much cross-confessional solidarity.⁵ For Protestants, TROD accentuated the partibility of the material, concrete spatiality of the cross and chapel from the homelike qualities of Christian fellowship. After all, so-called underground churches are no less churches for want of an instantly recognizable place of worship. Such recognition, demanded by the aggressive qualia of the largeness and stereotypically Protestant redness of the cross, signifies the social emplacement of official churches. Understanding these structures as agents of Christianization (Chambon 2017) can help explain why they are perceived to be dangers to the sociophysical landscape. Not only do they exteriorize what ought to be one's private confession of faith, but they also monumentalize the economic prowess of local elites (Cao 2017). The TROD campaign was a response to the perceived encroachment of Christian affiliation into the secular public space of the built environment and, by extension, into state modernity. As another account

³ The Three-Self Patriotic Movement (est. 1954) and the Patriotic Catholic Association (est. 1957) are the representative organizations of state-authorized Protestant and Catholic churches in China. The three "selves" stand for self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation.

⁴ Elimination/unification of denominational groups is supported by the professedly postdenominational Three-Self Patriotic Movement (Weller and Wu 2017). The movement, however, is not free of denominational influence; many of its early leaders were prominent Anglicans (see Wickeri 2015).

⁵ The Zhejiang Christian Council and the Zhejiang branch of the Patriotic Catholic Association circulated open letters of protest regarding TROD in 2015 (Ying 2018:61-62), but locally any displays of dissent were separated along confessional lines.

(Talbert 2018) of the story goes, the visiting high-level official, this time Xi Jinping himself, was said to have asked, upon seeing the Wenzhou churchscape, “Is this China or heaven?”⁶

As a physical structure, the church is an object of mediation between confessional subjectivity and state supervision. In her monograph on the shared “currency” of saints among Copts and Muslims in Egypt, Angie Heo (2018) describes how church buildings, together with the Marian apparitions illuminating them, become the very media through which sectarian politics is calibrated. Muslim eyewitnesses are crucial to authenticating a Marian apparition regardless of whether or not they “see” the Virgin or believe that the apparition is nothing more than a laser show (2018:129). Like the Marian apparitions discussed by Heo, rooftop crosses in a non-Christian country index churches as minoritarian, and thus publicly vulnerable, sites of belonging. Although fleshless apparitions and material crosses belong to different orders of things, both direct attention to the imagined status of the physical structure of the church (2018:138). The rooftop apparitions point to the territorial presence of Coptic identitarianism; the rooftop crosses, chiastically, point to the spiritual infestation of a nonnative belief system – an infestation dire enough to have spilled over onto an entire landscape. As the document obtained by The New York Times shows, TROD’s target was not the church but the cross. But like the apparitions, these crosses were only ever found above churches.

First-tier anxieties

Three hundred fifty kilometers (220 miles) north of Wenzhou, TROD’s epicenter and Zhejiang’s southernmost prefectural city, lies the provincial capital of Hangzhou. TROD had spared Hangzhou’s Midtown Catholic Church, a modestly sized chapel built after the style of the

⁶ According to Yang (2018), this expression has been widely reported, although its speaker (sometimes Xi, sometimes Xia) varies by account. In Yang’s account (2018:9), Xia Baolong asks, “Is this land under the cross or under the Communist Party?”

Church of the Gesù in the heart of old downtown.⁷ Like other protected historical sites, it announced its sheltered status on multiple stone markers. Even the gnarled tree in the middle of the slab-paved courtyard was, I was informed, “hundreds of years old, immovable.” Nor were any parishioners concerned that Midtown, a Patriotic Catholic Association church, would suffer any physical modification. The far younger and taller Catholic church in the subdistrict of Linping, some 26 kilometers (16 miles) away, however, was not so fortunate; its three large crosses, along with those of three other Protestant churches throughout Hangzhou’s expanded metropolitan area, were swiftly removed during the wee hours of July 10, 2015, under police watch, after most Christians who had shown up to protest had returned home. For those who did not consider newly developed areas like Linping or Binjiang to “really be Hangzhou,” any church outside of Hangzhou’s protected historical districts was fair game. Although TROD’s stated goal was to “fully commence the transformation of old residential areas, old factories, and urban villages in the urban planning area and [to] demolish illegal buildings in violation of the laws and regulations pertaining to land management, urban and rural planning, etc., in the entire province,”⁸ the degree of this “transformation” or “remolding” (*gaizao*) was, in the opinion of many Christians, calculatedly vague.

As a precursor to Xi Jinping’s inauguration of a “New Era” (*xin shidai*) in 2017, TROD marked a turning point not only for mountainous Wenzhou but also for the boutique city of Hangzhou. In 2018, Midtown Catholic Church would have to come to terms with pending plans for the massive mall Westlake 66 – according to its developer the Hang Lung Group a “high-end

⁷ Mission churches around the world were modeled after the Church of the Gesù (see Bailey 1999), the mother church of the Jesuit order.

⁸ “Notice of Zhejiang Province People’s Government on the Province-Wide Launch of the Three-Year Program ‘Three Rectifications, One Demolition,’” March 3, 2013, http://www.zj.gov.cn/art/2013/3/13/art_13012_77021.html.

commercial complex, comprising a world-class shopping mall, five Grade A office towers and a luxury hotel” – that would eventually tower over it.⁹ Architecture firm Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF) lays out the New Era chronotope of streamlined cultural continuity, complete with the ecoconscious ethic of an urban workforce, as follows: “Situated between two Hangzhou landmarks – West Lake,¹⁰ a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the Grand Canal – Westlake 66 reinvigorates a deteriorated neighborhood with a new, green pedestrian link and office space suited to technology startups and young professionals.”¹¹

The old era of the “deteriorated neighborhood,” as KPF puts it, is to be “reinvigorated” and modernized. The New Era’s image of personhood is the young professional: the educated, urban, middle-class embodiment of “virtuous behavior and spiritual civilization” (Tomba 2009:611). The reorganization of neighborhoods and homes recruits middle-class subjects as self-governing, high-*suzhi* (high-quality) citizens,¹² in contrast to those needing to be governed: unruly “low-quality” rural migrants whose “visual[ly] pollut[ing]” illegal structures (in the words of a former Beijing mayor, quoted in Zhang [2001:211]) are obstacles to the “idealised vision of ... an ‘advanced society’ ... modelled on the achievements and experiences of the most developed countries in the West” (Xiang 2005:4).

Urban residents often justified demolition as an ordinary, inescapable fact of development. Anna, a former nun and now mother of two, explained it to me this way: “Sooner

⁹ Hang Lung Properties, “Westlake 66,” <http://www.hanglung.com/en-US/mainland-china-properties/hangzhou/westlake-66>. See this page for a digital rendering of the mall complex. For more images, see <https://www.kpf.com/projects/westlake-66>.

¹⁰ West Lake is Hangzhou’s most famous tourist attraction.

¹¹ KPF, “Westlake 66,” <https://www.kpf.com/projects/westlake-66>.

¹² In part because of their membership in official churches, both Protestant and Catholic informants openly championed *suzhi* politics. See Yuan (2021b) for a more critical approach to middle-class aspirations among underground Reformed Christians in Nanjing.

or later, all those messy old houses will have to go. They don't look good with the new buildings. Hangzhou counts as a first-tier city...it might not be a real first-tier city because there's Shanghai, but it just *is* a first-tier city.”¹³ Interspersed along major arteries and tucked inside alleyways, old walk-up apartment buildings (*loufang*) eked out their flimsy lifespans as owners waited impatiently for a government requisition notice and the compensation – either money for the expropriated home or, more desirably, the replacement of an old apartment with a brand-new one – that came with it. These relocated households (*chaiqianhu*), many of which became wealthy overnight, found themselves just as swiftly reviled as “eruption households” (*baofahu*, or nouveau riche) whose wealth had come as violently and suddenly as an explosion.

In the eyes of local officials, a church's structural integrity is an index of its civic and spiritual ability to transcend the embarrassing spectacle of unruly passions and political unrest. Correspondingly, the secular state imaginary of urban renewal considers a swanky new church's tacky, “hard to endure” cross symptomatic of a spiritual rudeness not unlike the coarseness of “eruption households” and “low-quality” *tuhao*, or rural rich (Ingebretson 2017). Yet by targeting the most recognizable emblem of Christianity, TROD counterproductively reinforced what a (Chinese) church looked like – typically a building of the Gothic style (Coomans 2014:126-29, Ying 2018:54), for many an index of Western colonialism.¹⁴ Consistent with their semicolonial pedigrees, many older churches like Midtown are preserved in what

¹³ China's unofficial city tier system is widely used in the media and in everyday discourse to rank a city's size and economic prospects (see Lin and Gaubatz 2015:214, fn. 2 and Li 2017:69, fn. 7). “First-tier cities” (*yixian chengshi*) refer to Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. What Anna is saying is that given Hangzhou's proximity to Shanghai, Hangzhou is unlikely to become an “official” first-tier city, as it would be presumptuous to equate Hangzhou with Shanghai.

¹⁴ Unregistered house churches, formerly the prime targets of government crackdown, were unaffected (Ying 2018:54) because they did not match the expected look of functionally religious buildings.

already were the ritzier and more “Western” parts of town; today, they are surrounded by shopping malls and luxury retailers.¹⁵

In May 2018, when Westlake 66’s development site was acquired by the Hang Lung Group, I was surprised to hear Luke, a thirty-something education professional from Shanghai, remark that he had “always said that there were lots of ghosts [*gui*] inside the chapel.” Luke and I cotaught an English class at Midtown Catholic Church, where I volunteered as an English teacher from April to June 2018, on Sunday afternoons. I was perplexed when students voted, on May 27, to discuss the topic of exorcism. (Prior topics included one’s hometown, recent vacations, and favorite films.) Molly, a twenty-four-year-old exam tutor from Wenzhou, chimed in excitedly: “Do you remember what I told you last year or the year before?” She was referring to a time she had WeChatted me about a possessed man convulsing and screaming obscenities during a Saturday Vigil Mass. He had to be physically removed. “Don’t you remember?! I was *there!*” It seemed to make sense to her now.

I mention this short-lived flurry of interest in ghosts because I was jarred by it. At the time, neither Luke nor I, nor anyone at Midtown, knew the name or scale of what would become – and what is still not yet, in 2021 – Westlake 66. Parishioners knew only that there would be a dazzling commercial complex to carry the “deteriorated neighborhood” into the New Era. But what they refused to leave behind – or so I initially thought – was a small plot of land adjoining the chapel. The city government had taken it by force, they claimed, without offering compensation. Now it belonged to the Hang Lung Group, which would soon clean up and brighten its surroundings.

¹⁵ Embeddedness in urban and residential environments is a distinguishing feature of the Chinese church, and it contrasts with the bucolic, less worldly settings preferred by Buddhist temples (Chambon 2017).

So why did it leave behind counter-modern memories of ghosts? What the English class students meant by “ghosts,” and what kind of ghosts exactly, they couldn’t quite say – just that they were definitely there, and there was a host of them. Is the ghost a chronotopic paradox – a type of presence out of place in the present, and yet which refuses, or is somehow unable, to depart from it? Not quite: the production of “history” in real-time events of interaction calibrates multiple chronotopes, even those as contrastive as spiritual immanence and scholarly historicity, to one another and to the interactional present (Wirtz 2016). The same is true of the production of modernity. Before returning to the dispossessed Midtowners, I examine how a small group of Hangzhou Protestants at Lian’an Church calibrated the ideology of chronotopic partibility to the developmentalist chronotope of the New Era.

Chrono-topic decoupling and the disenchanting cross

“Lian’an Church is the only entirely unreconstructed church left in this city,” church elders declared proudly. As Hangzhou’s Three-Self Patriotic Movement headquarters, Lian’an partakes in the state project of defining and directing acceptably “religious” activity.¹⁶ Although the Chinese state’s promotion of atheism is not equivalent to the Western understanding of secularization, the view that science is rational and religion is emotional is prevalent in both state ideology and everyday life (Huang and Hu 2019). Churches like Lian’an and Midtown are, as the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Patriotic Catholic Association would have it, monumental testaments to church-state harmony and cross-cultural interaction.¹⁷ How did Protestants at

¹⁶ See “Five-Year Planning Outline for Advancing the Sinification of Christianity (2018-2022) promulgated by the Chinese Christian Council and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement”; English translation at <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/outline-of-the-five-year-plan-for-promoting-the-sinification-of-christianity>.

¹⁷ Even so, the officially recognized historicity of select church buildings does not purify them of their politics, just as the strained space of negotiation between state law and Hui Islamic law in northwest China does not produce a “depoliticized” Islam (Erie 2016:7).

Lian'an articulate a politically sensitive Christian semiotics in the wake of TROD? Although TROD had ended well over a year before I settled in Hangzhou, its effects were still felt.

First Fruits, a small-group fellowship (*xiaozu juhui*) at Lian'an that met every Sunday after the 9:00 AM service, always kicked off with two to three praise and worship songs and a prayer led by the group leader. We would then take our seats in a circle and commiserate over the travails of everyday life: trouble with coworkers, work-life balance, nagging parents, and health concerns. All ten to fifteen of the regular "fellow-fruits" (*guozimen*) were young professionals in their twenties and thirties. We then would view an episode of an Old Testament video series produced by an overseas Chinese ministry¹⁸ and, textbooks in hand, review its content. After lively discussion, we would conclude by sharing things we promised to work on or were, in retrospect, grateful for. Finally, we would break for a group lunch in the same room.

On December 17, 2017, the video series introduced us to the story of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings): although God did not permit David to build it, it would be built by his family nonetheless; God had made many preparations for it, including transporting the Ark of the Covenant; and the Temple was to be splendid. The takeaway was that, although the Temple's magnificence was directed toward the honor of God, what mattered most was one's sincerity (*chengxin*).

Minglei was the first to speak. "The Temple really couldn't have been built without God," he said, "what with all the complicated preparations that we read about, all the cubits and cedar and olive and cherubim and gold...and for all that, it was eventually destroyed anyway. Actually, it's similar to the removal of crosses. God wants His Temple to be magnificent, doesn't he? That way it can attract more people. Like those baroque and Gothic churches – they look so

¹⁸ 加拿大福音證主協會, Christian Communications (Canada).

lavish, but under present circumstances they'd defy building codes. Which means that what really matters is what's within our hearts.”

Ruiqi chimed in with an anecdote she had once heard, about a small town elsewhere in China, where some time ago, a very grand church was built. Soon afterward, an even grander Catholic church was built right in the same area. What then? Everybody wanted to spend Christmas at the most Christmassy place in town, and now there were two of them.

Xiao Li took up the topic of grand churches and reminisced about how greatly they had impressed her when she visited Europe. But after seeing church after church after church, she contracted aesthetic fatigue (*shenmei pilao*). Many in the room murmured in understanding.

Already there was a palpable tension between the weight of an exterior that lavishly and worshipfully conveyed the glory of God and the primacy of interiority. When it was my turn, I mentioned this tension. As a would-be fruit, I was eager to convey a passing knowledge of basic Christian themes. I decided to talk about how the human body was, elsewhere in the Bible, a temple that Christians were to maintain with dignity, and that while we shouldn't care too much about appearances, weren't we also supposed to dress nicely when at church? What ought we to do? Xiao Li, herself very smartly attired and very beautiful, quipped that crosses had become nothing more than fashion accessories, and that people indeed attired themselves becomingly for the sake of showing off.

To my relief, other fellow-fruits snatched up the body-as-temple theme. Lang Ge, the oldest fellow-fruit in attendance, and who had been nodding off while others were speaking, shared his thoughts: “Some people are more attractive than others. It doesn't say anything about them – their human worth, that is to say – but if you're good-looking, you get points [*jia fen*, i.e., you're rated more highly]. It's the same with churches. They don't *have* to look nice, but what's

the harm? Here, any district government [building] is far more luxurious than any church. When I was remodeling my house, it felt so cold and didn't have any human warmth [*renqingwei'r*]. Now, of course, it's different – we've moved in. But before, it was just very unsettling because I'd open the door and there'd be no human warmth at all.” “It was just this way with those grand churches [*jiaotang*] in Europe,” added Zhao Ge, Ruiqi's husband and the small-group leader. “What matters,” said Lang Ge emphatically, “is the fellowship taking place right now, the way we talk like family. This is why I come.” Xiao Li said, “That's why it's a *jiaohui*, not a *jiaotang*.”

Jiaohui (church [association]) and *jiaotang* (church [hall]) can be used synonymously to denote a church. As Xiao Li certainly knew, *jiaotang* is used comfortably by Catholics, while Protestants much prefer the associational flavor of fellowship evoked by *jiaohui*. Most churches have the word *tang* in their formal names (e.g., *Jidujiao*¹⁹ *Lian'an Tang*, or Lian'an [Christian] Church; *Zhongcheng Tianzhutang*, or Midtown Catholic Church). Only when identifying a specific church by name, or when talking about a church as an architectural shell, however, do Protestants use *jiaotang*. In distinguishing a *jiaotang* from a *jiaohui*, they link *hui*²⁰ to time and *tang* to space, but not to the exclusion of space from one and time from the other. *Jiaohui* is widely understood by all Christians to be the church as an active community, housed or unhoused.

A chronotopic ideology explains and validates how time, space, and personhood are connected or divided. Just as a language ideology regiments persona-register relations, so too a

¹⁹ The descriptor “Christian” (*jidujiao*) is tacked on to Lian'an Church to modify *tang* ‘hall’; cf., e.g., a dining hall (*shitang*), an ancestral temple (*citang*).

²⁰ The most basic meaning of *hui* is ‘to meet (together)’. It also frequently denotes a moment in time, e.g., *yi hui('r)* ‘a (short) moment’.

chronotopic ideology regulates time-space-personhood configurations. For Xiao Li, the *chronos* of the church during the course of fellowship (the *jiaohui*) is separated from the topos of the fifth-story classroom in which we sat, in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement office building next to the chapel (the *jiaotang*). Under the First Fruits' chronotopic ideology, the *jiaohui* is not bound to the ritualized space of a chapel. It is effervescent and mobile (as mobile as the fellow-fruits themselves), whereas architectural shells are rigid and hollow. Remarkably, the topos of even the Temple – the original *jiaotang* – is refilled with the recent experience of TROD: Minglei finds the destruction of the Temple (2 Kings 25) “similar to the removal of crosses” rather than the other way around, as might be expected when drawing a lesson from the Bible. (Moreover, crosses slated for removal were usually those erected in recent memory and therefore “without history” – no revered missionary lineage, no government recognition.) Time, space, and personhood are thus subject to flexible chrono-topic mixing and matching such that neither chronological nor indexical correspondence can be assumed: public-facing splendor points not to spiritual flourishing, but rather conceals the impoverished reality of “what’s within our hearts.”²¹

My point is not that *jiaohui* is to time as *jiaotang* is to space, but that the First Fruits' way of dividing time and space is organized by their distinction between *jiaohui* and *jiaotang*. (The interior space of the heart is not any less a topos with its own palpable qualities: “like family,”

²¹ Feng Zhili, former chairman of the Zhejiang Provincial Ethnic and Religious Affairs Committee (ERAC), made the case that the prominence of crosses on churches had no Biblical basis, that the cross was “merely an external manifestation,” and that faith ought to be internalized and purified so as to be respectful of non-Christians' feelings. See Zhejiang ERAC, “Director Feng Zhili goes to Ningbo to investigate the handling of illegal religious buildings” (2015), accessed July 1, 2019, <http://www.zjsmzw.gov.cn/Public/NewsInfo.aspx?type=10&id=e51eee61-16c2-4b2a-95b0-1237e1116b3b> (as of November 2019, this link appears to be defunct). See also Ying (2018:54).

having *renqingwei'r*.) Instead of criticizing TROD, which from personal conversation I know he opposes, Minglei points out that the current building code, however discriminatorily enforced, clarifies the faith and human feeling that sustain the *jiaohui* over time. Regardless of how God is understood to transcend time and space, human uptakes of the divine are in time and therefore open to deniability. And no matter how instantly recognizable, the cross as a visual text is but faulty infrastructure for the Christian experience (cf. Barker and Nakassis 2020). Under the First Fruits' TROD-compatible chronotopic ideology of partibility, the "image of man," or the bundle of visual and characterological traits that indexes one's social persona, is unreliable: not even the cross can make a church out of a building or a Christian out of a human body.

Ghosts inside the house of God: *renqing*, *renqingwei'r*, and chronotopic partibility

For the First Fruits, "the way we talk like family," as Lang Ge puts it, contrasts not only with the architectural shell of the church, but also with Old Testament prosody. Minglei paraphrases 1 Kings 6 by picking at its ceremonial materiality: "all the cubits and cedar and olive and cherubim and gold." Anxieties over material externalities such as sartorial and architectural adornments are related to anxieties over "fleshly" language (Keane 2002), and new uptakes of old qualities change how their objects are semiotically constructed (Gal 2017). Observing that not all marked by the cross, and not even the cross itself, was *of* the cross, the fellow-fruits' contributions after Minglei acknowledge and critique the value of consumptive material splendor: competitive building of churches, European cathedrals, dressing up for church, crosses as accessories, bonus points for attractiveness, fancy government buildings, and home improvement.

Lang Ge's disavowal of literary ornamentation reflects the political disturbance of flashy church structures in recent memory. The First Fruits' Christianized interpretation of TROD

would seem to confirm the stereotyped Protestant propensity toward the spiritual and individual over the material and collective. In fact, Protestant Christianity’s competitive advantage over rival religions in China has been attributed to its resemblance to the purificatory politics of the campaign against the “Four Olds” (old ideas, old culture, old habits, old customs) and the iconoclasm of the Cultural Revolution (Kao 2020) – of which TROD might seem to be a stunted, late-sprung offshoot. Thus did the Maoist state unintentionally remove long-standing sociocultural barriers to Christian conversion, most notably powerful lineage organizations (Sun 2017). The aim to emancipate society from the material and “superstitious” things of bourgeois and feudal thought-worlds had a familiar precedent in the modernizing, liberatory ethics of Protestant Christianity (Kao 2020).

The project of urban renovation, expressed in KPF’s Westlake 66 blurb, borrows a similar emancipatory ethics of cleaning up a “deteriorated neighborhood.” The cramped, cluttered appearance of old alleyways – an index of a coarse, inelegant age – is out of place in a first-tier city. Designed to “[minimize] the shadow impact on the surrounding buildings” and to “maximize the amount of daylight into each building while reducing the overall energy consumption,”²² Westlake 66 promises to lighten up the landscape. Like the 1960s Eastern Bloc Socialist Modern aesthetic, it too adopts the qualisigns of lightness and cleanliness, not only with “lightweight furnishings, light colors, and the bright light of the sun flooding in through windows liberated of bulky curtains” (Fehérváry 2013:87) but also with “cleaner” energy.

I now return to the aforementioned ghosts of Midtown Catholic Church and the land expropriation controversy that stirred them. On May 20, 2018, two years after the long shadow

²² KPF, “Westlake 66,” <https://www.kpf.com/projects/westlake-66>.

of TROD seemed to have at last slinked away, an unexpected message appeared in a Midtown chatgroup on WeChat:

Emergency prayer sign-up: Brothers and sisters, the 400 square meters of church property [*jiaochan*] on the west side of Midtown Catholic Church has already been put up for public auction. As soon as a deal has been reached on the 28th, there will no chance of getting it back.

[Our] church is our home [or family, *jia*], all of us have the duty of offering up prayers. Earnest prayer is our means of victory. May the Lord begin the work, still the waves, and save our family estate [*jiaye*]!

Let us sons and daughters of Christ, we who love God and Church, together sign up and offer prayers! There are three time slots per day for Adoration and fervent prayer!

Morning 7:30-8:30
Afternoon 2:30-3:30
Evening 7:30-8:30

Please follow this sign-up format: Full name + time, for example: Zhang Li – afternoon

Prayer content: Rosary + Way of the Cross + Chaplet of Divine Mercy

Three days later, all parishioners were informed of a public pray-in at Midtown:

Tomorrow [May 24] afternoon, the head of the relevant government department is coming to the Hangzhou church specifically to examine the matter related to the plot of land on the west side of the church. On this occasion [we] ask all families to come join in public prayer. Those who can't participate, please appropriately and eagerly offer up your prayers, that God Almighty grant sufficient wisdom and judiciousness. What is Caesar's be unto Caesar, what is God's unto God!! This we ask in Jesus's name. Amen.

Around 100 people showed up, most of them elderly parishioners who lived nearby. Twenty parish representatives accompanied the city inspectors during their visit. Photos were taken and transmitted via WeChat on the spot, along with urgent prayer requests. Variations of the above two messages were relayed over and over again. Midtown was informed that the relevant

government boards would convene and submit a proposal to the Hangzhou Party Committee within two days. Therese Zhou Fang, my former host mother and an active parish representative, was not optimistic. “We must now come up with another plan. Of course prayer is important, but a united effort is also important,” she wrote to one of the chatgroups on the night of May 25.

The plot of land in question (see Figure 3.1) – roughly the size of a basketball court, but in later messages more than tripled from 400 to 1,500 square meters, to include an additional plot formerly occupied by a seminary – was located behind the chapel and accessible from a path, often used for parking, between the church and a two-story office building.

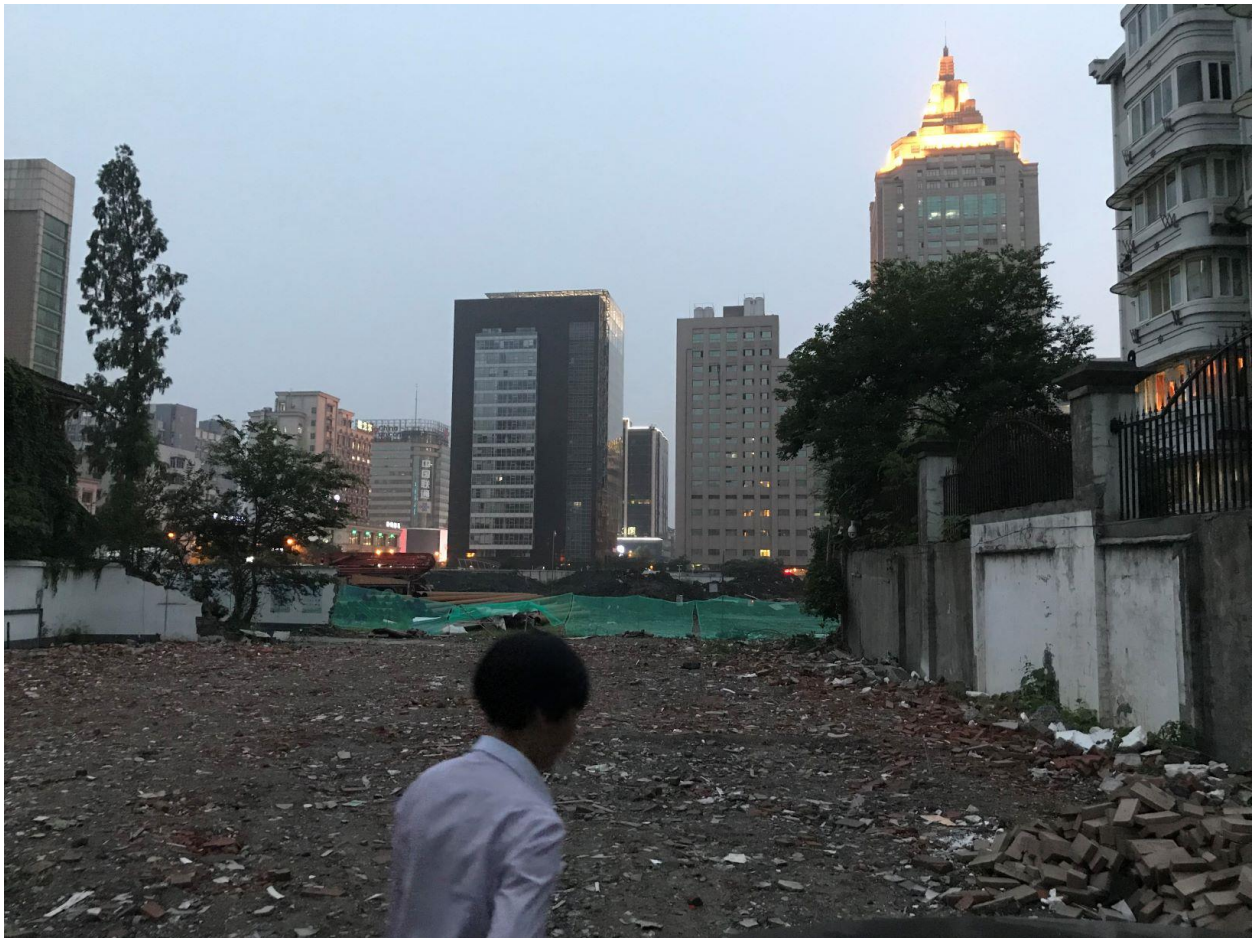


Figure 3.1. Midtown Catholic Church’s contested plot of land. Photo taken by the author, May 2018.

During this time, I frequently heard Midtowners describe the church and its territory as “our home,” “our house,” or “our family” (*women jia*); the refrain “The *jiaotang* is our house” (*jiaotang jiushi women de jia*) was repeatedly intoned. I could not help but remember how Lang Ge had invoked a priceless “human touch” (*renqingwei’r*, literally, flavor of human relationality, scent of sympathy) against the brute quantifiability (cubits, attractiveness points) of material surfaces. *Renqingwei’r* is the substance exuded by *renqing* (human feeling), the moral circulation of sentiment mediated by the exchange of gifts and favors (Kipnis 1996, Chu 2010:252-256), that is detectible by the senses. It eludes, therefore, un- and under-lived-in spaces, whether lavish and immaculate or decrepit and deserted. On the one hand, a home exists by virtue of it tasting like human relationality; on the other hand, it suggests, or is haunted by, prior claims of belonging (Feuchtwang 2004:7), long devoid of liveliness. For what *renqingwei’r* did a nearly forgotten parcel of undeveloped land behind the chapel hold for Midtown’s parishioners, until the city took it away?

“As redevelopment unfolded,” writes Julie Chu about a once-bustling Fuzhou neighborhood, “one of the intensifying challenges for residents was to hold their ground amid the dissipation of *renqi* – the unique ‘human atmosphere’ that made a place familiar and habitable” (2014:361). *Renqi* connotes the buzzing vitality of a popular area or community. A teeming neighborhood has *renqi*, a cozy home has *renqingwei’r*. Little wonder, then, that Lang Ge had turned to a personal anecdote about his newly renovated but yet unoccupied home’s eerie absence of it, and Zhao Ge had recognized this same absence in “those grand churches [*jiaotang*] in Europe.” The lack of village-like neighborliness contributes to the spatial anxiety peculiar to urbanized areas, of which ghosts – in Chinese popular religion the souls of those without descendants to worship them – are materialized forms (Wu 2015). The ghostlike “floating”

population of rural migrants, too, personifies the threat that landlessness and mobility pose to rootedness (Zhang 2001).

Considering, as well, the penchant of ghosts for manifesting as symptoms of and responses to dislocation and the absence of moral obligation (see Ong 1988), memories of chapel ghosts would appear to have been stirred by the division and confiscation of Midtown's "family estate" (*jiaye*). Like the oppressive, inalienable possessions that Socialist Modern sought to scrub away from modernity (Fehérváry 2013:87), such religious patrimony – and parishioners' obstinate attachment to it – was hopelessly outdated in an updated, renovated cityscape. The elderly parishioners who came daily to stand guard and pray personified the old age, economic idleness, and deterioration that urban renewal sought to eradicate. (Young adults were, they themselves complained, trapped at their workplaces.) When the seniors kept vigil, it was noted with bemused bitterness that those who accompanied them all through the night were none other than the dozen or so black-shirted policemen. These men occupied a conference room in the office building next to the chapel.

Frail but emotive, Midtown's seniors embodied the other pole of "floating" mobility: aged local stuckness. On the one hand, there was the ghostly danger of displacement. On the other hand, there was the stubbornly retrograde refusal to leave. Older Midtowners cleaved to a spatiotemporally fused patrimony tied to the filiational ecclesiology and ethnicization of Chinese Catholic identity (see Lozada 2001). By "filiational ecclesiology," I mean a church's self-structuring as a social group organized by generational continuity, geographic provenance, and family membership (see Harrison 2011, Li 2018). As a structure of time-space-personhood relations, this ecclesiology appears to be antithetical to chronotopic partibility. The Midtowners thus seem "ethnic" in comparison to the Protestants at Lian'an. Many of the First Fruits, for

example, are the sole baptized individuals in their families. This is a common trait among Chinese Protestants, who as a category correspond to no specific class, region, or clan (Chambon 2020).

As Midtown was protesting territorial expropriation, Luke's timely recollection of ghosts – socially marginal strangers without families (Weller 1987) – became evocative of the threat of chronotopic partition. Perhaps these ghosts, like the Marian apparitions at Zaytun and Warraq (see Heo 2018), shape minoritarian imaginaries of territorial loss and belonging. Nor are ghosts excluded from the moral circuitry of *renqing*; they are in popular religious imagination the pitiable beggars of the spirit world (Chu 2010, Feuchtwang 2010). Whereas the First Fruits had discarded physical quantifiability (again, cubits and attractiveness points) in favor of immaterial *renqingwei'r*, the Midtowners held the quantifiability of church property – its size and market value – inseparable from the *renqing* owed by the Hangzhou city government. God, too, is well within the same participation framework of *renqing*, recruitable by collective, on-site public prayer (see the May 20 WeChat message) directly or through intercession to intervene in the here and now. One parishioner summed up the situation like this:

Your house [jia], it's got a plot of land. I get ten or so hired thugs, all in black, and go to your house, encircle that land, and build a wall [to section it off]. These guys are at your house, taking turns standing guard. Then, at the same time, [I] put up your [family's] plot of land for auction. In any case, your Father has already spoken. [Of the] Ten Commandments, one of them is Thou Shalt Not Kill. You must obey. I get to do whatever I want. Who's your Father anyway? [Even if] I know him, I pretend I don't, [because] all I want is the money I can get from the sale.

This antiparable sardonically adopts the aggressor's point of view. The violence of the city police-*qua*-organized crime mob – “hired thugs, all in black” (*chuan heiyifu de dashou*) – caustically subverts urban renovation's spectacle of economic modernity (see Cao 2017:36). It

highlights a condition of chronotopic partibility that the First Fruits, in subsuming the destruction of Solomon's Temple under TROD, had taken for granted: the moral incommensurability of a rival chronotope's claim over the same referent (e.g., a church building or property). In this clash between urban renewal and "home"-ownership, dueling chronotopes, each informing an official worldview, objectify and anathematize one another (see Agha 2007b:322). Chronotopic contrasts do not always lead to violence. But when they do, chronotopic partibility may emerge, as it did among the First Fruits, as a way of making sense of contrast.

The Boethian solution to incompatibilism, or the incompatibility of divine foreknowledge and free will, is obliquely related to the problem of violence. Its challenge is to show that God does not cause human evil – human *violence* – despite knowing that it will happen. Just as incompatibilism motivated a chronotopic reorganization of God's place in human affairs and the carving out of secular history from divine history (see Elliot 2015:63-65), so too has the incompatibility between visually noisome (or deteriorated) Christian spaces and the smart sleekness of the New Era motivated the First Fruits to salvage and sunder the spiritual substance of phenomenal time (the *renqingwei'r* of a home, "the fellowship...right now") from the discardable matter of physical space ("it's a *jiaohui*, not a *jiaotang*"). Despite forcibly dividing, developing, and repopulating (or depopulating) illegal structures and shabby neighborhoods, urban renovation projects like TROD and Westlake 66 justify the violence of demolition and expropriation not as collateral damage, but as positive ideology (see Sargeson 2013:1075).

“What is Caesar's be unto Caesar, what is God's unto God!!”

To nobody's surprise but everybody's dismay, city inspectors determined that Midtown Catholic Church was not the rightful claimant of the land-use rights. On Sunday, May 27, a group of parishioners unfurled a banner that read: “Implement and execute the spirit of the

National Regulations on Religious Affairs. The occupation of religious property is forbidden!”²³

Amid talk of law and lawyers, police arrived and a brawl ensued. Clips of the confrontation were shared on WeChat. One of the older women, Therese Zhou Fang’s mother, fainted; this became the most remembered incident of the confrontation, which died down shortly after an ambulance arrived. Nobody could talk about anything else during the English class that Luke and I taught that afternoon. After class ended, I chatted with a young man outside, one of the thirty to forty people still milling about in the courtyard. “During the Cultural Revolution, they built an elementary school on that plot of land,” he said, “but the school’s been shut down long ago. They’re saying the land belongs to the school and not the *jiaotang*, but the school doesn’t exist anymore.”

Parishioners claimed that the Municipal Tax Bureau had, in 1951, listed Midtown Catholic Church as responsible for the plot. It was then misattributed twice, once in 1958 owing to circumstances related to the Great Leap Forward, and again in 1991 by the Hangzhou City Housing Authority. Midtown argued that the Religious Affairs Bureau and the Housing Authority *had*, in 1992, restored its land-use rights. The following scale drawing (Figure 3.2), circulated on WeChat, was provided as proof of the 1992 corrections. The diagonal red lines mark where a seminary or monastery (634.02 square meters), a minor seminary (185.40 square meters), and a parish school (241.80 square meters) once stood. Before Yan’an Middle School there was Tingyun Middle School, a parish school named after Yang Tingyun (1557-1627), the late Ming scholar-official convert who acquired the land on which Midtown Catholic Church was built.

²³ “贯彻执行《国家宗教事务条例》精神。严禁侵占宗教财产!”

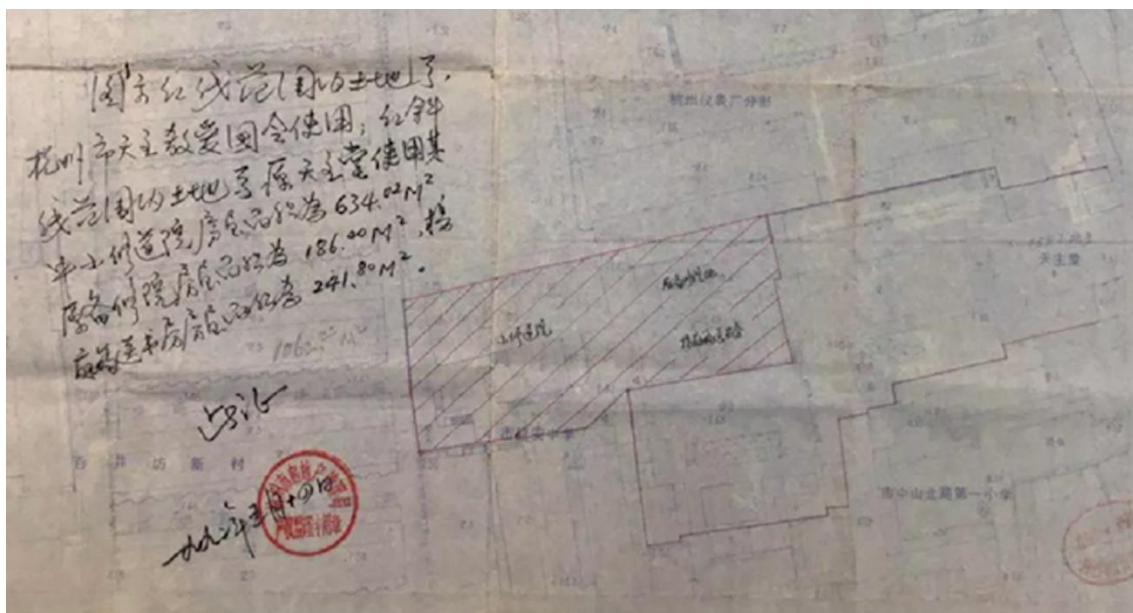


Figure 3.2. A scale drawing shared as proof of Midtown’s historic land-use rights.

It seemed to parishioners that the city government was, like many a greedy local government (see Lee 2007:260), illegally upholding the former misattribution. This was a small but valuable plot connected to a much larger tract right in the heart of the old city. Just as decaying infrastructures elsewhere in China have become spaces of encounter between a spectral state, land developers, and resistant citizens (Chu 2014:352), here too a fallow plot of land – a visual glitch in a sparkling commercial district – became fertile ground for contestation.

What happened in 1958? The land was “dedicated” to the nation and handed over to Yan’an Middle School. But, parishioners argued, this was no true transfer of property rights; in 1984, the Religious Affairs Bureau had said as much concerning all Cultural Revolution-era “dedications.” The slippage between the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution was lost on many; I was informed of an elementary (not middle) school during the Cultural Revolution (not Great Leap Forward) by most interlocutors. No matter what “really” happened, the main complication, I was told, was that the “elementary school” no longer existed.

Yan'an Middle School had long since been absorbed by Fengqi Middle School (reportedly attended by Alibaba founder Jack Ma), which was itself closed in 2012. The entire expanse (in red, Figure 3.2) was to be auctioned off to developers.

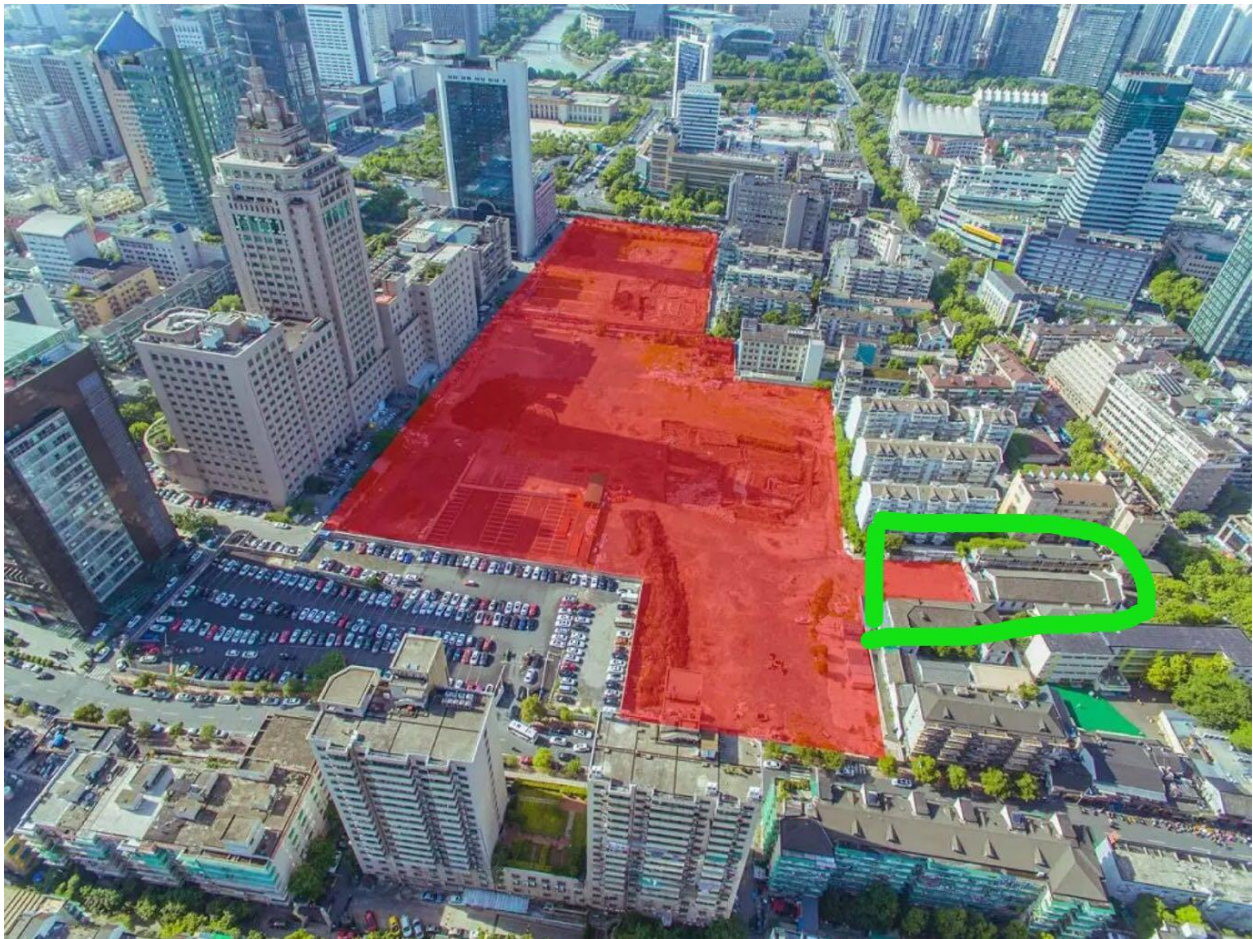


Figure 3.3. Image shared in Midtown WeChat groups in May 2018. The area circled in green is Midtown Catholic Church, including the parcel of land in contention.

Parishioners took the lead in protesting. “I’m really angry at Father Huang,” said Marcella, a jobseeker in her thirties from a village north of Hangzhou. “I don’t even want to look at him. He’s telling us to stop protesting. He’s negotiating with the city government, of course! Haven’t you noticed that whenever we’re out there protesting, the priests never join? It’s only ever us *jiaoyou*, and a few nuns, but never the priests.”

Independent of sacerdotal leadership, elderly parishioners showed up at Midtown each day to pray, often for hours. Under a filiational ecclesiology, their age indexed the depth of their geographically and genealogically rooted personhood. Under Westlake 66's developmentalist chronotope, however, it reflected the immobility and nonproductivity of a "deteriorated neighborhood." Recall that each chronotope, in the Bakhtinian sense of a genre-specific narrative structure, proffers its own representation of personhood and, by extension, concept of agency and mode of participatory access (Agha 2007b:321, Morson 2010:93). Many parishioners critically compared Midtown's middle-aged (but fresh-faced) priests, none of whom was from Hangzhou, to the pious local elderly. (Fr. Huang was from Zhejiang, but he hailed from a county much closer to the Anhui border than to Hangzhou.)

After many conversations with Marcella, I finally realized that what was unacceptable to everyone was not so much that the land had been seized – it was unused anyway, and there was little that could be done to avert its seizure – but that Midtown was not offered even a courtesy pittance. "People may have misinterpreted the old documents," she admitted. "There was that school [Yan'an], but you can't ask them to verify anything because they're not here anymore. It's not about *needing* to have that piece of land, you understand? The government wants it, that's normal. But they didn't compensate us, not even a little. It's the right thing to do [*shì yinggāide*]. Do you know how much it's worth? The priests didn't even try asking!"

This was similar to a *chaiqian* problem, and standard *chaiqian* procedures – think of the overnight wealth of "eruption households" – involved remuneration. Had the parish priests been colluding with the government?²⁴ According to Marcella, the city government ought to have

²⁴ A few parishioners did defend the priests, pointing out that their interference risked causing more trouble. Midtown was also home to an elderly, seldom seen bishop (who died in 2021), but he was distrusted by parishioners for reasons beyond the scope of this chapter.

acknowledged that Midtown had a historical claim to the land. Even though Yan'an was no longer around to authenticate Midtown's 1958 "dedication," was not a little *renqing* in return right and just? Parishioners were outraged that they were treated no better than outsiders and "floaters" when they were by filiation the rightful, original urban residents. The antiparable quoted above suggests as much: "Who's your Father anyway?" asks the aggressor. "[Even if] I know him, I pretend I don't, [because] all I want is the money I can get from the sale." In the absence of *renqing*, the difference between lawful requisition and criminal seizure (by "hired thugs") vanishes. The citation of the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" ironically makes a case for justifiable homicide.

The seizure was swift. On Sunday, May 27, I lingered at Midtown for two hours after my English class with Luke. I chatted with the young man who told me about the "elementary school" during the Cultural Revolution. That very night, under the watchful eyes of the police, the open gateway to the plot was walled in. The land vanished from sight. What happened there, as an onlooker remarked on WeChat the next day, was "the birth of the most expensive commercial property in Hangzhou!" With it, the Midtowners' filiational chronotope was forcibly recalibrated to the accelerated, agonistic temporality of the urban real estate market.

The sale was swifter. On Monday, May 28, news broke that the small plot of land claimed by Midtown Catholic Church, along with the much larger adjoining portion totaling 67.24 *mu*, or 44,827 square meters (about eight football fields), became, at 107.3 *yi* (1 *yi* = 100 million) RMB (1.57 billion USD), the most expensive commercial real estate ever sold in Hangzhou to date.²⁵ This meant that at least 5 million RMB (730,000 USD) belonged to

²⁵ News articles were shared on WeChat, e.g., Pang Jintao, "Hong Kong Real Estate Giant Hang Lung Buys Core Hangzhou Commercial Tract for 10.7 Billion after 7-Hour Auction," *Pengpai Xinwen*, May 28, 2018, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2157955; and Yin

Midtown, argued a nun on WeChat. Others placed the estimate as high as 80 million RMB (11.6 million USD), and still others from 1.64 to 3.58 yi RMB (23.8-52 million USD). Rising property values added insult to injury. A few parishioners floated the idea of hiring lawyers, but quickly scrapped it, noting that “it’s not like lawyers dare to face off with the government, [so] hiring a lawyer is useless.” “The legal system is the last buttress of a civilized society,” another added pointedly. Others maintained that church property wasn’t something that could be measured by money.

The Midtowners’ distinction between what is Caesar’s and what is God’s (see Matt. 22:21 and the pray-in announcement on WeChat) organizes their division between time, mediated by inalienable patrimony, and space, mediated by alienable property. They know that what is Caesar’s is the land itself; by law it belongs to the state (see Zhang 2002).²⁶ This division recalls the overlapping layers of the heavenly/earthly contrast. Chronotopic partibility is here expressed in the exchangeability of land and *renqing*. This exchangeability is quite unlike the First Fruits’ sundering of *renqingwei’r*, a quality of phenomenal time, from the physical structure of a church or house. I do not mean that *renqing* is placeless or immaterial; it very well is not, and such objects as transnational loans and remittances mediate *renqing* across time and space (Chu 2010:232-38). To criticize the Midtowners for desiring financial compensation more than the land itself – that is, to acquiesce to chronotopic partibility after marshaling archival maps and proclaiming that “the *jiaotang* is our house” – would be to assume a bourgeois division between morality and economics (Kipnis 1996, Chu 2010). Here, topoi are alienable even from a

Mengyi, “10.7 Billion Yuan! The Prize Tract of Baijingfang Falls to Hang Lung,” *Qianjiang Evening News*, May 29, 2018, http://qjwb.zjol.com.cn/html/2018-05/29/content_3658982.htm.

²⁶ That it lay vacant for so many years betrayed, as several interlocutors surmised, Midtown’s historical but less than legal claim to it.

filiational ecclesiology that bundles together time (generational continuity), space (geographic provenance), and personhood (clan membership), provided that sufficient *renqing* is shown.

Sanitized neither from the moral-sentimental circuit of *renqing* nor from the filial representation of personhood, God's place in phenomenal spacetime is open to uptake and therefore deniable: "I get to do whatever I want," announces the antiparable's aggressor, exulting in human freedom. "Who's your Father anyway?" God, a participant embroiled in human spacetime, is here subject to the vagaries of human freedom. The First Fruits and the Midtowners attempt to solve this indignity by drawing their own boundaries between time and space, defining the qualities they deem appropriate to each category and negotiating, in Boethian fashion, God's alignment(s) with those categories. The First Fruits make a moral distinction between the event-time of fellowship and the venue of fellowship. The Midtowners concede the real property that is presently Caesar's by demanding in its place the *renqing* or human feeling, mediated by money, that is God's in perpetuity. What makes possible moral exchange between God and Caesar is in fact the condition of their separation – the presumption of an original chronotopic partitioning.²⁷

Conclusion

I have shown how chronotopic partibility is a Christian response to the arbitrary yet inexorable rhythm of top-down urban redevelopment in Hangzhou. Spatial and temporal qualities associated with "home," the frequent site of expropriation and transformation, emerge as detachable media with which to negotiate the violent politics of urban renewal (see Sargeson 2013). What these qualities are, and how God interfaces with human spacetime, the First Fruits

²⁷ Not only of time and space, but also of humankind from God after the original sin of Adam and Eve (Gen. 3). Cf. the *felix culpa* principle, which holds that original sin is a necessary, "happy" split because it makes possible reunion with God (see Stuart 1986; Otto 2009).

at Lian'an and the parish community of Midtown differently describe. The way these qualities are talked about implicates speakers in specific moral-political commitments (Gal 2013).

For the First Fruits, *renqingwei'r* organizes homely qualities by separating the perceivable (e.g., architectural grandeur) from the palpable (e.g., coldness, warmth) inside a chapel or house. I was often asked if empty pews were the norm in American churches because “that’s how foreign churches are: big and beautiful but cold and bare [*leng leng qing qing*].” As a quality of human sociality, *renqingwei'r* is detachable to the extent that its producers (sociable individuals) are thought to be disentangleable from the spaces they frequent. The First Fruits plainly profess the partibility of fellowship from its venue. But what about the Midtowners?

In characteristically Catholic analogical fashion (Greeley 2000), perhaps, the Midtowners adhered to a spatiotemporally interwoven filiation ecclesiology. As it was pushed aside by the legal hand of a government that seemed, at the same time, unlawful in its strong-arm tactics, this chronotope was left as vulnerable as the elderly bodies in whom it inhered. The Midtowners thus arrived at chronotopic partibility differently – they appealed to the necessary boundary between God and Caesar that made possible (or rejectable) their liaison. In their own ways, the Midtowners and the First Fruits both respond to forced urban renewal by pointing to the moral flows of obligation that imbue an environment with the scent of human relationality or with the memory of an abundance of ghosts. (Despite the physical proximity of their churches, I knew of no interaction between the First Fruits and Midtowners save for the time I invited Molly, the exam tutor at Midtown, to accompany me to a talent show at Lian'an.)

The politics of demolition and development shapes how Protestants and Catholics conceptualize their agency in a participation framework that includes God in the New Era. Putting God back inside phenomenal time salvages human agency from the flat, monologic

unfolding of eternity that the Bakhtinian chronotope rejects.²⁸ But with the freedom to deny God (“Who’s your Father anyway?”) comes the irony of nonbelievers’ immunity. Why are the most pious always also the most susceptible? Isn’t the house of God, like one’s own home, supposed to feel safe? Absolutely nothing, as far as anyone could tell, happened to the police that kept vigil with the elderly, and that later walled away Midtown’s small slice of vacant land.

With its weedy reversion to the state of nature, that remnant was out of place in the New Era chronotope of the sleek, futuristic cityscape. Unreplaced and unremunerated, it vanished into the ghost of the neighborhood yet to come: the commercial complex that would “reinvigorate” everything around it. Thinking back, it was no accident that the students in my May 27 English class had excitedly raised and then voted on exorcism to be the following week’s discussion topic. What might a newly remodeled house have in common with expropriated land or a haunted chapel? Although they are all “our home”/“our house,” these chronotopically fractured places are neither settled-in enough to exude *renqingwei’r* nor ever settled enough to be safe from state or spirit possession. They are incompletely “ours.”

In the next chapter, I turn to a different case of spiritual home invasion: “cult” infiltrators at a church of immigrants, this time in the United States. While this chapter has attended to chronotopic fissure and the eerie residuals of the “home” (as well as their equally eerie absence) in the midst of urban renewal, the next chapter tackles the dilemma of telling apart angels and demons, good and bad operators in the spiritual “wilderness” of the transnational church in the city.

²⁸ No matter how divine and human temporalities coexist and overlap, “whatever is gained religiously in the idea that God is in time is lost unless God is in our time” (Zagzebski 1996:65). See Morson (2010) for a discussion of the chronotope’s “heresy” of open (i.e., unknown to God) time.

Chapter 4

Becoming urban discerners: “listening to God” as social differentiation at a Chinese church in New York City

This chapter examines how an ex-rural Chinese priest in New York City turns the exhortation to “listen to God” into a method of social differentiation. I take as a case study a homily in which he equates “listening to God” to knowing how to distinguish “true” Christians from “false” ones. Because the false Christians in his homily are “cult” missionaries who prey upon naïve and often rural Chinese immigrants, knowing how to not be “tricked” means knowing how to adjust to urban life. Knowing how to “listen to God” also means, at the level of the narrative event (Bauman 1986), knowing how to listen to the homilist, and by extension how to follow the homilist’s layering of seemingly unrelated events. To render analogous an event that shaped China-U.S. relations to an event from the New Testament, for example, is to construct a parallel structure of “recurrent returns” (Jakobson 1966:399). The homilist thus demonstrates his skill in “hearing” God’s resonances transnationally, modeling the upward mobility that bridges the worlds of rural China and New York City by narrativizing “recurrences” of Christian transformation.

Enming Guo is a Chinese priest in New York City who ministers to recent arrivals from China. The ways in which priests like him advise immigrants to navigate multiple political and spiritual worlds reflect institutional assessments about immigrants’ ability to successfully adjust to life in a different country. Fr. Guo says that the majority of his parishioners come from rural regions all over China. In this chapter, I claim that Fr. Guo’s exhortation to “listen” to God’s voice in the “wilderness” – when applied to the practical scenario of encountering newcomers at church – re-territorializes and assimilates immigrants’ Catholic identity outside China to the

political and religious context of Catholicism within China. Augustine's distinction between the City of God and the City of Man, which is implicit in the homily, helps to ground Fr. Guo's mistrust of public, urban life in a mixed society of good and bad operators (see Sennett 1992).

In the *City of God*, Augustine ties the fortunes of Rome to God's own motives. Augustine projects, via the term *civitas*,¹ an ecclesiological polis comparable to the Ciceronian *res publica* held together by a bond (*vinculum*) between citizens (*cives*) (Conybeare 2014:145-148). To be Christian is to engage in the commingled, intersecting, but ultimately asymmetrical politics of the two cities, the *civitas terrena*, the Earthly City or City of Man, and the *civitas Dei*, the City of God. However tightly interwoven, they will be split apart at the Last Judgment (*De civ.* 1.35). Until then, the axis of differentiation between the heavenly and earthly cities manifests in the contrast between the qualities of one set of citizens – cautious, compliant, listening – from the cunning, scheming other.

Fr. Guo's homily cautions an immigrant congregation to be wary of strangers by exhorting it to "listen" to God's voice. Although he has been based in the United States for close to ten years, Fr. Guo speaks to his congregation from the point of view of one still residing in China. First, he draws on the highly securitized process of receiving heads of state, expressed in his recollection of President Clinton's 1998 state visit to China, as a model method of enforcing the contrast between the sacred and the secular. Second, Fr. Guo's rhetoric recruits what can be considered a Chinese politics of religious orthodoxy to the Christian differentiation between the heavenly and earthly spheres of influence, a contrast most memorably articulated in Augustine's *City of God*. The state-enforced contrasts between the sacred and the secular, as well as between

¹ The more biblically familiar terms *populus* or *regnum* might have been expected (Conybeare 2014:139).

institutional religions and heterodox “cults,” are thus mapped onto the contrast between the heavenly and the earthly.

The axis of differentiation is the schema of contrast that maps qualitative contrasts between signs onto the objects they index, like a map that diagrammatically represents territorial boundaries (Gal and Irvine 2019:18-19). Why is it that qualitative contrasts cannot always be transparently mapped onto their proper territories? Sometimes, evildoers disguise themselves as angels (see 4.12, below). At other times, the contrast itself disappears. The Puritans transformed the Augustinian metaphor of the “city on a hill” by uniting the City of Man and the City of God into one political entity, accommodating political destiny to the will of God (Deneen 2012). Because it collapsed the boundary between the two cities, the idea of the “redeemer nation,” which originates from post-Reformation Protestant millenarianism, has been interpreted as a rejection of Augustinian history (see Tuveson 1968). Gone is the flexibility of incorporation in (and/or disincorporation from) the City of God. The two cities are no longer divided; they are one and the same. While the mortal members of Augustine’s City of God must wander in exile or pilgrimage all their lives (*De civ. 11.9*), for the Puritans the notion of spiritual exile is transformed and anchored to a concrete, this-worldly destination and political mission.

For the newly diasporic and newly initiated members of the transnational Chinese Christian community, however, the absence of an official “mission” means that multiple messages and missions compete with one another. What happens when missionaries from a persecuted, heterodox Christian group from China suddenly appear at Fr. Guo’s parish in Brooklyn? Numbed by secular comforts, says Fr. Guo, parishioners not only fail to “hear” God’s voice, but are drawn away by counterfeit messengers – false angels. Although he never explicitly refers to Augustine, I argue that the metaphor of the two cities structures Fr. Guo’s spiritual

politics of “listening,” especially as it relates to true and false Christians (or messengers). After all, Augustine’s two cities have their origin in the division of the angels (*De civ.* 11.1), a point to which I will later return.

Fr. Guo pries opens the division between the two cities and explores two scenarios of contrast: (1) when the sacred/secular (or spiritual/political) contrast is reflected in how narrated events from biblical and political spheres are mapped onto one another (see 4.1-4.5, below), and (2) when the contrast between the rural immigrant who does not yet know how to “listen” and the ex-rural transnational who does – i.e., the congregation vs. Fr. Guo – is created through the meta-discursive mapping of the narrative event of the homily itself onto the parallel structure of the narrated events in (1). In the case of (2), the rural immigrant cannot discern the contrast between messages (and messengers) from the earthly and heavenly cities (see 4.9-4.10 and 4.12, below). Recall that rural villages are idealized as repositories of generational Catholic piety. However, when naïve parishioners cannot tell the difference between fellow Catholics and recruiters from Eastern Lightning, a controversial Christian group categorized as an “evil cult” (*xiejiao*) by the Chinese state, the rural qualities that index piety become the very same that put them in harm’s way.

Like Fr. Chen and Fr. Lü, Fr. Guo was born and raised in a rural Catholic village, and has sought upward social mobility through confessional, vocational means. In this chapter, I show how he enacts distance from rural subjectivity by teaching others how to “listen”: the rural/urban contrast divides those for whom the heavenly/earthly contrast is perceptible (or rather, audible) from those for whom it is not. Fr. Guo layers the rural/urban contrast onto the Christian contrast between the Old and New Testaments through the chronological layering of thematically parallel events (see Bauman 1986:97-98).

Clear divisions: saints and statesmen

Fr. Guo delivered the following short homily from December 9, 2018, the second Sunday of Advent, at the late afternoon Mandarin Chinese Mass at St. Cecilia in Brooklyn. He extemporizes from notes on that day's Gospel reading, Luke 3:1-6,² which tells of John the Baptist receiving, in the wilderness, the “word of God” and subsequently announcing to all “a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Luke 3:3) to prepare for the coming of Jesus. Below is an excerpt of his homily from around the two-minute mark:

Excerpt from Fr. Guo's homily, Sections 4.1 to 4.5 (2:06 to 4:23)

4.1	他是连结旧约和新约，他是一个桥梁（）从旧的时代到新的时代。但若翰呢，也是耶稣的前驱。既然是前驱，就是给耶稣铺路的，给耶稣准备道路的。	[John the Baptist] connects the Old Testament and the New Testament. He is a bridge（）from the era of the Old Testament to the era of the New Testament. But John is also the forerunner of Jesus. As forerunner, he paves the way for Jesus, prepares the way for Jesus.
4.2	我们想一想，如果现在一个国家的总统去拜访一个地方，他一定要[派]先遣部队，先遣的人员去准备，去—去—去考察。我记得几十年之前，我在上海佘山的时候儿，有一年呢，我们整个儿修院被封住了，啊，被封住了。为什么？当这个柯林顿访问中国，访问上海，去我们修院去，去访问，所以整个儿修院被封起来[了]。在前几天一定有警察，还有安保人员，在[瞧]这个地方。	Let us think for a minute. Today, if the president of a country pays a visit somewhere, he will certainly send an advance guard, advance personnel to prepare, to – to – to inspect. I remember decades ago, when I was at Sheshan in Shanghai, there was one year that our entire seminary was closed off, ah, was closed off. Why? When this ³ Clinton was visiting China, visiting Shanghai, [he] came to our seminary, came to visit, so the entire seminary was closed up. A few days prior, of course, there were police, and also security personnel [watching] this place.
4.3	但在旧约当中也是一样的。一个国王，一个先知，一个（）只要出群，他一定要派人去准备。但若翰是前驱。他也是天主派遣的使者，给耶稣准备道路。	But in the Old Testament, it's also the same. A king, a prophet, a（）as soon as he leaves the group, will of course send people to make preparations. But John is the

² All December 9, 2018 readings are available here:

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120918.cfm>.

³The emphatic filler demonstrative *zhege* ('this') does not translate well into English.

		forerunner. He is also the messenger sent by God, to prepare the way for Jesus.
4.4	[但]我们要问一问:若翰是怎么样给耶稣准备道路的? 如果说让你欢迎准备迎接教宗来这个地方访问, 教宗告诉我说, 我... 半年之后要来这个地方访问, 我们要不要准备欢迎他?	But we need to ask: how does John prepare the way for Jesus? If you're to welcome, to prepare to receive the pope [who has] come to visit this place, [if] the pope tells us, "I...in half a year I'll be visiting this place," will we want to prepare a welcome for him?
4.5	要! 怎么样准备[啊]? 啊? 怎么样准备, 朋友们? 你们肯定要唱歌儿了, 对不对? 你们要[先]跳舞啊, 要准备节目啊, 诶! 可爱的教宗看! 是不是? 还要学一点西班牙话... 就是义大利呢阿根廷的... 讲西班牙语的。是不是?() 希望教宗访问一切顺利! 这个都是我们的准备的工作啦。那若翰也是一样的。他的使命很清楚。他是一个使者, 给耶稣准备道路。	We will! How will we prepare? Ah? How will we prepare, friends? You'll surely want to sing, right? You'll first have to dance, prepare a program, ah! "Dear Pope, watch!" Right? [You]'ll have to learn a bit of Spanish...which is Italy's, eh, Argentina's...Spanish-speaking. Right? () [we] wish the pope's visit to be a success! All this is the work of our preparation. [For] John, then, [it] is also the same. His mission is clear. He is a messenger [who] prepares the way for Jesus.

The event recollected is Clinton's 1998 trip to China, the first American presidential visit since the Tiananmen Square protests.⁴ This comparison combines personal anecdote and history lesson to flesh out a biblical passage. At first glance, it is unremarkable; homilies frequently tie in current events, popular films and literature, and autobiographical recollections that priests see fit for (and hope to be engaging to) their audience.

Fr. Guo implies that Clinton had personally directed the securitization of the diocesan seminary at Sheshan, a pilgrimage site known for its basilica and Marian shrine, just as God the Father had directed John the Baptist to prepare the way for God the Son (see 4.2). I found no

⁴ See Peterson, Jonathan and Jim Mann, "Clinton Begins Visit to China, Hails Its Future," *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1998, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1998-jun-26-mn-63808-story.html>, and Faison, Seth, "CLINTON IN CHINA: THE OVERVIEW; President Arrives in Shanghai; Focuses on Talk With Citizens," *The New York Times*, June 30, 1998, <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/06/30/world/clinton-china-overview-president-arrives-shanghai-focuses-talk-with-citizens.html>.

mention in the news of Clinton ever having visited Sheshan. While Clinton did not visit, or was not reported to have visited Sheshan, he *did* briefly converse with Bishop Aloysius Jin Luxian, a complicated figure credited with revitalizing the Diocese of Shanghai in the 1980s, during the same 1998 visit. At a roundtable discussion at the Shanghai Library, Bishop Jin spoke to President Clinton as follows:

“And here I really want to tell something that is not always readily known to others from our side. People were often asked about if the Chinese Catholic Church was cooperating with the Communist Party. And the answer is simple: Why should the church believers here do something against our government, which is a government of ours? Here we adopted this policy of dialogue instead of contending with each other. I believe, Mr. President, you are here to have more dialogues with us, with Chinese government not to contend with us. So I believe all the church believers, religious believers, they should have dialogues instead of having conflicts with the government.”⁵

Bp. Jin was known for his conflicted ties to church and state (see Chan 2019:158-166).⁶ In this excerpt, he contains both under “our side”: “Why should the church believers here do something against our government, which is a government of ours?” This question contains “church believers” and “government” under a single national sphere – exactly what Fr. Guo’s partial retelling has avoided doing. Just as Clinton “[is] here to have more dialogues with us” and “not to contend with us,” according to Bp. Jin, so too are church believers “here” to practice their “policy of dialogue”: “here” refers to both the physical confines of Chinese territory and to their

⁵ Full transcript of President Clinton and First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton’s June 30, 1998 Roundtable Discussion in Shanghai available here: <https://clintonwhitehouse4.archives.gov/textonly/WH/New/China/19980630-3597.html>, accessed Nov. 30, 2021.

⁶ While he would appear to be performing state apologetics in his address to Clinton, his incongruous legacy of imprisonment, reconciliation, and rehabilitation ought not to be understated. “I have had to be, how do you say, both a serpent and a dove. I am both a serpent and a dove,” said Jin in a 2010 interview, the text of which is available here: http://www.ignatiusinsight.com/features2010/aclark_noeasyanswers_july2010.asp, accessed Nov. 30, 2021.

(and Clinton's) circumstantial incorporation into "our side" by virtue of having come for conversation, not contention. Bp. Jin projects onto the practice of dialogue the possibility of dismantling the "contentious" division between church and state.

Why did Fr. Guo omit Bp. Jin, and why does it matter? First, Fr. Guo is aware that among many Chinese Catholic immigrants, Bp. Jin is regarded as an accomplice of the Communist Party. Omitting him avoids controversy. Second, and more importantly, his omission preserves the sharpness of the division between church and state. Bp. Jin was controversial precisely because he unapologetically inhabited and exercised the functions of both spheres. He was rector of the seminary at Sheshan when Fr. Guo studied there. As I find it unlikely that Clinton's visit to Sheshan would go unremarked in international media coverage, it is possible that Fr. Guo, if he didn't cut the tale out of whole cloth, was incorrectly or roundaboutly recollecting Bp. Jin's meeting with President Clinton at the Shanghai Library. That Sheshan was heavily patrolled anyway is plausible; Sheshan is about an hour's drive from the central branch of the Shanghai Library, and perhaps seminarians could not be trusted to mind their own business.

How is welcoming a foreign president to a locked-down seminary at all comparable to welcoming the pope with a parish spectacular? "[W]ill we want to prepare a welcome for him? We will!" says Fr. Guo, interpellating the congregation of St. Cecilia into the role of way-paver, two thousand years after John the Baptist and twenty years after Clinton's "advance guard." On the one hand, the pope is foreigner and guest, and "our" tasks consist of organizing entertainment and learning Spanish. On the other hand, the pope is God's representative, and "our" pageanttries mimic the praise ceaselessly sung by the angels around the throne of God. The pope is not asked

to dialogue, as Bishop Jin dialogued with President Clinton, but only to (in Spanish) “watch” (4.5).

In explicating Luke 3:1-6 to an immigrant Chinese audience, Fr. Guo’s examples reterritorialize the biblically metaphoric “way” paved for Jesus in localized detail. Inadvertently or not, these details index a strict and careful separation of the sacred and secular spheres in contexts where they would be expected to mix, e.g., a presidential visit to a seminary. I diagram the analogical relations between sites and persons in the homily as follows:

“Era of the Old Testament”	Messenger, bridge	Leader from the “era of the New Testament”
Law of Moses, the “Old Covenant,” etc.	John the Baptist “pav[ing] the way” in the wilderness	Jesus, from Nazareth, “two thousand years” ⁷ ago
China before Reform and Opening Up	Police/security/Secret Service(?) at Sheshan, “decades ago”	Bill Clinton, from the United States, 1998
When Luke 3:1-6 was irrelevant: the time before Fr. Guo connected it to us	We the parishioners at St. Cecilia in Brooklyn, second Sunday of Advent, 2018	Pope Francis, from Italy/Argentina, “half a year” after December 2018

Figure 4.1. A diagram of persons and places mentioned by Fr. Guo in his December 9, 2018 homily.

With each example, Fr. Guo moves forward in time, from right before the start of the ministry of Jesus to December 9, 2018, six months prior to an imagined papal visit. This arc reveals how Fr. Guo organizes the boundaries between different political and spiritual spheres in a way that intersects with the Christian division between the “era of the Old Testament” and the “era of the New Testament.” As a watershed moment in U.S.-China relations, Clinton’s 1998 visit may well have helped to pave the way, or straighten it somewhat, for those like Fr. Guo who left China in the 2000s. Fr. Guo’s vision of an immigrant church in a multicultural city hosting the pope

⁷ As Fr. Guo says at the 5:55 mark in his homily. I have not reproduced this excerpt for analysis.

reflects the terrestrial, transnational breadth of the Roman Catholic Church. To better understand how this vision is predicated on the sacred/secular contrast, I turn to Figure 1: if John the Baptist is the forerunner of Jesus, and Jesus is, like Bill Clinton,⁸ a head of state deserving of ceremonial welcome, who then is Clinton's forerunner?

As seen in Figure 1, the forerunner(s) would appear to be the police and security personnel sent by city authorities to “[watch] this place” (4.2). The seminarians are locked in (or out),⁹ if not out of sight, and security guards are everywhere. The division between church and state would seem to harden, and quite literally require more policing, the more the two spheres appear to overlap. Even so, Fr. Guo claims that the President Clinton and Pope Francis examples are the “same” (“in the Old Testament, it's also the same” [4.3], “[for] John, then, [it] is also the same” [4.5]). While it may be ironic to draw a parallel between state security forces and John the Baptist, not to mention St. Cecilia's immigrant congregation, this analogy suggests an overlaying of church and state, China and the United States without suggesting the assimilation of one to the other. John the Baptist is comparable to Chinese police and parishioners because they all prepare

⁸ To be clear, Fr. Guo never implies that Jesus is mediated through Bill Clinton; rather, the secular office of the presidency and not the fallen humanity of Clinton is what renders his visit commensurable to the arrival of the unfallen human Jesus. Clinton the head of state can thus be commensurated to Jesus the head of the City of God without Clinton the man ever being included within the City of God. This is important to note because it defuses the indexical relationship between political ups and downs and God's pleasure or displeasure. While motivated by God for God's own reasons, political vicissitudes – according to Augustine – are not the rewards or punishments for good or bad behavior (Murphy 2008:62-66). In other words, the stuff of human history does not necessarily mediate divine interaction even if it contains superficial resemblances of it. The Augustinian vision of the earthly and heavenly cities is of two overlapping but non-mapping chronotopes; political events in the former are not the transparent indices of divine machinations in the latter.

⁹ Fr. Guo does not say whether the seminarians were locked down inside the seminary (or on campus grounds), or kept outside of it. If Clinton never visited Sheshan – and unless he did so in private, without press coverage, he most likely did not – Sheshan's lockdown means that all seminarians were in fact kept out of sight.

for and welcome Jesus, President Clinton, and Pope Francis in parallel ways. Fr. Guo does not mean that the sacred/secular contrast is erased because the examples, one overtly secular and one overtly religious, are the “same.” Fr. Guo bases their sameness on the new, global age (of Christianity, of exchange with the United States, of hosting the pope) that they usher in to replace an old, implicitly pre-global age.

The rural seminarians locked in (or out of) their seminary during Clinton’s visit to Shanghai did not, after all, represent Shanghai. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the rural village is the nostalgic point of reference of Catholic piety for many Chinese Catholics, as well as the source of their clergy. The quality of rurality is manipulated, managed, or embodied by the “messenger” or “bridge” in Figure 4.1: John the Baptist in the wilderness, the security guards who keep the (rural) seminarians from going in or out, the rural provenance of many Chinese immigrants in New York City. John the Baptist’s role as bridge (*qiaoliang*) between the era of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament (see 4.1) joins the two in historical progression while setting them up as sharply contrastive. The policing of the sacred/secular division during Clinton’s visit thus also inadvertently separated rural people from urban visitors.

By analogy, the isolationism and provincialism of pre-reform China, carried over by many older rural immigrants to their receiving country, is out of place in a transnational world. For ordinary, nonelite Chinese citizens, Clinton’s visit marked the arrival of an era in which they could dream of personally participating in U.S.-China exchange. Just as Clinton’s visit is, in the structure of Fr. Guo’s homily, the event bridging John’s way-paving and the here-and-now of December 9, 2018, so is it still, as Rey Chow (2002:19ff.) likewise highlights, a resonant point of reference bridging China and the United States.

The bridges or messengers – John the Baptist, police, parishioners – are those who span two different eras; they do the work of metaphoric surveying and re-measuring: paving a new road, inspecting (and locking up) a seminary, and singing, dancing, and speaking Spanish. In each of Fr. Guo’s three examples, one passes from the old era to the new. Fr. Guo himself embodies this progression: a rural migrant transformed into an urban transnational. By interpellating the Mandarin and/or other Sinitic language-dominant parishioners of St. Cecilia as hosts of the pope, he envisions their social transformation and belonging as model multilinguals of New York City. The challenge, however, is to pass from one era to the other without bringing over the old qualities.

Blurry boundaries: angels, demons, and angelic demons

Fr. Guo speaks of the wilderness not as a dangerous, barren wasteland but as a spiritual, deterritorialized site of communication (e.g., prayer). Temptations come neither from the desolation of the desert nor its dearth of human society, but rather from its excess: a surplus of virtual user-friendliness. Recent arrivals from China, although just as likely to be from urban areas as from rural towns, are hailed as rural migrants too easily taken in and corrupted by way of user-friendly, technologically mediated connectivity. Moving on from Pope Francis’s imagined visit, Fr. Guo turns back to John the Baptist:

Excerpt from Fr. Guo’s homily, Sections 4.6 to 4.11 (4:23 to 8:20)

4.6	那他怎么样准备的？首先，他的生活的方式。在玛窦福音第三章讲：若翰在旷野中穿的是骆驼毛的衣服，腰间束的是皮带，吃的是蝗虫和野蜜。他以[刻骨]淳朴简单的生活方式要让人去悔改，准备自己。不要依赖世俗守护的东西，而是要准备自己的心灵。[所以]他的生活方式。	How does he prepare? First, his way of living. The third chapter of the Gospel of Matthew says: in the wilderness, John wears clothing made of camel hair, a leather belt around his waist, and eats locusts and wild honey. Through a [deep-rooted], unsophisticated, simple way of life, he wants people to repent, to prepare themselves. Do not rely on secularly
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		guarded goods, but prepare your own soul. [So] his way of life.
4.7	那第二个：他怎么样去准备呢？若翰在哪里出现？对的，在旷野里面出现！欸！旷野是一个人与天主交流的地方，是一个启祷的地方。在旷野当中，人可能会听到天主的声音。所以在旷野当中与天主交谈。	Second: How does he prepare? Where does John appear? Yes indeed, [he] appears in the wilderness! <i>Ei!</i> The wilderness is a place where man and God communicate, a place of prayer. In the wilderness, man can hear the voice of God. So in the wilderness, [one] can converse with God.
4.8	他在旷野当中听到什么？听到声音。这个声音引导他，指导他，用以耶稣铺路。各位弟兄姊妹：我们的生活当中有没有听到这个声音？我们有没有听到这个声音？可能有时候听不到这个声音，因为杂音太多了，太吵杂了，对不对？诶！你们把 high-tech 的打开的，电脑打开，诶，电视也打开，给我们怕定下来，总((a baby cries))听不到这个声音。可能有时候呢，听的是——不是耶稣的声音，是魔鬼的声音。	What does he hear in the wilderness? [He] hears the voice. This voice guides him, directs him to pave the way for Jesus. Brothers and sisters: have we heard this voice in the midst of our lives? Have we heard this voice? Perhaps sometimes we can't hear this voice because there's too much noise, it's too noisy, right? <i>Ai!</i> You[pl.] turn on high-tech, computers, <i>ai</i> , and TVs, making us scared to settle down, it's always ((a baby cries)) can't hear this voice. Perhaps sometimes, [what we] hear is – not the voice of Jesus, but the Devil's voice.
4.9	刚刚在布道班儿当中，上完之后呢，我就问一些人，[我说]“你怎么样啊？”“诶！不错阿。”然后有的人就分享了，“神父啊，你怎么有一很多短信别人发给我啊...”诶！看来看去，不对劲啊！是闪电教的。()然后呢，他说是这个人，电话拿出来，拨着电话号码。我说：“你怎么认识他的？”他说：“在这个圣堂里遍儿。”他[突然]认识你？他突然就是教友？	Just now during [adult] catechism class, after it ended, I asked someone, I said, “How are you?” “ <i>Ai</i> , not bad.” Then someone shared, “Father, how do you have – someone sent me a lot of texts...” <i>Ai!</i> Looking here and there, something's off! It's Eastern Lighting. ¹⁰ () And then [s/he] ¹¹ said it's this person, [s/he] took out his phone, dialed the number. I said, “How do you know him[/her]?” [S/]he said, “[It was] here in this chapel.” [S/]he (i.e., the Eastern Lightning member) [suddenly] knows you? [S/]he's suddenly a parishioner?

¹⁰ Formally known as the Church of Almighty God (*Quannenshen jiaohui*). Eastern Lighting practitioners believe that Jesus has reincarnated in China as a woman. The group is known to recruit aggressively, and is disliked by the Chinese government and mainline Chinese Christians alike. See Dunn, Emily C., “‘Cult,’ Church, and the CCP: Introducing Eastern Lightning,” *Modern China* 35(1): 96-119 (2018). For a sympathetic treatment of Eastern Lightning (and the sensational murder case associated with it), see Introvigne, Massimo, 2017, “‘Cruel Killing, Brutal Killing, Kill the Beast’: Investigating the 2014 McDonald’s ‘Cult Murder’ in Zhaoyuan,” *The Journal of CENSUR* 1(1):61-73.

¹¹ The third-person pronoun 他 (or at least its pronunciation) is gender non-specific.

4.10	这不是魔鬼的一些伎俩？所以你听到的是什么的声音啊？是魔鬼的声音。这个不是天主的声音。所以我们((someone coughs))魔鬼在我们当中啊，今天，是闪电教的，就在我们当中啊。所以--所以我们要听到--听天主的声音，要听天主的声音。(2-second pause) OK? 要听天主的。	Are these not some of the Devil's tricks? So what voice did you hear? [It] was the Devil's voice. This was not God's voice. So we ((someone coughs)) the Devil is in our midst. Today, it was [something/-one] from Eastern Lighting in our midst. So – so we must hear – listen to God's voice, must listen to God's voice. (2-second pause) OK? Must listen to God[’s voice].
4.11	那()若翰在什么地方听见呢？是旷野当中。是旷野当中。	So () where did John hear [it]? It was in the wilderness. It was in the wilderness.

What – and *where* – is the wilderness? This vision of the wilderness is deterritorialized in that it is not based on any geographic location and is not related to rurality despite the shared trait of simplicity (see 4.6). “In the wilderness,” says Fr. Guo, “man can hear the voice of God” (4.7) because human interference – the numbing, (human) nature-modifying distractions of culture, from fine garments to prepared foods – is absent. Devoid of (or delivered from) human manipulation and noise pollution, the wilderness is a place where God and man can talk to one another. In the wilderness, the hearer can approximate, as much as is humanly possible, the clarity of unmediated communication.

Interestingly, the “voice” of the devil (see 4.8-9) is never heard. The catechumen, whose gender is unknown, has texts on a phone; the actual context of interaction (“[It was] here in this chapel”) is both outrageous (sanctity breached!) and vague (what words were exchanged?). Fr. Guo animates the voice of caution: “[S/]he [suddenly] knows you? [S/]he’s suddenly a parishioner?” (Recall, in Chapter 3, the ghosts at Midtown; here too, in the safety of the chapel, where one might expect to hear the voice of God, it is the unholy that is encountered.)

Enming Guo is a cautious, guarded individual. As I have mentioned, he too is from a rural background. In Chapter 1, I offered a generic sketch of the “typical” Chinese priest by way of the extroverted, loquacious personalities of Fr. Chen and, to a lesser extent, Chapter 2’s Fr.

Lü. Now safely settled in New York City, these priests have neither contact nor desire for contact with old superiors and coworkers at Midtown. They are highly suspicious of any such contact.

Fr. Guo is the only one of them to have joined a religious society,¹² and is known for his scholarly bent and reserved manner.

The first time I met him, in fact, he suspected me to be a member of Eastern Lightning (see fn. 10) because I was visibly ethnic Chinese, a Mandarin speaker, and a stranger. I had approached him in the vestibule after Mass, as people were leaving. I told him I had attended Midtown prior to coming to New York, as I had told Fr. Chen in Chapter 1, and that I had heard about him from parishioners there. I had not yet been introduced to him. He asked that we take a selfie together so that he could circulate it among his associates, to ask if I had been seen inside chapels and classrooms “dragging sheep” (*la yang*), or recruiting among Christians.¹³ I went along and smiled for the photo. I knew I was suspicious: never before seen, yet eager to talk and more informed about his background than was perhaps acceptable for a stranger. In truth, I would have been more ready for Fr. Guo to suspect that I was an agent or sympathizer of the powers that be at Midtown; I never foresaw being taken for an Eastern Lightning missionary. Only after I was later introduced by his superior, the parish pastor, was I granted an interview.¹⁴

That Fr. Guo was attuned more to Eastern Lightning than to the Chinese state or, as was the case with Fr. Lü and Fr. Chen, the legal trouble that former superiors at Midtown could create for him, can be explained by two conditions: one, he was the only former Midtown priest

¹² Out of respect for his privacy, I will refrain from disclosing the name of this society.

¹³ This purpose was later confirmed by one of the recipients of his texts, a Chinese nun in Flushing.

¹⁴ This is an instance of a fieldwork “goof”: I should have first sought an introduction from a mutual acquaintance. However, it well expresses the caution and apprehensiveness toward strangers that Fr. Guo asks of his parishioners, and it “makes sense” in light of his homily.

in the United States to possess a green card (at that time), which he had recently obtained, and so he had no fear of either Midtown or of deportation; two, many of his parishioners were from rural backgrounds. In light of these conditions, Fr. Guo's positive sketch of the security guards at Sheshan – analogues of John the Baptist, no less – can be more fully appreciated. I was at first surprised by what seemed to be a perfect alignment with the Chinese state's criticism of "cults" like Eastern Lightning.¹⁵ Throughout 2018, I had heard warnings about two "cults," Eastern Lightning and Shincheonji Church of Jesus¹⁶ (*Xintiandi* in Hanyu Pinyin), at TSPM and PCA churches in Hangzhou, more frequently at Protestant than at Catholic churches. I had not expected to encounter a nearly identical warning in Brooklyn, much less to be taken as an Eastern Lightning missionary. For Fr. Guo as for Fr. Chen in Chapter 1, the Chinese state, even in the eyes of those who are glad to have left it, is astute even if it is not always just. As (technically) a rural subject himself, he is in a position to recognize the legal difficulties and spiritual risks faced by naïve rural (im)migrants, whether in China or in the United States. He chidingly instructs them to "listen to God's voice" (4.10, 4.12) as though he is talking to young pupils who do not yet know how to be wary and are therefore easily led astray.

High-flow immigrant communities in urban areas are especially risky for new rural arrivals. The weakness of interpersonal relations between urbanites, for whom even longtime neighbors may be strangers, is a common complaint among rural migrants in China (see Huang 2014:S244). Although a discussion of gender is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important

¹⁵ In a departure from Rey Chow's protesting ethnic (2002), state persecution and the discourse of rights do not necessarily accrue for "ethnics" among themselves moral capital. Partly because of their association with "cults" such as Falun Gong and Eastern Lightning, the register of protest and the persona of the persecuted dissident are viewed with skepticism.

¹⁶ Shincheonji gained particular notoriety in 2020 as a site of COVID-19 superspreading in South Korea. For a sympathetic write-up of its theology as well as controversial reputation, see Introvigne, Massimo, 2020, "Shincheonji: An Introduction," *The Journal of CENSUR* 4(3):3-20.

to note that women are thought to be more susceptible to religious recruitment and more active in recruiting. Danger and sexual temptation are also associated with how mobile phones have transformed social relations in strongly classed and gendered ways (see Wallis 2013, McDonald 2018). Rural women are thought to be especially susceptible to the passionate tides of charismatic movements (Yuan 2021a). The disadvantaged rural woman-qua-typical Christian subject is the figure against which Wenzhou's "boss Christians," for example, seek to distinguish themselves (Cao 2012). Together with commonplace observations about how "lukewarm" urban Christians are compared to their rural counterparts, the stereotyped association between religiosity, class, and gender shapes how Fr. Guo as well as the "boss Christians" described by Cao (2012) arguably subvert Christianity for upwardly mobile ends.

As seen in Chapter 1, displays of spiritual purity often rely on the performance of psychological simplicity. While Fr. Chen enacted the persona of a trusting listener too careless to plan ahead, much less to scheme, Fr. Guo goes for a different persona. The association of piety with rurality valorizes "listening" (to spiritual superiors) over (being recognized for one's) smarts. Fr. Guo's reputation among those who still remember him at Midtown and the Chinese Catholic community in the New York City area is markedly different from how Fr. Chen and Fr. Lü are viewed. Fr. Chen is a "good talker," Fr. Lü is "clever," but Fr. Guo is "like a scholar" and "more private." Fr. Guo differentiates himself from the others, and from his congregation, not as the most trusting of listeners, but as a shrewd discerner of schemes. He takes on the cautious, sophisticated attunement to deception that hapless, easily scammed rural migrants are presumed to lack.

For Fr. Guo, the wilderness is a site of overlap: neither the countryside nor the city, but the space in between them, complete with their toils and temptations.¹⁷ What this overlap adds to the politics of differentiation is the lesson that family resemblance is no sure sign of credibility. The voice of God and the voice of the Devil *are* similar, and even for the most spiritually discerning, they can be difficult to differentiate; to deny their similarity would be, in effect, to naïvely insist on their sameness and therefore to prime oneself for temptation, because the Devil is a master of disguise:

Excerpt from Fr. Guo’s homily, Sections 4.12 to 4.15 (10:14 to 11:30)¹⁸

4.12	声音 (1-second pause) 是天主的声音, 哎, 是天主的声音。魔鬼是很聪明, 很聪明, 伪装成天使。他不可以伪装成天主, 但是魔鬼[的]可以伪装成天使。哎, 在诱惑你, 在诱惑你, 让你分辨不出来是天主的声音还是魔鬼的声音, 在不知不觉当中 ((someone coughs)) 所以你要听天主的声音。	The voice (1-second pause) is God’s voice, <i>ai</i> , is God’s voice. The Devil is very smart, very smart; [he] disguises himself as an angel. He can’t disguise himself as God, but the Devil[’s kind] can disguise [themselves] as angel[s]. <i>Ai</i> , tempting you, tempting you, making you unable to distinguish God’s voice from the Devil’s voice, while [you are] unaware ((someone coughs)) so you must listen to God’s voice.
4.13	那有的人说 "神父, 怎么样听天主有的声音?" OK? 这个是有方法, 有技巧	Some people say, "Father, how [do we] listen [for] God’s voice?" OK? This has a method, a technique. One is prayer. We

¹⁷ In contrast, the popular American interpretation of the wilderness as a metaphor for the frontline of rhetorical (or actual) combat harks back to the Puritan layering of the City of Man with the City of God. Believing they were called by God to subdue the wilderness (Heimert 1953), the Puritans interpreted it as a site of opportunity (to cultivate a pleasant garden or godly society), temptation (resembling the forty-day temptation of Jesus in the desert), and danger (from wild animals and the original inhabitants). At its mildest, and only briefly, it was a *tabula rasa* and "passive partner in the completion of their mission" (Forrer 1976:616). The American fixation with the trope of the "voice crying in the wilderness," seen in its laudatory application to figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., points to a vision of public argumentation as a struggle between good and evil, one against the many (Roberts-Miller 1999:168).

¹⁸ Between 4.11 and 4.12, Fr. Guo’s homily continues, for about 1 minute and 45 seconds, with a hasty explication of Luke 3:5 ("Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low" [Luke 3:5/Isaiah 40:4]). Fr. Guo says we must fill the valleys, which we have created by sinning, between ourselves and God with acts of love, and flatten the hills of hatred, intolerance, and anger. He then resumes the theme of God’s voice.

	的。一个是启祷。我们要启祷唉，要念玫瑰经，要参加弥撒，要读圣经。第二个，我们要参加教会的各种活动，参加教会的各种活动。	must pray <i>ai</i> , must pray the Rosary, must attend Mass, must read the Bible. Second, we must participate in all kinds of church activities, participate in all kinds of church activities.
4.14	这个是一种方式，让你的心（）对不对？这就是一个旷野，才能听清楚这个声音，否则你——否则你听不清楚的。	This is a kind of method, to let your heart（）right? This is a wilderness, [and] that's why [you] can clearly hear this voice, or else you – or else you don't hear clearly.
4.15	所以让我们在将临期提醒自己((sounds of people shuffling))准备我们的心。祂敞开一个大道，进入我们的生命。(5-second pause) 整起。	So let us during Advent remind ourselves ((sounds of people moving)) to prepare our hearts. He opens wide a great avenue, entering into our lives. (5-second pause) All rise.

As I have mentioned, Augustine traces the division of the two cities to the division of the good and bad angels (*De civ.* 11.1). The cities are not divided by species, but by their loves: the love of self and the love of God (*De civ.* 24.28). As our fleshless “communicative betters,” angels receive and transfer information without the mediation of external vocal activity (Peters 1999:76-77). They do not need a “place where man and God communicate, a place of prayer” (4.7). Angelic communication is instantaneous and telepathic (Peters 1999:76-77), and importantly, once they have made a decision, angels do not change their minds (*De civ.* 11.13). But for humankind, the clarity of God’s voice is indexically related to the intensity of one’s love of God. This love can be cultivated – *learned* – through the methods or techniques of prayer and participation in church activities (4.13-4.14). In the wilderness, one can hear the voice of God *and* be tempted by fallen angels because the wilderness affords one the space in which to change one’s mind.

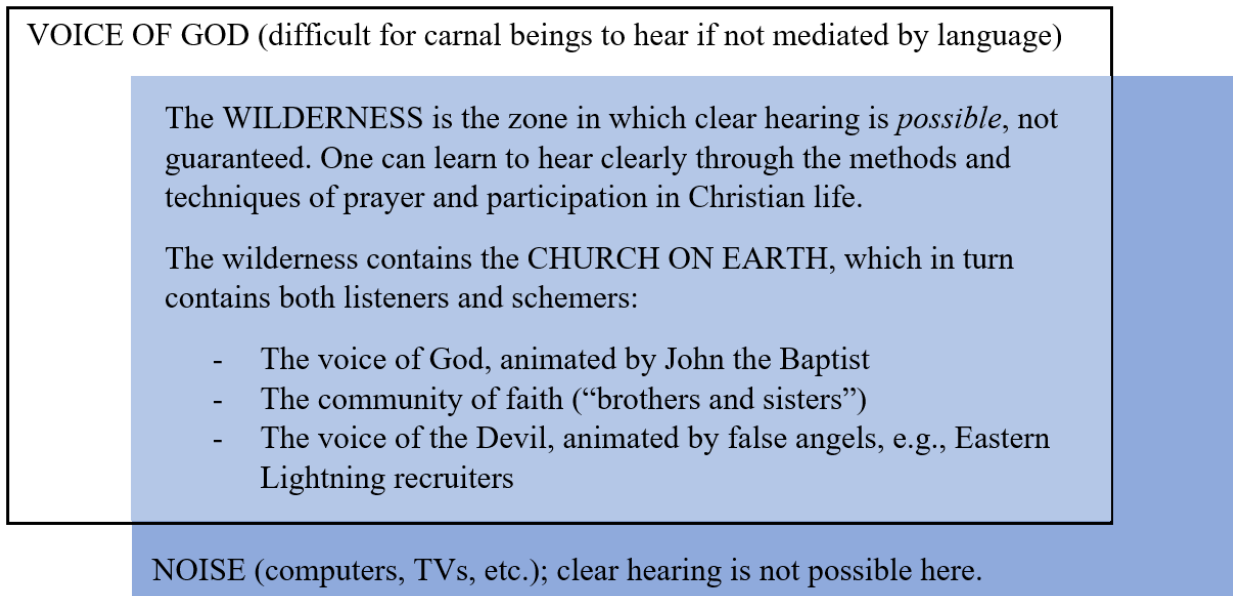


Figure 4.2. A diagram of persons and places mentioned by Fr. Guo in 4.6-4.14.

As shown in Figure 4.2, the wilderness contains both the voice of God and the voice of the Devil. The wilderness is a place where the axis of differentiation between citizens of the earthly and heavenly cities can be worked out by those (like Fr. Guo) who are well versed in “listening.” Although different in kind, angels are intermixed with humanity in both cities (*De civ.* 12.1), and social intercourse between angels and humans is commonplace. The divisions between angel and human, saved and damned, are often unclear. Nor is church membership any guarantee: the City of God contains people who may currently be outside the church; others currently within the church may not in fact belong to the City of God. Eastern Lightning missionaries are encountered in church settings because the church is open to all. The church as it exists on earth is thus “transnational” with respect to the two cities, the City of God (i.e., the church in heaven) and the City of Man (i.e., everyone else). As I will later show in Figure 4.4, this construct of spiritual transnationalism-*qua*-deterritorialized wilderness maps onto the rural-to-urban

transformation effected by Fr. Guo. It also fractally projects the rural/urban contrast into the heavenly/earthly contrast: the entire congregation is treated as spiritually rural.

Thought to be naïve, emotional, and gullible, recent arrivals from China – including those who were wealthy city-dwellers prior to emigration – are instructed to “participate in all kinds of church activities” (4.13) and by extension to place greater trust in institutional events than in individuals encountered at those events. Where the voice of God is not readily audible, the institution of the church is to be trusted. Rich or poor, the newly arrived are in this way likened to rural migrants *within* China. When I interviewed Fr. Guo, he spoke of the short, simple, childlike nature of their confessions. These confessants lacked introspection and talked mainly about rule-following, said Fr. Guo, “because of the education system in China.” Therefore, right rules and safeguards – stern warnings against joining Eastern Lightning, for example – must first be clearly given. Earlier that year, as I have mentioned, I heard nearly identical warnings at TSPM and PCA churches in Hangzhou.¹⁹

Where the division between the heavenly and earthly cities is unclear – as it is in the wilderness – and where the voice of God is not, as aforementioned, always readily audible, we are to resist the temptation of rapid connectivity and strive to do the slow work of differentiation: to pave the way, like John the Baptist, but also to guard against potential infiltrators, like the police at Sheshan. (We are not to be like the unmentioned Bishop Jin, someone who schemes *and* listens, “both a serpent and a dove” [see fn. 6].) By calling attention to Eastern Lightning interlopers, Fr. Guo himself models the very differentiation he exhorts us to practice. The

¹⁹ Is it ironic for the leadership of Chinese state-registered churches and diasporic churches in the United States to be in alignment regarding matters of religious dissimulation and competition? Not so for Fr. Guo: spiritually, the PCA and the underground are not irreconcilable. If citizens of the City of God can at present (in the human experience of time) be found outside the church altogether, surely they can be found in PCA churches, in spades.

narrative event of the homily becomes, as well, a bridge in the structure of thematically parallel events:

“Era of the Old Testament”	Messenger, bridge	Leader from the “era of the New Testament”
Law of Moses, the “Old Covenant,” etc.	John the Baptist “pav[ing] the way” in the wilderness	Jesus, from Nazareth, “two thousand years” ago
China before Reform and Opening Up	Police/security/Secret Service(?) at Sheshan, “decades ago”	Bill Clinton, from the United States, 1998
When Luke 3:1-6 was irrelevant: the time before Fr. Guo connected it to our lives	We the parishioners at St. Cecilia in Brooklyn, second Sunday of Advent, 2018	Pope Francis, from Italy/Argentina, “half a year” after December 2018
Undiscerning rurality: when we couldn’t tell (or were unaware of) the difference between parishioners and interlopers	Fr. Guo warning us about false angels from Eastern Lightning, second Sunday of Advent, 2018	God(’s voice), discernable to Catholic transnationals in New York City
When we didn’t know how to “listen”: the time before Advent 2018	God “open[ing] wide a great avenue, entering into our lives” during the Advent season...	...as narrated by Fr. Guo, whose message God has prepared us to hear right now

Figure 4.3. An expanded diagram of persons and places mentioned by Fr. Guo in his December 9, 2018 homily.

The spiritual transnational can see through schemes (“[t]he Devil is very smart, very smart” [4.12]) that the spiritually rural, pious and simple, cannot. Fr. Guo thus defines and elevates himself vis-à-vis his congregation. Rather than perform the characterological naïveté that indexes rural piety at the expense of mental agility, he presents himself not so much as one who (only) listens, but as one who sees through deception and even preempts, as when he suspected my intentions, tricks and schemes. His recommendation to the congregation is that *they* listen – to God ultimately, but to him more proximately. How can they learn to hear clearly (see 4.14) if they do not first hear *him* clearly? Learning how to “listen” is thus a way of reinscribing the rural/urban contrast in a transnational social field – here, the deterritorialized wilderness in which

the heavenly and the earthly are all mixed up. “Policing” the parish by catching cult recruiters, Fr. Guo models the contrast that he exhorts his congregation to discern. His homily is densely indexical in that it is concretely *about* his relationship to his audience (see Bauman 1986:76). He concludes by stating that God ultimately is the one who “opens wide a great avenue” (4.15) – thus paving the way and building a bridge – for us to be changed by Fr. Guo’s message. Now that we have heard Fr. Guo, we can cross from the era of undiscerning rurality into the new age of spiritual transnationalism: to welcome Pope Francis and to be on guard against interlopers from Eastern Lightning, to interface with and differentiate between angels and demons, to overcome our (spiritually) rural susceptibility to cultish deceit.

Conclusion: how do clear divisions and blurry boundaries fit together?

Fr. Guo’s homily overlays the rural/urban, sacred/secular, and heavenly/earthly contrasts in two ways: (1) by mapping biblical and political events of transformation onto one another, as thematic parallels, and then (2) by mapping the narrative event of the homily itself onto the already narrated (biblically and politically parallel) events, as yet another thematically parallel event of social transformation. To illustrate the first scenario, he inaccurately recollects or invents President Clinton’s (unattested) visit to a Shanghai seminary in 1998. The seminary was locked down. He then asks the congregants, many of whom he says are from the Chinese countryside, to imagine a papal visit to their parish. By interpellating them as hosts of the pope, he envisions their social transformation from provincial Chinese into multilingual residents of New York City. To illustrate the second scenario, he warns the congregation against “false angels” from Eastern Lightning, a Chinese state-proscribed “cult.” Taking up the theme of the (voice in the) wilderness, he presents it as a quandary of communication in which fallen angels intermix with humanity and strive to call people away from God. By listening to Fr. Guo, the

congregation too can pave its way from the rural lack of discernment to the urban skill of discrimination.

Through these examples, this quandary of communication emerges as a site of social differentiation that separates those who can distinguish between the earthly and the heavenly from those who cannot. Fr. Guo associates the difficulty of discerning true from false Christians with the worldly inexperience of the rural migrant, especially one who has not yet cultivated strong social ties in the receiving community. In the absence of these ties, Fr. Guo recommends that his parishioners trust state and church institutions. By doing so, he projects urban Chinese stereotypes about rurality onto first-generation Chinese immigrants, even those who do not come from a rural background, while differentiating himself from them.

“[W]oven of the most exquisite contraries” (Wolin 2016[1960]:110), Augustine’s Christian politics overlays political and spiritual spheres without assimilating them. My interlocutors in Hangzhou and New York consistently insisted that the church activities in which they partook, whether Bible study fellowships or the reception of the sacraments, were anything but “political.” Although Fr. Guo likewise claims to “not do politics,” his examples – Clinton in Shanghai, police at Sheshan, and even Pope Francis in Brooklyn – are borrowed from the pomp and circumstance of political theater. As I have summarized in the Introduction, the reception (or invention) of the category of “religion” in China was and remains deeply tied to the formation of China as a modern nation-state (see Kipnis 2001 and Goossaert and Palmer 2010).

Seeing in present-day migration a pilgrimage in the wilderness is nothing new (see Cruz 2010:3ff.); Jesus has often been represented as a refugee, and his family a “refugee family” (see O’Neill and Spohn 1998, Feldman 2011, Anderson 2018). Gemma Tulud Cruz evokes the vision of a pilgrimage in the wilderness in her account of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong

(Cruz 2010) and Sunggu Yang discusses how the pilgrimage-in-the-wilderness story serves as a collective narrative for the Korean Christian diaspora in the United States (Yang 2016). For the Puritans too the “errand into the wilderness” was one that evolved alongside generational shifts and changing political contexts (see Miller 1956). An earlier generation of Puritans saw in their mission the fulfillment of the Reformation and the founding of a model, the so-called “city on a hill,” for Europe and the world to imitate.²⁰

Missions such as these borrow from Augustinian imagery while erasing Augustinian divisions. Although Fr. Guo does not explicitly cite Augustine, the contrasts explored in his Advent homily, from the separation of the spiritual and political spheres to the tricky similarity of demonic and angelic voices, is based on the contrast, fuzzy to human perception, between the interwoven cities of heaven and earth. The wilderness is not a territory to be tamed, but a space in which the process of differentiation or clarification occurs. Because humans lack the languageless telepathy of angels, there is space for indecision, persuasion, and deception.

For Augustine as for Fr. Guo, to learn how to separate true and false voices, political events and divine intentions, then, is to learn how to navigate multiple cities, multiple axes of differentiation. Recall that angels, *because* of their communicative virtuosity, do not change their minds; once fallen, they cannot be saved. There is no dual citizenship: one belongs either to the Heavenly City or the Earthly City (Kent 2012).²¹ Unlike angels, humans can and do change

²⁰ With the rise of global Christianity, a “reversal” of this missiological trajectory has been observed, from the southward demographic shift in Christian identification (Jenkins 2002) to the Roman Catholic Church’s hope that Latin American migrants in Rome be “new blood for the church...to feed...a much-needed revitalization of the Catholic heart of Europe” (Napolitano 2016:3).

²¹ Aquinas was later to disagree and claim, in arguing that human virtues can be good even if not endowed by God but acquired through one’s own resources, that such dual citizenship is possible, and that humans are members of both earthly and heavenly cities (Kent 2012:240-241).

affiliation again and again, and at least while they are journeying in the wilderness, can be doubly “transnational” with respect to both worldly and heavenly “nationalities.” Figure 4.4 fits the two parts of this chapter together by mapping (1) the thematic parallels between sacred and secular spheres into (2) the Augustinian quandary of communication:

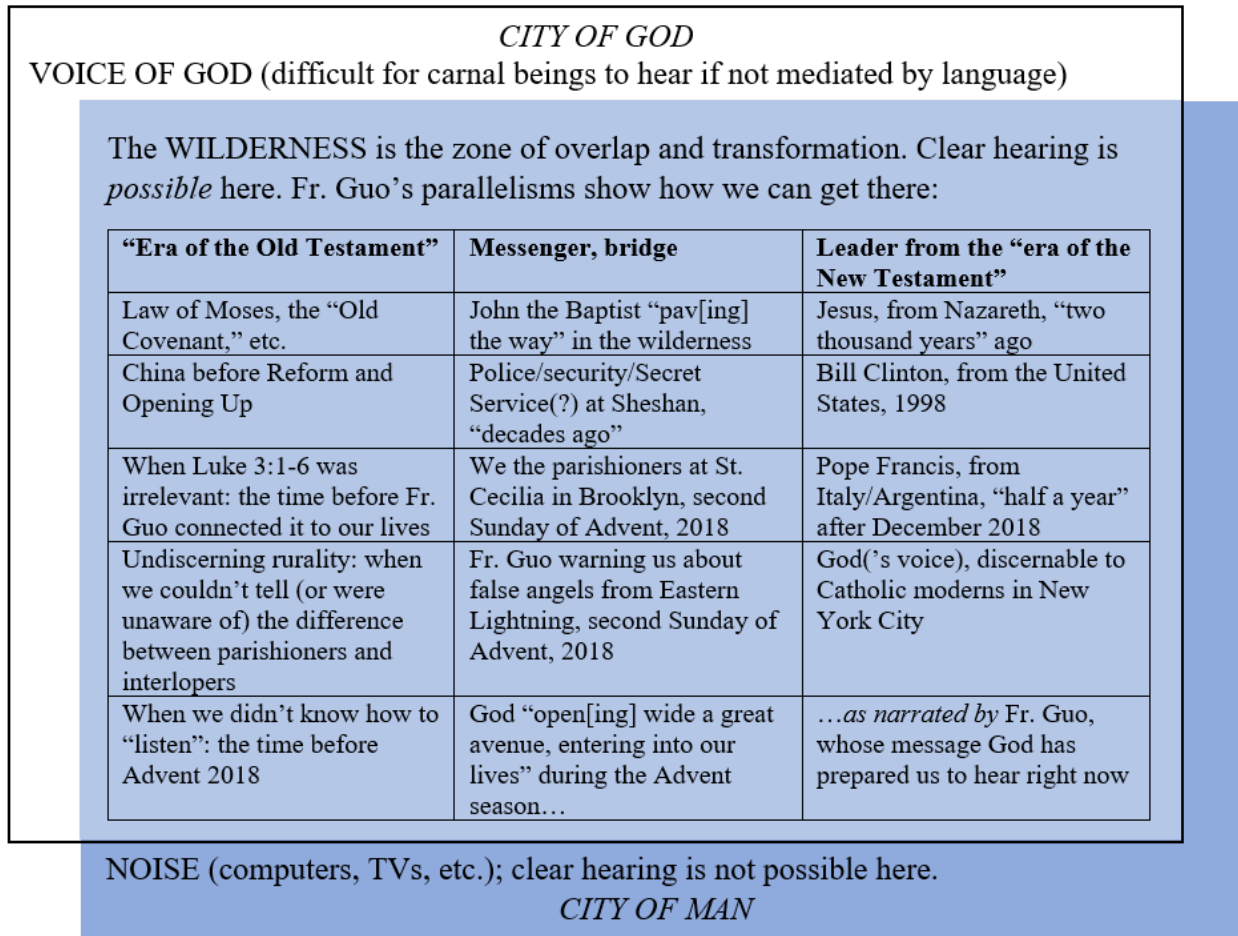


Figure 4.4. A diagram of persons and places mentioned by Fr. Guo in 4.1-4.15. (Figure 3 mapped onto Figure 2.)

The process of “listening to God” – here, listening for difference – is the practice through which Fr. Guo can differentiate himself from his congregation. The overlapping layers of thematically parallel events mimic the overlap of the two cities, forming a kind of diagrammatic icon of their

woven contraries.²² Fr. Guo’s combined use of Christian contrast and parallelism not only maps Chinese rurality onto the hazy “era of the Old Testament,” but also onto all lay immigrants indiscriminately. Meanwhile, the gap between the narrative event of Fr. Guo homilizing and the narrated events of John the Baptist in the wilderness, Clinton at Sheshan, and Pope Francis at St. Cecilia makes of the former yet another layer that can be analogized to the rest. Mirrored in the distance between the seated congregation and the standing homilist, the space in which the call to “listen to God” (through the homilist) is transmitted becomes also an icon of the “wilderness” through which the voice of God can reach the City of Man (see Figure 4.4). This chapter has sought to show how one priest’s exhortation to “listen to God” becomes, through the thematic parallelism in his homily, a way of linking social difference to Christian contrast.

²² Augustine on the poetic value of “oppositions of contraries”: “For God would never have created any, I do not say angel, but even man, whose future wickedness He foreknew, unless He had equally known to what uses in behalf of the good He could turn him, thus embellishing the course of the ages, as it were an exquisite poem set off with antitheses...As, then, these oppositions of contraries lend beauty to the language, so the beauty of the course of this world is achieved by the opposition of contraries, arranged, as it were, by an eloquence not of words, but of things” (*De civ.* 11.18, Marcus Dods, trans.).

Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that “callings” to urban and transnational futures are among the affordances of Catholic minoritarianism in China. This claim intervenes in scholarly studies of Chinese Catholicism as a largely village-based phenomenon still trying to come to terms with global modernity. In taking up the axis of differentiation between the sacred and the secular as a contrast between communicative postures (listening vs. scheming), upwardly mobile Chinese Catholics have fashioned a confessional style of mobility. Three priests and a wealthy urban family at Hangzhou’s Midtown Catholic Church – or rather, between China and the United States – are the points of entry through which this dissertation examines confessional mobility. Whether it is getting across the airport border or entering a private household, and whether it is confronting the Hangzhou city government or being on guard against rival missionaries in New York City, Catholic mobility is confessionally structured by the listening/scheming and kin/stranger contrasts. In professing to “listen to God” or to “follow God’s plan,” people called by God defer their personal agency while moving upward socially and spiritually. The kin/stranger contrast comes into play as the affective demands and obligations of hospitality, *renqing*, and filiation ecclesiology recruit actors to their roles in a participant framework.

If early Christianity was primarily an urban movement (see Stark 1996), in China Christianity was, at least until the 1960s, the exact opposite (Huang 2014:S238). As rural Christian migrants continue to move outward into cities, and into cities outside China, the politics of Christian unity, whether Protestant or Catholic, reflects the tensions between the rural and the urban. Adapting the concept of confessional mobility as articulated by Liesbeth Corens (2019), I acknowledge that the theme of exile has long been characteristic of Chinese Catholic history (Clark 2014) and of rural Catholicism in particular (Wong 2016). Moving on from the

observation that “exile” characterizes how the migrant church (or, relatedly but not equivalently, what Huang [2012] calls the “rural church in the city” [*doushilide xiangcun jiaohui*]) understands its relationship to the rest of a secular, urban society of which it is a part, but in which it is not fully integrated (Wong 2016:101), this dissertation attends to the migratory, transnational affordances of being Christian and Chinese.

Part I, “Strangers at the door: making contact, marking contrast,” explored how the high stakes of transnational encounters, especially when they go wrong, are navigated and resolved through Christian texts or models of conversion and charity. (Mis)adventures in border crossing and ethnographic rapport reveal how the listening/scheming contrast and the kin/stranger contrast regiment the boundaries and perceptions of Chineseness. When Fr. Chen tells the young woman that “[w]e Chinese have got to follow the law [and] immigrate in a more legitimate way” and Therese Zhou Fang tells me that “we say *liang an yi jia qin* [‘two shores, one family’] because we share the same culture,” “look the same,” and “speak the same language,” they are embedding a Chinese state-aligned metapragmatics of ethnonational identity and mobility into the moral obligations of Catholic solidarity.

Fr. Chen attests that his unlikely reentry into Canada was planned by God, and that “[y]ou cannot help but assist what God has planned” (1.3). Leveraging the transnational, spiritual authority of the Roman Catholic Church against the airport police, he implies that his passage was God’s scheme all along. At the same time, the public confessionality of this very passage (e.g., “I just said, I’m a priest, I went on pilgrimage” [1.15]) destabilizes the fraught division between the official or Patriotic church and the underground church. Viewed by many Western observers as accomplices of the Chinese Communist Party, Patriotic priests like Fr. Chen do not find it easy to align themselves with the underground community. Vocational transparency, first

declared on official forms and then professed through the legality of (im)migration, is the way Fr. Chen and Fr. Lü counteract suspicions of self-interested scheming and authenticate their calling to a life overseas. What they do not say is that this transparency is made possible by their official, Patriotic affiliation; after all, underground priests cannot be as frank about their occupation on official forms and still expect them to be approved.

Meanwhile, private donations to priests such as Fr. Lü from wealthy Midtowners like Therese Zhou Fang comprise a kind of Catholicized neoliberalism that infuses economic relationships with love (see Muehlebach 2013). Uneasy about planning for her son's future (as well as her own) in the United States, Zhou Fang turns to Fr. Lü, and through him listens to God. In return, Fr. Lü provides both spiritual consolation and practical advice: what Americans are like and how to befriend them, where to rent a storefront, where the good school districts are, where to look for housing, whom to ask, and so on. (Zhou Fang and her husband Kang Jianxin had been planning to open a sushi restaurant in the San Gabriel Valley.) On the one hand, as a priest, Fr. Lü possesses the priority of pastoral status and the authority to dispense spiritual direction. On the other hand, he remains the vulnerable rural beneficiary of an affluent urban donor. After the breakdown of rapport between Zhou Fang and me, Fr. Lü scrambled to stay in her good graces. What was irreparably offensive was that I (according to Zhou Fang) had accused her of scheming. Stripped of (the recognition of) the love that infuses economically motivated relationships, the moral style of Zhou Fang's charity toward both Fr. Lü and me was at stake.

The Christian encounter is meant to be transformative: participants emerge as either kindred (in spirit as converts, or in law via marriage) or as strangers. In Fr. Chen's recollection of being granted an exception to cross the border with an invalid visa, the border police are

recruited to the role of the Philippian jailer who converts to Christianity after Paul and Silas are miraculously freed by an earthquake that opens all doors and unfastens all fetters (Acts 16:25-34). In Zhou Fang's case, the falling out between us is scaled up to a betrayal of biblical and political proportions, resulting in a curious mixture of Christian estrangement and ethnonational cooption. Enraged that I had speculated upon the transactional nature of her (and her husband's) hospitality, Zhou Fang deploys a communicative repertoire of subposting and allegorizing, lamenting on WeChat that she "[e]xperienced once what Jesus felt at that time, that's all." Intentionally or not, the anonymized codedness her remarks, from a reference to me as a *waidiren* or internal migrant to a post about giving alms to a scammer, was easily taken up by family members and viewers on "my" side as broadly reflective of anti-Taiwanese sentiment. Christian models of conversion and charity enable Fr. Chen and Zhou Fang to make contact and mark contrast in ways that align with Chinese norms and class ideologies of occupational transparency, transnational mobility, and cross-strait relations.

Part II, "Uncrossings: responses to state and supernatural interference," examined how the spiritual challenges of mobility (or immobility) and migration are peculiar to their situatedness in urban contexts, whether in China or in the United States. I compare Protestant and Catholic responses to the state-mandated "renovation" of the urban landscape in Hangzhou – a renovation that targeted churches and rooftop crosses. The young Protestant professionals at Lian'an interpret Zhejiang Province's Three Rectifications, One Demolition campaign (2013-2016) through a chronotopic ideology that pries apart the coherence of relations between time, space, and personhood: Christians need not be, nor are they always, identifiable by outward marks of religion like crosses or ornate chapels. Organized by their distinction between *jiaohui* (the church community) and *jiaotang* (the church building), the First Fruits' way of dividing time

and space separates *renqingwei'r* (human warmth or the flavor of human relationality) from the materiality of concrete structures like houses, chapels, and crosses.

For the parishioners at Midtown, however, this materiality cannot be separated from the filiational ecclesiology that binds time (generational continuity) to space (geographic provenance) and personhood (clan membership). It is this filiational ecclesiology that makes their mobility – or immobility, or even refusal to move – confessional: “[Our] church is our home [or family, *jia*], all of us have the duty of offering up prayers. [...] May the Lord begin the work, still the waves, and save our family estate [*jiaye*]!” They were called to hold on. The city government’s expropriation and subsequent auction of a piece of church land tore at the *renqing* or human feeling sought by the Midtowners in the form of remuneration. Absent the government’s acknowledgment of Midtown’s historical claim to the land – “our home,” “our house,” according to the Midtowners – their feelings of aggrievement and immobility gave way to an eerie sense of un-housing: a recollection of demonic possession, a recurring awareness of ghosts in the chapel, a sudden interest in exorcism.

When a different chronotopic dilemma of spiritual “home” invasion occurs at a Brooklyn congregation of immigrants, former Midtown priest Fr. Guo delivers a homily urging his flock to be wary of “false angels” from Eastern Lightning, a Chinese state-proscribed “cult.” Because Eastern Lightning missionaries prey upon naïve Chinese immigrants that Fr. Guo describes as rural, knowing how to not be “tricked” means knowing how to withstand the intoxicating distractions of technology and the ruses of bad operators like an urbanite. In this mixed community of immigrants from all over China, the filiational ecclesiology so palpable at Midtown is absent. Himself a former villager, Fr. Guo acknowledges the vulnerability of these immigrants and their need for a reliable, supportive community while assuming their

susceptibility to religious (and economic) deception. In doing so, he falls back on stereotypes of rurality as well as the Chinese state's enforcement of the sacred/secular contrast and the credibility of the global, institutional church.

The heavenly/earthly contrast organizes the biblical and political events of transformation related by Fr. Guo: John the Baptist announcing the coming of Jesus, a (fictive) U.S. presidential visit to a Shanghai seminary, and an imagined papal visit to Fr. Guo's parish. Subtly structured by Augustine's metaphor of the interwoven, overlapping cities of God and Man, these disparate events are figured as overlapping semiotic parallels of each other. The site of their overlap is the "wilderness," in the homily a spiritually transnational space in which the "nations" in question are the Christians who struggle to discern God's voice and the fallen angels who scheme to draw them away. "Listening to God" emerges as a kind of confessional mobility: rural-to-transnational social differentiation is enacted via spiritual expertise. Through Fr. Guo's thematic parallelism, interpreting Christian contrasts becomes a way of delineating social difference. Fr. Guo, an expert in distinguishing the heavenly from the earthly, is thus able to self-differentiate as someone who has successfully transitioned to urban life.

This dissertation has sought to examine Catholic politics and mobilities as they are formed in the transnational and upward social trajectories of Chinese Catholics. Enabled by and embedded in the social and semiotic field of Chinese Catholicism are the callings to migrate and marry overseas, impose *renqing* as the condition of church-state relations, and become vigilant urban subjects. These futures are achieved via a confessional style of mobility that "calls" people from the village to the city, and from China to overseas Chinese communities. The moral demands that make possible this migratory pathway are among the changing socioeconomic affordances of Catholic minoritarianism in China.

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