



# THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

This thesis has been submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a postgraduate degree (e. g. PhD, MPhil, DClinPsychol) at the University of Edinburgh. Please note the following terms and conditions of use:

- This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, which are retained by the thesis author, unless otherwise stated.
- A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.
- This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the author.
- The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the author.
- When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Ling'en Christianity in San Gabriel Valley:  
Immigrant Chinese Doing Religion in the United States

Zhongchao Ma 马中超

World Christianity PhD

The University of Edinburgh

2025

Ma 1

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis would not be possible without the kindness, trust, and generosity of the Chinese American Christians and churches of this study. It is my hopeful wish that this study reflects their lived experiences. The participants of this study are all first-generation immigrants, having travelled to an unknown land typically in search of economic opportunities for themselves and their families. Few travelled as Christians while most found Christianity, mainstream evangelicalism and then ling'en Christianity, in these new lands. I join in with my participants' experience as a migrant to the United States.

Words cannot express how much I am indebted to my insightful, kind, sharp, and patient supervisors – Dr. Alexander Chow (Chinese theologian) and Dr. Mark McLeister (ethnographer of Chinese society). I learned so much from both Alex and Mark. I am also grateful to my thesis examiners – Dr. Naomi Haynes (internal; social anthropologist) and Dr. Chris White (external; historian of modern China) for their careful reading of this thesis and their many helpful questions and comments.

Along the journey I met several supportive friends: Cai Shiqi, Xian Chuojie, Josh Ip, Xie Dingjian, Wang Sijia, Axolile Ntsika Qina, and the many friends at Chinese Evangelical Church of Edinburgh. I am incredibly thankful to my family – Nancy Dong (spouse), Jay Ma (twin brother), and Tina Ma (mother) – for their sustained encouragement, sacrifice, and for our conversations about some of the ideas in this study. Finally, I want to thank the UK's NHS system and its wonderful doctors, nurses, and support staff who treated me with kindness in times of difficulty.

## Abstract

The San Gabriel Valley (SGV) occupies much of the southeast part of Los Angeles County and is home to hundreds of thousands of immigrant Chinese and hundreds of immigrant Chinese Protestant churches. Amongst immigrant Chinese American Protestants in SGV, a minority group, often described as “Pentecostal” or “charismatic,” but in this thesis referred to as “ling’en,” engage in religious practices that emphasize the Holy Spirit and manifestations of the Holy Spirit within the lives of its adherents. Through a close interrogation of SGV ling’en religious practices and understandings, this study reveals a negotiation between Christianity, Chinese religiosity and culture, and their status as migrants in the United States.

Drawing upon data generated through ethnographic methods, this study tests and expands on the five modalities of religious practices, a theoretical framework developed by anthropologist Adam Yuet Chau to analyze Chinese religiosity within Greater China. These five modalities are: the personal-cultivational, the immediate-practical, the relational, the discursive/scriptural, and the liturgical. Chau’s framework has been minimally applied to diasporic Chinese residing outside Greater China and overlooks Christianity. This study seeks to address these limitations by arguing that SGV ling’en Christianity is an expression of immigrant Chinese doing religion in the United States. Through categorization of ling’en religious practices into the modalities and follow up analyses, the study reveals and discusses the “Chineseness” of their religious practices and understandings. These include *gandong* (a group of emotional and physical responses to ling’en Christian interactions with the Holy Spirit), *ling* (magical efficacy of deities), *guanxi* (social connectedness), and the gendered nature of ritualistic practices. The study expands Chau’s modalities framework by proposing a sixth modality, World Management, highlighting religious practices that engage the public space (space between the state and family).

The application of the modalities framework to SGV ling’en has produced several useful insights. First, it demonstrates the feasibility of the framework developed out of Chinese religiosity which did not include Christianity nor diasporic Chinese (outside of Greater

China) in its original formulation by viewing individual ling'en religious practices as belonging to distinct modalities. Second, it expands the framework in several ways including a sixth modality as well as adding new dimensions and/or considerations to each modality through analysis of ling'en religious practices. Third, the study introduces layered thinking as a tool to interrogate the understandings behind ling'en religious practices (and beyond), often challenging and expanding Chau's modalities to include SGV ling'en Chinese American Christians as Chinese doing religion.

## Lay Summary

The San Gabriel Valley (SGV) in Los Angeles County is home to many Chinese immigrants and hundreds of Chinese Protestant churches. Among these churches is a smaller group of Christians, often described as “Pentecostal” or “charismatic,” but referred as “ling’en” in this project. Ling’en Christians focus on the Holy Spirit and its role in their everyday lives. This study explores the religious practices of ling’en Christians and considers their relationship with Chinese culture and their unique experiences as immigrants in the United States.

Using ethnographic data including interviews and participant observation, this study applies and adapts a framework by Adam Yuet Chau originally developed to study religious practices in Greater China. While this framework was not designed for Christianity or immigrant communities outside of Greater China, the study shows how it can be used to understand the religious practices of ling’en Christians in SGV. It also adds a new modality, called “World Management,” to explain how these Christians use their faith to address social and political issues.

The study highlights key aspects of ling’en religious practices, such as emotional and physical responses to the Holy Spirit, ideas of spiritual power, the importance of social connections, and the role of gender in religious rituals. It reveals how their faith is deeply shaped by Chinese culture and how they adapt it to their lives as immigrants. This study shows that ling’en Christianity is a way for Chinese immigrants to stay connected to their cultural roots while navigating life in the United States as immigrants. It expands our understanding of how religion and culture interact, especially in immigrant Chinese communities.

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Lay Summary.....	5
Table of Contents.....	6
Table of Figures.....	10
List of Abbreviations.....	11
Introduction to the Study of SGV Ling'en Christianity.....	12
Project Origins, Literature Review, and Research Questions.....	14
Chinese Christianity and Chinese Religiosity and Culture.....	14
Immigrant Chinese Christianity in the United States.....	23
Research Questions.....	26
Methodology: Methods and Theory.....	28
Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological approach.....	28
Fieldsite and Participant Selection and Limitations.....	30
Data Generation and the Ethnographer.....	32
Ethical, legal and data protection issues.....	37
Theoretical Framework: Modalities of Doing Religion.....	37
Chapters Overview.....	45
Conclusion.....	47
Some Notes on Hanyu pinyin and Simplified Chinese.....	48
Chapter One: Chinese Immigration and Christianity in San Gabriel Valley.....	49
Introduction.....	49
Chinese Immigration to the United States and "Chineseness".....	49
Chinese Protestantism in the United States.....	54
San Gabriel Valley, its Chinese Migrants and Ling'en Institutions.....	57
Site One: Vineyard of Harvest in Walnut, California – A Chinese Vineyard Congregation.....	61
Site Two: Great Commission Church International in Hacienda Heights, California; An Evangelical Plus Ling'en Congregation.....	64
Site Three: Agape Renewal Center in Walnut, California; Headquarter of Chinese Ling'en.....	67
Why "Ling'en" and the Swimming Pool Analogy.....	70
Ling'en "Conversion".....	77
Conclusion.....	79

Chapter Two: Gandong Production and Cultivation Through Ling'en Practices .....	81
Introduction .....	81
Personal-Cultivational Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity .....	82
From Cultivating "Head Knowledge" to Gandong.....	85
Introducing Emotional Experience and Communicational Experience Gandong .....	91
Conversion through the Production of EE gandong.....	92
Repeating EE Gandong Production .....	98
Actualizing and Authenticating CE Gandong.....	101
When CE gandong fails.....	108
Conclusion.....	111
Chapter Three: Ling'en Cosmology and Magical Efficacy.....	114
Introduction .....	114
Immediate-Practical Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity .....	115
Ling'en Drawing Material from Chinese Cosmologies .....	119
Defeating Harmful Ghosts? .....	125
Borrowing from Chinese Cosmologies: Prognostication and Prophecy.....	134
Conclusion.....	140
Chapter Four: Making and Sustaining of Ling'en Guanxi .....	144
Introduction .....	144
The Relational Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity .....	145
Valuing hG guanxi over hh guanxi .....	148
Guanxi and its Key Components .....	150
Ling'en hG Guanxi Logic.....	155
hG Guanxi: Making a Connection.....	155
hG Guanxi: Sustaining a Connection .....	157
Ling'en hh Guanxi: Making and Sustaining a Connection .....	160
Ling'en hG Influence on hh .....	167
hG Guanxi: Positively Altering a Connection.....	167
Negotiating Ling'en Gifts (enci) and Guanxi.....	173
Conclusion.....	177
Chapter Five: Encountering the Holy Spirit through Ling'en Biblical Practices.....	179
Introduction .....	179
Discursive/Scriptural Modality in Chinese religiosity and Chinese Christianity.....	179

Ling'en View and Interpretation of Christian Scripture.....	182
“We do what the Bible says” .....	188
Views on Scripture in Layered Thinking .....	191
Ling'en Discursive/Scriptural Practices with the Bible .....	195
Private Engagements with the Bible .....	195
Studying the Bible communally .....	200
Preaching the Bible .....	203
Conclusion.....	208
Chapter Six: Ling'en Ritual Space and Specialists, and Gender.....	210
Introduction .....	210
The Liturgical Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity.....	211
Pastors, Laypeople, and Female Itinerants as Ritual Specialists .....	212
“Equipping and Practicing” as Process for Ritual Specialist Training .....	215
Equipping (zhuangbei) .....	215
Practicing (xunlian).....	219
Ritual Specialists and Healing .....	221
Harp and Bowl: A Case study of Female Itinerant Ritualists.....	226
Gender and Female Itinerant Ritualists in Ling'en and Chinese Religiosity .....	232
Conclusion.....	238
Chapter Seven: Ling'en Management of the World through Sociopolitical Participation .....	241
Introduction .....	241
World Management Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity.....	242
Overview of WM Practices amongst SGV Ling'en Christians .....	249
Ling'en Management of the World .....	252
Ling'en Spiritual Warfare.....	256
Ling'en Political Activism and Consumption of Ethnic Media .....	263
Conclusion.....	269
Conclusion.....	271
Introduction .....	271
Modalities of Doing Religion and Layered Thinking.....	271
Immigrant Chinese Doing Religion in the United States .....	275
Limitations and Further Research .....	276
Conclusion.....	278

References Cited .....	280
Appendix A – Participant Demographics.....	305
Appendix B – Character List .....	306
Appendix C – People and Organizations .....	326

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 A Chinese supermarket in one of the many commercial squares in SGV (photo by author).....	59
Figure 2 Vineyard of Harvest Church (photo taken by author).....	61
Figure 3 Great Commission Church International (photo taken by author) .....	64
Figure 4 Agape Renewal Center (photo taken by author) .....	67

## **List of Abbreviations**

ARC	Agape Renewal Center
ATS	Association of Theological Schools
CPC	Communist Party of China
FRCC	Forerunner Christian Church
GCCI	Great Commission Church International
NAR	New Apostolic Reformation
RCCC	Rutger's Christian Community Church
SGV	San Gabriel Valley
TSPM	Three-Self Patriotic Movement
VOH	Vineyard of Hope

## Introduction to the Study of SGV Ling'en Christianity

On a Friday evening in 2022 a group of twenty-five Chinese immigrants in the United States – most of whom were Christians – gathered for a two day “camp gathering” *yinghui* in the main sanctuary of a church building located in San Gabriel Valley (SGV), a region in the suburbs of Los Angeles. In the two days, participants sat on metal folding chairs and listened to over a dozen “short teachings”, each lasting roughly thirty minutes with a variety of activities between sessions. These teachings drew from dozens of biblical verses and personal stories. They argued for the biblical legitimacy and spiritual necessity for each person to “encounter God” in personal and transformative ways. The hope was for each participant to “receive the Holy Spirit” and begin their lifelong cultivation of an intimate relationship with God through various religious practices. In the context of ling'en Christianity in America, to “receive the Holy Spirit” is a central gift in a constellation of gifts of the Holy Spirit. The compound Chinese word ling'en comprises of two characters: *ling* (spirit, soul) and *en* (grace, gift). In the context of SGV, *ling'en Christianity* – which has been translated into English terms as “Pentecostal”, “charismatic”, and “Pentecostal-charismatic” Christianity, among others – refers to expressions of Chinese Christianity that emphasize the Holy Spirit and its manifestation (with spiritual gifts being a key emphasis) within the lives of believers through its religious practices and teachings. From this emphasis flows Christian practices that are unique in many subtle ways and different from their mainstream evangelical counterpart.<sup>1</sup> In chapter one I discuss in greater detail the particularities of SGV ling'en and my reasoning for using the Chinese term, *ling'en*, instead of English terms.

During one of the seven sessions, participants were invited to walk up to the front of the carpeted large hall. The main lights were dimmed down, while a few lights remained at half strength and pointed at the stage. In this gentle glow, participants approached the stage and organically drew towards pairing up with those who were “serving” (*fushi*). As I approached the stage, a lay Christian, Xu (male, 50s)<sup>2</sup>, gently signaled that he would

---

<sup>1</sup> In chapter one, I discuss in detail participant understanding of mainstream evangelicalism and their conversion from evangelicalism to ling'en.

<sup>2</sup> Participant demographics are provided in Appendix A.

be serving me. He called out to me in Mandarin: “brother, let me pray for you”. Though I had only briefly spoken to Xu earlier and introduced myself as a fellow Christian and researcher of ling’en Christianity, he addressed me as “brother” signifying that we were members of one spiritual family.

Though he stood slightly lower than me, he raised both arms and rested his hands on my shoulders, at times holding onto them gently. I lowered my forehead, clasped my hands together near my waist, and closed my eyes in a posture of prayer. My pose was like that of expectant submission – in preparation to receive the Holy Spirit and its gifts by means of Xu and his prayer. He closed his eyes. With just an inch between our foreheads, Xu drew in deep slow breaths and began to pray for me in a hushed, controlled tone. At first the content of his prayers was characteristic of the countless Christian prayers I had experienced in the church – for my health, research, family, personal faith, and other relationships. Suddenly, he paused and looked up at me. Noticing this, I opened my eyes and looked back. He said to me that God communicated to him that I would gain the ling’en ability to “translate tongues” (*fan fangyan*), and he prayed as such. This lasted roughly ten minutes. As I returned to my seat, I observed that a few other participants were experiencing the prayer in different ways. Some were being prayed for physical healing and later that night, two briefly spoke of their experiences of healing.

I later found out that Xu had first attended this gathering many years ago as a participant. During that gathering someone had prayed for him to receive the ling’en gift to “speak prophecy” (*shuo yuyan*). Years later, he used that gift on me. Xu and other ling’en participants who speak prophecy legitimize this religious practice squarely on the New Testament text of Acts 2:17: “God says: in the last days, I will pour my spirit onto all blood (life), your sons and daughters will speak prophecies, your young people will see visions, and elderly will have prophetic dreams.”<sup>3</sup> As we will see in chapter five, when ling’en read this and other texts they interpret them as God’s promises and take these promises very seriously in part by incorporating them into their religious practices.

---

<sup>3</sup> My translation from the Chinese Union Version.

Ling'en believe that the "filling of the Holy Spirit" activates prophecy and other gifts, where prophecy is foreknowledge received from God through the Holy Spirit, typically for the purpose of speaking to other individuals about some future or unknown event. Ling'en prophecies may come as clear warnings, cryptic messages, and comforting words.

### **Project Origins, Literature Review, and Research Questions**

I first heard about ling'en Christianity over ten years ago in Beijing, China where I resided between 2012 and 2014 for work and regularly attended an urban unregistered Protestant congregation. I recall that the church was overtly "anti-ling'en" (*fandui ling'en*) and every so often taught against "crazy" (*fengkuang*) religious practices such as speaking in tongues and speaking prophecies and those who practiced them. After I returned to the United States for Christian theological studies and pastoral training in 2014, I attended a mainstream evangelical immigrant Chinese church in northern San Diego that was generally less hostile towards religious practices that are typically referred to as ling'en. This project was birthed out of personal interest in ling'en Chinese Christianity and narrowed in scope due to the accessibility of ling'en Christianity amongst Chinese Americans in SGV during the COVID19 pandemic.

#### *Chinese Christianity and Chinese Religiosity and Culture*

This study contributes to scholarship on Chinese Christianity and encounters with so-called Chinese culture and religiosity, as well as a broader context of "pre-Christian" culture. The interaction between Chinese religiosity (and culture) and Christianity can be very roughly summed up through the concepts of continuity and discontinuity thinking. Amongst social scientists, continuity thinking argues that cultural material such as symbols, meanings, logics, structures, and power dynamics have an enduring quality and are not readily subject to change (Robbins 2007, 9). On the other hand, discontinuity (also, rupture) thinking highlights change in cultural material – in this discussion, following conversion to Christianity.

It is instructive to note that discontinuity/continuity has been a major theme in anthropology of Christianity in recent decades (Meyer 1999; Maxwell 2006; Engelke 2010). Writing in the early 2000s, anthropologist Joel Robbins has argued that while the field of cultural anthropology has generally adopted continuity thinking, evidence against continuity cannot be ignored (cf. Marshall 2016, 4). Robbins (2003) cites anthropologist JP Kiernan's work amongst Zulu Zionists in South Africa, in which Kiernan traces the affinities between the Zionist prophet and the diviner. Kiernan (1992, 240) concludes that while "there are obvious similarities in the conduct of diviners and Zionist prophets, the similarity falls well short of simple equivalence." In other words, Kiernan pointed to the false equivalence fallacy in which two objects – one in Christianity and the other in indigenous culture – are claimed to be essentially similar (or identical) because they share some characteristics, an idea found in continuity thinking.<sup>4</sup> Robbins (2007) explains that his emphasis on discontinuity was to restore balance to the heavy bias towards continuity in existing literature at the time.

In the decades since then, scholars have thoroughly explored and critiqued discontinuity/continuity in various contexts. Anthropologist Liana Chua warns that the swing towards discontinuity should be questioned. In her work amongst Christian Bidayus in Malaysia Borneo, she notes that Christian converts found ways of maintaining links with animist rituals known as the *adat gawai* (2012). Near the end of her article (2012, 521), Chua juxtaposes the Anglicans and Catholics against the Christians of the Borneo Evangelical Church, the latter group outrightly rejecting *adat gawai*. Thus, while her argument was to show that continuity can be seen in Christian conversion (in attempt to push the pendulum back towards continuity in response to Robbins), it seems has demonstrated the diversity of discontinuity/continuity thinking amongst various types of Christianity and specifically highlights the theme of discontinuity amongst Protestant Christians In Borneo. Anthropologist Girish Daswani (2013) notes that while Pentecostal conversion is rife with rhetoric of rupture (discontinuity), it is never exclusively articulated in the dichotomy of continuity/discontinuity. Instead, Daswani examines rupture as an ethical practice which

---

<sup>4</sup> Historian Henrietta Harrison (2013, 4-5) makes a similar remark in her study of Catholicism in China.

encompasses complexities, certainties, and uncertainties. Implicit in these discussions is the aspect of time – that is, how Christians think about the past, present, and future. We will visit this aspect shortly below.

Returning to the theme of continuity/discontinuity in studies on Chinese Christianity: an early example of continuity thinking is historian Daniel Bays' (1982) contention that the content of Chinese religiosity shares many features with Christianity such as salvation, apocalypse, and a creator deity such that Chinese converts to Christianity did not have to adopt an entirely new cosmology.<sup>5</sup> Swiss theologian Hans Küng and Chinese American scholar of Chinese religion and philosophy Julia Ching (1989) explore the relationship of concepts found within Christianity and Chinese religions including the Three Teachings (*sanjiao*). Küng suggests that it possible for a person to simultaneously take seriously Christianity and Chinese religiosity on the theological basis that the spirit of Jesus Christ can be enculturated to the entirety of human experience. Here Bays, Ching, and Küng advocate for continuity thinking in terms of religious and theological ideas. Others have looked for continuity in other aspects. For example, in their examination of Chinese churches in Hong Kong, Philip L. Wickeri and Ruiwen Chen (2015) observe that the concept of “family” is illustrated in church service and outreach in the local society. Additionally, they note the Chinese-style architecture used in the construction of buildings such as St. Mary's Church.

As for discontinuity thinking, I cite three examples. First, historically, Protestant missionaries condemned religious practices related to ancestors such as the burning of incense or spirit paper money and maintaining an ancestral tablet or household altar. Second, following the Miao conversion to Christianity, they rejected the indigenous shamanism and previously held religious beliefs. However, they maintained some cultural preferences such as many young Miao Christians going off to the cities in search of a better education and jobs. They then send money home, and visit when they can, bolstering the presence of Christianity back home (Wickeri and Tam 2011). Finally, Anthropologist Cao Nanlai traces the rejection of cultural materials in the conversion of Wenzhou people to Christianity. Cao (2011) notes that while they

---

<sup>5</sup> Also see Bays 2012, 33.

embrace Western culture, United States English, and an understanding of modern, civil, urban, and entrepreneurial religiosity, they reject feudal superstitions and uncouthness (*tu*) typically associated with people of rural origins. Furthermore, they condemn symbols such as the dragon and phoenix which traditionally represent auspiciousness and harmony.

Historian Melissa Inouye (2018, 6) notes that scholarly investigation of the True Jesus Church in China has emphasized continuity thinking between the charismatic practices of the church and those of Chinese popular religiosity, leading some to emphasize the “Chineseness” of the church. Similarly, Chris White (2017, 8) who has written on Christianity in modern China finds that scholars have perhaps overly emphasized continuities in Chinese religiosity and Protestantism. White (2018, 113) and Inouye (2016, 897) express a suspicion regarding the attribution of Christian religious practices that share similar characteristics with Chinese religiosity as “Chinese”. Noting that such affinities can also be seen amongst the Yoruba in West Africa, Inouye (2018, 7) suggests that overlaps in Christianity and local religiosities are generally expected where Christianity encounters local cultures around the world.

Several scholars of Chinese Christianity recognize the framework of continuity and discontinuity thinking as problematic and have tried to move beyond it.<sup>6</sup> For example, anthropologist Michel Chambon summarized the social scientific studies of Chinese Christianity as “messy” in their search to evaluate continuity and discontinuity (also referred to as change). Chambon (2020, 6) is interested in how Chinese Christianity produces categories and standards for assessing themselves as Christ’s disciples, while still retaining some elements of the framework. Inouye (2018, 8-9) turned to the religious ideas, language, and motivations of the True Jesus Church that sparked its birth and sustained its growth. White (2017, 8) also pushes back against continuity thinking with hope of “slightly readjusting the pendulum to a more central position”. I contend that continuity and discontinuity (or change) thinking may be problematic for

---

<sup>6</sup> Outside of Chinese Christianity, anthropologist Naomi Haynes (2017, 161) argues that Christianity’s internal tension between continuity and discontinuity “structures around its capacity to make claims about value”. Indeed, many scholars in the field of anthropology of Christianity, including Robbins, recognize that Christian conversion involves both continuity and discontinuity aspects.

two reasons. First, to think in these terms suggest that the influence of Christianity on pre-Christian material as effecting change or preservation operates at some “essential” level, leaving one vulnerable to the essentialism fallacy. Second, these labels suggest that the impact of Christianity on a culture is either all or nothing.

I propose that instead of viewing the relationship between pre-Christian culture and Christianity in terms of continuities and discontinuities, we may view them as “layers” of vellum (or translucent) paper – what I call, “layered thinking”. Imagine placing a vellum layer of Christianity over a vellum layer of pre-Christian culture. When viewing the Christian layer, the text and images may alter how we visualize the underlying layer(s). On some parts of the page where there is interaction – what I call “points of contact”, the content of the underlying layer will come through more clearly, even if it has been altered by the upper page. On other parts of the page, the underlying layer might be largely covered by the upper layer – this formation of layering might be described by extreme discontinuity. For example, White’s (2017, 10) observation that entrance into the Minnan required at least a partial denial of one’s previously held beliefs and practices. In layered thinking, this is where the Christian layer has, in theory, covered up the lower layer. Still on other parts of the page, the lower layer shows up perfectly unaltered.

Indeed, studies have shown that the negotiation between Christianity and pre-Christian culture to be far more complex than continuity and discontinuity. Take for example Shu-ling Yeh and Ying-Cheng Chang (2021) study amongst the indigenous Amis community in Taiwan. They note that amongst the Amis, Presbyterianism was rejected for its refusal to tolerate the *ilisin* harvest ritual, yet Catholicism was embraced due to its acceptance of Amis customs and ritual practices (Yeh and Chang 2021, 375-377). This divergence can be explained using “layered thinking” in that one type of Christianity was rejected because the Amis could not accept the fact that it did not allow for the pre-Christian cultural layer to shine through. Yet to say that Catholicism simply allowed for the continuation of the *ilisin* ritual and culture ignores details such as Amis Catholics actively re-imagining the ritual as an exchange between traditional Amis cosmology and Christianity, and Mother Mary being incorporated into Amis ritual processions as the

center piece (Yeh and Chang 2021, 380). Therefore, in the rituals alone, we see some elements that are extended yet at the same time other elements that are radically altered (i.e. we would not imagine the Amis carrying around Mother Mary in ritual processions prior to their conversion to Catholicism). It seems that the layer of Catholicism amongst the Amis serves to impact Amis pre-Christian culture in several ways including *continuation*, *preservation*, and *re-imagination*.

Another example can be seen in Yang Shu-Yuan's (2008) study on the Bunun, an Austronesian-speaking indigenous people of Taiwan. They viewed Christianity as "the same" as Bunun traditional beliefs. Yang notes that compared to Robbins (2004) Urapmin case study where people make a conscious effort to keep Christianity foreign, the Bunun encourages and facilitates the translation of Christian ideas into local meaning. Yang (2008, 70) attributes the difference in reception to the "hard culture form" (Robbins 2003, 223) of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity compared to the "soft cultural form" of Catholicism and Protestantism, allowing the Bunun to take apart Christianity and adopt pieces. In this case, we see the interaction between the two layers as characterized by *borrowing or adopting from Christianity to legitimize* local cultural and moral preferences. In contrasting against the Urapmin, Yang (2008, 69-70) defends the Bunun example as continuity thinking yet in the article, he raises a few points where the Bunun either rejected elements of their pre-Christian culture or adopted new elements from Christianity. However, rejection of pre-Christian cultural material may not necessarily translate into actual rejection. For example, Francis Ching-wah Yip (1999, 149) argues that "[the Chinese] acceptance of Protestant Christianity was based on and informed by ideas, categories, conceptual scheme, worldview, etc. of the very religious tradition they consciously rejected."

There are several advantages to layered thinking. First, it allows us to recognize that Christianity may have varying effects on different aspects (think different areas on the sheet of vellum paper) of a pre-Christian culture without having to fully commit to continuity or discontinuity. For example, while the Bunun embraced morality from Christianity, they did not emphasize the possibility of personal salvation (Yang 2008, 68). Second, layered thinking allows us to move away from dichotomous thinking of

continuity and discontinuity, and towards interrogating the variety of effects that Christianity may or may not have on a culture. These may include adoption, rejection, re-evaluation, re-imagination, negotiation, compromise, embrace, contradiction, resistance, realignments (Engelke 2010), etc. Third, layered thinking is inclusive in that it allows for the possibilities of continuity and discontinuity. For example, White's (2017, 251) argument that highlighting the shared characteristic of communality within Chinese religiosity and Chinese Protestantism is one pathway to view Protestantism as a Chinese religion. In layered thinking, White clearly sees at least one similar theme (i.e. communality) in the layers of Chinese religiosity and Chinese Protestantism. Fourth, layered thinking allows for multiple layers beyond Christianity and pre-Christian culture. And fifth, the flexibility of layered thinking allows for one to consider how the layers of non-Christian culture affect the Christian layer, and in this way, we can avoid giving preference to a particular layer but instead drawing out interactions at points of contact, wherever the data may lead us. There are, however, a few warnings when employing layered thinking. First, a major pitfall to avoid is to view layers as stable, monolithic, bounded entities. Second, layers of culture may blend so tightly that identifying and analyzing discrete layers (including any discussion regarding point of contact) may be difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, there is the potential risk of incorrectly or inaccurately ascribing religious practices and understandings to a particular layer.

Indeed, scholars have imagined the relationship between Christianity and pre-Christian culture as layers. For example, Chinese theologian Alexander Chow (2018, 16-17) writes of "manifold layers" in which aspects of Confucianism interweaves with Chinese Christian intellectuals to form Chinese Christianity and Chinese public theology. Chow draws from concepts by the historian Andrew Walls and theologian Kwame Bediako. Walls (1996, 131-139) writes of eight forms of response: *absorption* of so-called primal religions into Christianity, *restatement* of religious concepts into Christianity, *reduction* of primal religion, *invention* of new forms of religion, *adjustment* within primal religions, *revitalization* of primal religions due to efforts of cultural preservation, and *appropriation* of primal religions into other traditions.<sup>7</sup> Bediako (1995, 227) also notes the cultural

---

<sup>7</sup> Walls (1996, 120) notes that many scholars reject the term "primal religions", but he uses it to point to a worldwide phenomenon (not confined to a particular region) for which he claims an absence of term.

affinity (i.e. continuity) between the Old Testament and the Gospels with African life and thought (e.g., ancestors, spiritual world). However, he also points out discontinuity, particularly in the failure of African theologians such as John Mbiti to recognize a multiplicity of African divinities (Bediako 1995, 98-99).

There are crucial differences in my proposed layered thinking than those offered by Chow, Walls, and Bediako. First, layered thinking allows for more than the usual two layers of Christianity and some other non-Christian layer. In the context of this study, the possibility of multiple layers is extremely important. Take for example the typical ling'en participant of this study. She was born and raised in Taiwan where she may have learned and embraced religious practices taught by her parents. She then migrates to the United States where she learns and adopts a new way of living and ways of doing religion. After some months or years in the United States, she is invited to a Chinese American evangelical church where she is baptized and learns the evangelical way of doing religion. Then a few years later, she finds her way to a ling'en church where she stays to learn ling'en religious practices. For such an individual, there are four distinct layers: (1) an "original" cultural layer (including religiosity) – which itself varies significantly between participants, (2) an "immigrant to the United States" layer, (3) an evangelical Christian layer, and (4) a ling'en layer. The recognition of multiple layers is to acknowledge that the lived experiences of ling'en participants can greatly change over time and that major changes reshape how they understand religious practices. Thus, layered thinking is flexible in that it offers as much, or as little, granularity required in different applications.

Second, while Bediako and Chow interrogate the thought of Christian leaders and theologians, this study centers on the religious practices and understanding of lay believers, revealing how Christianity is practiced and understood at the grassroots level and captured by multiple level layered thinking. Third, layered thinking and points of contact provide the foundation for a framework that is far more robust and precise as it allows for the critical analysis of the variety of relationships between layers without giving preference to any layer. In doing so, we do not only consider how the Christian layer affects other layers, but also how other layers affect the layer of Christianity. In

conclusion, one goal of this study is to identify, describe, and analyze layers and points of contact. By doing so, we gain understanding of both ling'en culture as well as the negotiation between layers.<sup>8</sup>

Before we continue to the next section, I want to note that within the field of anthropology of Christianity, discussions on the theme of continuity/discontinuity are closely linked to Christian understanding of time – for example, “make a complete break with the past” (Meyer 1998), living in the time that remains, and expecting future rupture. Writing about Zambian Pentecostals in the northern region known as the Copperbelt, anthropologist Naomi Haynes (2020) draws a distinction between dispensational and Pentecostal temporal frameworks. Whereas dispensationalists place more stock in a future Parousia, Copperbelt Pentecostals are much more concerned with the here and now – what Haynes has termed the “expansive present.” However, more relevant to this section is that Haynes wants to move debates within the anthropology of Christianity to topics beyond continuity and discontinuity. While Haynes wants to push through the increasingly abandoned theme of continuity/discontinuity by turning to the issue of time, I have suggested layered thinking as an analytical tool with the potential to help researchers not only think about the question, “what difference does Christianity make” (Cannell 2006) but also to turn the question around and ask, “what differences can happen to Christianity?” In this way, while layered thinking may not directly help us to break out of the continuity/discontinuity debate, it may function as a useful tool by pinpointing “points of contact” and thinking about them in ways that help us move beyond continuity/discontinuity. For example, Haynes’ expansive present could be further analyzed by considering the Copperbelt Pentecostal perspective of time vis-à-vis non-Pentecostal Copperbelt perspectives of time. One apparent avenue is to make explicit the connection between Pentecostal’s difficult in understand how God works in the world and the boom/bust cycles experienced by Copperbelt residents (Haynes 2017; Larmer 2021). Furthermore, layered thinking promotes additional inquiry

---

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the closest idea to layered thinking has been proposed by Bandak and Jørgensen (2012) in terms of foregrounds and backgrounds. The key differences are that layered thinking does not require Christianity to be the foreground (or top layer) and that layered thinking allows for more than two layers (as suggested by fore- and backgrounds).

such as: with the contraction of Zambia's copper mining activities since 2015 and a need for revival in the region's copper mines, how might this decrease of the region's GDP affect Copperbelt Pentecostal imagination of expansive time (Mulder et al. 2024)? This question encourages us to consider how changes in broader society continuously shape Christian imagination.

### *Immigrant Chinese Christianity in the United States*

This study also contributes to the narrower field of immigrant Chinese Christianity in the United States. In a review of publications from the past decades I found that they can be positioned, broadly speaking, into three categories. First, social scientific studies focusing on the Chinese American Christian as immigrant and the Chinese American congregation as a community of immigrants (Yang 1999; Tseng 1994; Jeung 2005; Chen 2006, 2008). Second, studies on intergenerational cultural and language issues within family and church communities (Cao 2005; Lu et al. 2012; Lee 2009). The final category of studies is primarily for those interested in church ministry and expansion (Wu 2016; Hall 2006). This study primarily focuses on the first and third categories, examining ling'en religious practices that are central to conversion and essential for nurturing the formation of ling'en religious communities. All three categories of studies were almost entirely conducted on mainstream immigrant Chinese evangelicalism, and as such, little is known about their ling'en counterpart. So far there is no monograph length study on ling'en Christianity in the American context. With that said, in her historical accounting of charismatic Christianity in Taiwan between 1945 and 1995, Judith C. P. Lin (2020) traces some of the ties between Southern California and Taiwan. These include the charismatic ministry of Jean Stone Willans and her significant role in the Charismatic Movement in Taiwan, and more relevant to this study, the influence of Ernest Chen Zhonghui (founding pastor of one of this study's fieldsites) to organize charismatic speakers from around the world to present in California, often with many Taiwan charismatic believers traveling in groups to attend (Lin 2020, 88, 205-206).

As a subset of the first category, a significant number of social scientific studies on first generation Chinese American Christianity have focused on Chinese conversion to Christianity. Scholars have identified several factors that drive conversion. For example,

sociologist Brian Hall (2006, 136-137) found that Chinese immigrants perceived Christianity as a modern and practical religion while religions like Buddhism and Daoism appeared out of touch with modern society. In contrast, Christianity is often seen as a religion that is not only aligned with modern values but also offers practical support through its community networks and outreach programs. Christian groups are noted for their effective outreach by providing specific forms of help in coping with the problems of daily life, which is especially appealing to immigrants facing the challenges of adaptation in a new country (Yang and Tamney 2006, 127; Ng 2002, 205). This practical support, combined with a modern outlook, makes Christianity an attractive option for many Chinese immigrants seeking both spiritual and socioeconomic support. In chapter four I interrogate the relevance and validity of these findings amongst SGV ling'en Christians.

Adjacent to studies on conversion, some scholars of Chinese American Christianity have identified continuities and points of conflict between Chinese culture and Christianity as immigrant Chinese consider whether they want to adopt Christianity or not. For example, sociologists Yang Fenggang and Joseph Tamney (2006, 128) argue that for many Chinese, Christianity appears to have elements that align with some Confucian values such as the emphasis on family and moral conduct. This perceived overlap can make Christianity more palatable to Chinese immigrants who wish to maintain a sense of cultural continuity while adopting a new faith (Yang and Tamney 2006, 128). For some still, the conversion process involves adapting Christian beliefs to fit within a framework of Chinese cultural expectations, such as viewing the Christian God in ways that resonate with Chinese understanding of deities or spiritual guardians (Ng 2002, 204). Sociologist Carolyn Chen (2008, 38-39, 97) highlights two points of tension amongst Taiwanese migrants in the United States. First, some dislike Christianity's insistence on the exclusivity of its beliefs and a related second reason, that conversion to Christianity in the United States may be perceived as a rejection of inherited religious traditions and accompanying set of social obligations to the family and ancestors.

An important and relevant scholarly discussion to immigrant Chinese Christianity in the United States is the question of immigrant assimilation into the cultures and languages of their new home. Classic assimilation theory – arising out of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to examine European ethnic migration experiences – contends that migrants naturally move toward and coalesce into a common culture, setting aside old cultural patterns (Karimi and Wilkes 2023). In her study of Chinese immigration to the United States, sociologist Zhou Min (2009, 7) employed the segmented assimilation theory – a more nuanced approach which considers the ways in which migrants assimilate upwardly, downwardly, or horizontally into a society that is segmented by class and race – to find that first generation Chinese immigrants approach the “American dream” typically via education. Yet their efforts are heavily shaped by several factors including socioeconomic status, the economy, and race (Zhou 2009, 223-224). While Zhou (2009, 109) is interested in the broader issue of assimilation and not particularly Christianity amongst Chinese migrants, she found that the rise of ethnic religious institutions played an important role in helping immigrants adjust to life in the United States. Having focused on an immigrant Chinese American church, Yang (1999, 16) goes further than Zhou and argues that although the immigrant church does not explicitly promote assimilation, it facilitates the process by teaching certain values that are recognized as conservative Christian interpretation of American civic religion – an idea I explore in chapter seven on the World Management modality.

There are clear gaps within these groupings of literature which this study seeks to fill. First, there are few, if any, significant studies on Chinese American ling'en Christianity. Second, conversion studies focus on conversion from non-Christian beliefs (and no beliefs) to Protestantism (primarily evangelicalism, the dominant form of Protestantism amongst Chinese Americans). As such there is little study of changes which follow this initial conversion. This study adds nuance to the conversion of Chinese Americans by exploring how these immigrants may go on to become ling'en Christians primarily through two groupings of religious practices which I explore in chapters two and three. Third, within assimilation studies there is little discussion of how religious practices function as meaning making activities amongst Chinese American immigrants. This thesis considers how Chinese American ling'en Christians employ religious practices to

preserve cultural (and as I argue, religious) elements as well as how they reshape cultural and religious understandings through religious practices. In this way, the study considers points of contact between the ling'en and "immigrant in the United States" layers.

### *Research Questions*

From the above discussions on scholarly literature and layered thinking framework, this study is interested in how Chinese American *ling'en religious practices and understandings reflect the negotiation of relationships between Christianity, Chinese religiosity and culture, and their immigrant status in the United States?*

From this main research question, I draw four subsidiary research questions – two on methodology and two on the nature and practice of ling'en. Regarding methodology: 1. In what ways are Adam Yuet Chau's modalities useful for studying Chinese American ling'en, and in what ways do they need modification or expansion given that Chau's framework was not developed with Christianity nor immigrant Chinese in mind? 2. In what ways does layered thinking, as opposed to continuity and discontinuity thinking, help us better understand the relationship between the layers of Christianity, Chinese religiosity and culture, and migration amongst SGV ling'en Christians? Regarding the nature and practice of ling'en: 3. In what ways do Chinese American ling'en negotiate and make sense of their religious practices and understandings in relationship to traditional Chinese religiosity and culture and mainstream evangelicalism? 4. In what ways does being immigrants in the United States shape Chinese American ling'en religious practices?

This thesis argues that *ling'en Christianity is an expression of immigrant Chinese in the United States doing religion* by analyzing ling'en Christians and three ling'en religious organizations in SGV vis-à-vis Chau's modalities of doing religion amongst the Chinese. Regarding the cultural/religious and Christianity layers, this thesis tends to portray Chinese religiosity as static and not inclusive of Chinese American Christianity. This is entirely out of convenience as I recognize that the cultural/religious layer is complex and fluid. While I ultimately contend that the Christianity layer could be considered a part of or closely joined with the Chinese religiosity layer, it is necessary to consider them as

distinct layers to critically analyze their relationship vis-à-vis points of contact before considering how closely connected they might be.

I want to stress that from an emic perspective *ling'en Christians would not consider themselves to be drawing from Chinese religiosity*. They reject the label of “Confucian Christian” or “Daoist Christian” that has been proposed in other contexts (Yang 1999, 161-162). Even so, they recognize some points of contact by acknowledging that certain aspects of Chinese “culture” – such as Chinese holidays and *guanxi* (social connectedness, see chapter four) – as contributing to the way they practice Christianity. With regards to religious beliefs, SGV *ling'en Christians* share core beliefs with their mainstream evangelical counterpart. These include God as the ultimate deity, God as trinitarian (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), Jesus as God and human, original sin and salvation, the works of the Holy Spirit, the responsibility of the church in the end times to share the gospel, and faith in Jesus as the exclusive pathway for salvation.

With that said, the most apparent point of contention between evangelicalism and *ling'en* is the issue of whether spiritual gifts remain available to the church and believers – and if so, what spiritual gifts are available. For *ling'en* participants of this study, they generally hold to a theological position known as continuationism, the belief that spiritual gifts remain available. The opposite theological position, cessationism, argues that certain spiritual gifts (including glossolalia, prophecy, and healing) have ceased with the apostolic period. *Ling'en* participants are not monolithic in their belief as to which gifts remain available, but generally speaking, they believe in gifts that allow for supernatural healing, prophetic visions and utterances, and speaking in tongues. While many Chinese American evangelicals do not completely reject supernatural healing, I found them to be relatively suspicious of prophecy and tongues (cf. Yang 1999, 3). Therefore, the position of the evangelical believer on this issue can vary widely, from hard cessationism to open but cautious continuationism. With that said, it is important to note that the descriptor “*ling'en*” may be applied to groups of Chinese Christians that do not share to the specific set of doctrines of SGV *ling'en Christians* in this study. For example, many years ago I visited a rural community of self-described *ling'en Christians* in Hebei that were nontrinitarian. The True Jesus Church may also be considered

ling'en (although Liu & Liu 2023 argue that they consider themselves *shuling* or spiritual) in at least some of its religious practices (e.g., glossolalia) and is also nontrinitarian.

I contend that despite SGV ling'en emic claims at discontinuity thinking, their religious practices and understandings reveal significant negotiation between the layers of Chinese religiosity, Chinese culture, their status as immigrants in the United States, and in many participants, their former evangelicalism. This study seeks to discover and interrogate the layers, and points of contact that interact and overlap to form a unique ling'en culture. Ultimately, I propose that SGV ling'en can assert their identity as immigrant Chinese doing religion.

### **Methodology: Methods and Theory**

#### *Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological approach*

This study is based on the ontological premise that ling'en Christians actively interpret and makes sense of themselves, their environments, and their experiences. The ways they do this are shaped by the cultures and respective layers (e.g., ling'en Christianity, Chinese culture, Chinese religiosity, mainstream evangelicalism) in which they have lived and live (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013; Hammersley 2013, 26). Since human acts and other artifacts are not completely external to the world of their creators and the researcher, we need to gather data and analyze how individuals make sense of their experiences and reality (Yanow 2014, 11; Berger and Luckmann 1979).

Under these ontological premises, this study's goal is to investigate the meaning behind the understanding of human behavior, interactions, and realities amongst ling'en Christians (Pulla and Carter 2018). In addition, the study seeks to clarify what and how meanings are embodied in the language and actions of individuals as social actors. Broadly speaking, the epistemological approach of this study is known as interpretivism (Burrell and Morgan 2019; Rabinow and Sullivan 1979). However, I recognize that studies cannot claim to apply only one epistemological framework. Therefore, while this study views individuals as actors in a social world, it also considers the ways in which sociocultural and other external factors act upon individuals. This study broadly follows

the approach known as *Verstehen* (German for “understanding”), which was initially developed by Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber. This epistemological approach attempts to make clear people’s interpretation of their own and others’ experiences (Yanow 2014, 9-10; Truzzi 1974; Hausheer 1996; Harrington 2000).

This study employs a mix of abductive and inductive reasoning. Inductive reasoning is primarily used when data is specific but limited in scope. Under these circumstances, generalized conclusions are likely but not guaranteed. As such, the degree to which these interpretations are valid across ling’en Christians in other contexts should be questioned and perhaps modified through additional research. Abductive reasoning is used where data is incomplete, and the likeliest explanation is presented (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Abduction, contrasted against the linearity promised by deduction and induction, is a powerful tool in interpretivist research while trying “to find a path through the mess” (Butler and Spoelstra 2023; Timmermans and Tavory 2012). Charles Sanders Peirce (1934, 106), known as the “father of pragmatism”, has said that “abduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new ideas. Deduction proves that something *must* be; Induction shows that something *actually* is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something *may be*.” Whether abductive or inductive, I provide the best line of reasoning given the available data. With that said, impartial and holistic data are not prerequisites for good research, and telling the “whole story” is not always necessary (Fitton 2022, 25). Another reason for employing inductive and abductive reasoning is due to the exploratory nature of this study, which aims to build theoretical knowledge through interpretive methods.

Broadly speaking, this study employs ethnography as a methodological approach for data sourcing and generation (Mason 2002, 52). More specifically, this study uses interpretive ethnography for “studying the ways in which a social group constructs and lives its particular, indigenous version of reality” (Smart 1998). In this way, this study is driven by both the aims of ethnography: to grasp the ling’en perspective and to describe the cultures in which participants are enmeshed, and interpretive ethnography: to chart out the network of shared meanings that constitute reality within ling’en communities

where the focal point is to understand the meaning of certain phenomena within the group (Spradley 2016, 3; Leavy 2017).

### *Fieldsite and Participant Selection and Limitations*

I selected SGV of Southern California for two reasons: accessibility and abundance of Chinese American Protestants. SGV has a significant Chinese immigrant population and is home to a number of immigrant Chinese evangelical and ling'en churches.<sup>9</sup> Due to the self-imposed limitations of this project, namely its interest in studying ling'en Christianity amongst foreign-born Chinese Americans, I set out with the following criteria: each participant must be a practicing Christian at time of interview, is of "Chinese" ethnicity<sup>10</sup>, attends the Mandarin or Mandarin/Cantonese congregation of an ethnically majority Chinese church in one of the three fieldsites located in SGV, is fluent in Mandarin Chinese (they may be proficient or better in other languages such as Cantonese Chinese and American English), is a foreign-born, first-generation immigrant, and identifies along the evangelicalism-ling'en spectrum, for example "ling'en", "not ling'en" (*bushi ling'en*), "anti-ling'en" (*fandui ling'en*), and other positions relative to ling'en.

The first half of my time in the field coincided with Los Angeles County's COVID19 stay-at-home orders. For several months, I was unable to conduct participant observation *in situ*. The COVID19 pandemic presented several unique challenges and opportunities. Challenges include physical distancing, capacity limitations on places of worship, requiring face coverings, temperature checks, and temporary closures which coincided with most of my time in the field. Opportunities mostly translate as increased accessibility to participant interview. Sites gradually re-opened mid-2021 and individuals were required to register ahead of time using email and/or phone apps such as "Church Center". During lockdown, I primarily relied upon digital ethnography for avenues of data generation (Svašek 2023). These include conducting interviews, attending online Sunday worship services, and participant observation in special gatherings featuring

---

<sup>9</sup> I discuss in greater detail the region and Chinese Christianity within the region in the next chapter.

<sup>10</sup> Wimmer (2008, 973) defines "ethnicity" as a "subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry." The concept of "Chineseness" is discussed in chapter one.

ling'en practices. While in-person participation observation has value in uncovering unexpected moments in the field (e.g., being able to observe the postures and movements of those who sit or stand out of frame of a YouTube Live session), fieldsites saw very gradual return to in-person worship following the opening up of sites. I observed that since the re-opening of churches, many individuals prefer to watch Sunday services of their choice via YouTube, Facebook, or church website live streams. Both during and in the months following lockdowns, many mid-week Bible studies and fellowships transitioned and remained on Zoom. Special gatherings such as baptisms, weddings, and conferences see significantly more participants than if they were held in person. Bible verses and messages with intention of encouraging, admonishing, reminding fellow believers are broadcasted in WeChat, Line, and Facebook.

During lockdown the first participants of the study were enlisted through my spouse's referral as she was enrolled as a student at a Chinese language seminary in SGV and as such, embedded in the broader immigrant Chinese Christian community. From these first participants I continued to enlist through participant referrals of their ling'en acquaintances (also known as chain sampling or snowball sampling), cold emailing, and through established contacts from time in the field. COVID19 lockdowns began to relax by mid-2021. With fieldsites opening and Sunday religious gatherings resumed, I conducted participant observation at all three fieldsites by visiting as many Sunday worship gatherings as possible, driving between Escondido and SGV. Within three months, I continued to establish rapport, enrolled participants on a rolling basis, attended online mid-week fellowship gatherings, and a handful of adult Sunday school sessions. It was also during this time when I could visit sites *in situ* that I quickly gained the confidence of key gatekeepers (namely, pastoral and lay leaders). I also returned to the field in October 2022 to attend a two-day conference which several ling'en participants encouraged me to experience. During the conference I took in-depth field notes, enrolled two more participants, and gained insight into ling'en healing and deliverance (*yizhi shifang*) and the ritualistic nature of ling'en practices.

This study employed the following data collection and generation methods:

1. Twenty-nine in-depth semi-structured interviews. See Appendix A for participant demographics.
2. Participant observation: dozens of casual conversations with individuals (both lay and pastoral) while in and outside of the field; four months of participant observation in church sponsored gatherings including Sunday worship services, adult Sunday school, fellowship gatherings, and “special gatherings” (*teshu juhui*)<sup>11</sup>. I attended around three dozen Sunday services, a small handful of adult Sunday school sessions and special gatherings, and around ten adult Sunday school sessions, all *in situ*.
3. Digital documents and artifacts: this category of remote and digital ethnographic materials includes public and private videos (anonymized and used with permission) posted on YouTube, personal audio and video recordings and photographs where allowed, YouTube Live Streams, public “Moments” (*pengyouquan* lit. “friend’s circle”), and group communication on WeChat (*weixin*); and private communication (anonymized and used with permission) on WeChat, WhatsApp, and email. I have watched over one hundred Sunday services (both live streams and video playback), dozens of videos for mid-week events and special gatherings, and I regularly monitored the handful of WeChat groups joined during fieldwork. These were critical in generating and triangulating data as sites and fieldwork were impacted by COVID19 pandemic (Kaur-Gill and Dutta 2017).
4. Field notes were primarily generated around in person and online participation observation.

### *Data Generation and the Ethnographer*

I conducted twenty-nine in-depth semi-structured interviews (SSIs), all online, between 2020 and 2022. Two SSIs were conducted via voice call on WeChat, one by cellular phone, and the remainder on Zoom. The challenges of conducting SSIs exclusively online were largely not related to the interview itself but rather having to quickly

---

<sup>11</sup> These are events that are not part of the routinized gatherings in the church which operates on a weekly cycle. An example is the “Encounter God” retreat that is hosted by GCCI twice a year.

establish rapport with interviewees without previous in person interaction. I anticipated trust issues; however, to the contrary, participants generally trusted me as evidenced in the ways some participants addressed me. These include “younger brother” (*laodi*) and “little brother” (*xiao xiongdì*), terms which generate a sense of closeness. Although online interviewing allowed data generation during lockdowns, I was unable to follow up with in-person meetings with several participants. As such, opportunities to corroborate participant data and to generate additional rich data were reduced because of pandemic restrictions.

Prior to conducting each interview, I requested and received informed consent. As interviews began, I requested and received permission to record the interview for transcription and analysis. To begin each interview, I employed a tentative questionnaire which captured participant’s basic demographic information, their relationship with ling’en Christianity, their participation in ling’en practices and personal reflections on those experiences, and their attitudes towards the “other side”<sup>12</sup>. Of the total twenty-nine interviewees, twenty-two considered themselves to be ling’en and seven considered themselves not ling’en (of which three considered themselves to be against ling’en). Of the twenty-two ling’en participants, twenty converted from evangelicalism while two converted straight into ling’en Christianity. I discuss in detail the meaning of ling’en, anti-ling’en, conversion, and mainstream evangelicalism in chapter one.

Respondents generally provided lengthy life narratives, many in “testimonial” (*jianzheng*) form in response to my early questions. I asked follow-up questions to seek clarification for the “why” and “how” of participants’ experience. Interviews lasted between forty minutes and four hours with an average duration of 105 minutes. From early on, a small number of participants expressed the desire to remain anonymous. As such I decided to inform all participants that pseudonyms will be used for this project. Where pseudonyms may not protect the identity of an individual (e.g., “Xuan, the senior

---

<sup>12</sup> I.e., if ling’en, then what they thought about mainstream evangelicalism and vice versa.

pastor of ARC” would reveal the identity of the pseudonym Xuan), I have deliberately kept their status ambiguous, for example “Xuan, a staff member of ARC”.

In this study, SSIs offered two advantages. First, they allowed me to ask probing questions to know the independent thoughts of each participant (Adams 2015, 494). The privacy that SSIs offer (as opposed to focus group interviews) minimized the loss of “face” (*mianzi*) in the sharing of sensitive personal details (Zhou and Nunes 2013). Second, SSIs are helpful in charting the unknown ling’*en* space (Adams 2015, 494). During SSIs, it was highly important to allow the participant to respond as much or as little as they felt comfortable since the purpose is to encourage their thoughts. To minimize any impositions of personal opinions, I avoided leading questions and instead used open ended questions which gave participants maximal space and time to respond (Adams 2015, 498). Using interviews as a data collection tool necessitates some comments on memory. This study employed the constructivist perspective in which conversation (primarily in the form of researcher asking questions and participant responding but also the reverse) generates data both in what is remembered but also that which cannot be remembered (Gemignani 2014). SSIs were conducted based on a hermeneutic of trust, utilizing the principle of charity or what Hans-Georg Gadamer called “good will” (Jasper 2004; Warnke 2013). I found that adopting a good will stance during SSIs helped participants to feel safe and “to speak the words in the heart” (*shuo xinlihua*), which aided in the understanding of participant perspectives.

Prior to SSIs, nearly all participants had never met me. I informed participants of my background as a 1.5 generation<sup>13</sup> Chinese American as well as my academic and religious background as a bilingual Chinese American practicing Christian with theological and pastoral education and training. Self-reflexivity (i.e., to be self-conscious about fieldwork and the role of the ethnographer in the production of knowledge) was an important aspect of fieldwork. As Samer Shehata (2009) notes, the ethnographer brings into the field their own identities and theories such that “the ethnographer’s self

---

<sup>13</sup> “1.5 generation” was coined by sociologist Rubén G. Rumbaut and refers to foreign born youths who immigrated to the United States before age 12 (Rumbaut 2004).

becomes a conduit of research and a primary vehicle of knowledge production.” Having a similar religious background was critical in securing many interviews as some indicated that they would not speak to me otherwise. A small handful also noted that my being from another church allowed them to speak critically of their own church.

Having undergone pastoral training at seminary was both hindering and advantageous. Its primary hindrance was when participants were concerned our interviews would delve deeply into theological and historical issues. For those who voiced this concern, I assured participants that no such specialized knowledge was necessary and that we would be focusing on their personal experiences and understanding. The advantages of being a pastorally trained ethnographer were twofold: first, participants did not doubt the authenticity of my Christian identity and as such, no participant attempted to proselytize me to the Christian faith (Kang 2016, 38; Yang 1999, 12; cf. Cao 2011, 18); second, our shared faith set a reasonable baseline of mutual trust. A handful openly appealed to me the superiority of ling'en Christianity (over mainstream evangelicalism) and encouraged me to “spread the word” to mainstream evangelicals.<sup>14</sup>

Many participants were interested whether I am ling'en or not. I responded that I had heard about and encountered ling'en Christianity in a few contexts, and that I held a curious and affirming view of ling'en. I informed participants that I did not consider myself ling'en. Being an outsider has its advantages as I was able to notice the unusual – the very things that insiders may not question (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, 171). However, I adopted the attitude that fieldworkers should do their best to set aside their biases. In my case, I recognized early on the impact that my personal bias might favor mainstream evangelicalism and impact ethnography primarily by assigning meaning where it is different in ling'en. As such I intentionally maintained an open acceptance and curiosity of ling'en Christians and their practices and understandings while avoiding any preconceived notions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy (Green et al. 2012; also see Anderson 2013, 352).

---

<sup>14</sup> In chapter one, I discuss participant views on “conversion” from evangelicalism to ling'en.

My being a Chinese American was both advantageous and limiting. One advantage I observed was because a few participants stated that my American citizenship inspired confidence in how much they would reveal to me. A few suggested that Chinese nationality might add politically motivated suspicion to the intention of the research. One expected limitation was my restricted Mandarin vocabulary<sup>15</sup> but this did not prove to be an issue at all. In summary, I was both an insider (Christian, Chinese, American, immigrant) but also an outsider (not ling'en, not Taiwanese or Hong Kongese, has almost no experience with Chinese religions, 1.5 generation immigrant). Certainly, I was not a "total insider", someone with deep experiences with the researched group (Giazitzoglu and Payne 2018, 1151). Rather, I am in the wide gap of the "space between", a term which challenges the dichotomy of the insider/outsider model as overly simplistic (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). Many participants recognized this and were very generous in explaining ideas carefully and thoroughly, often without my prompting.

In 2022, after leaving the field and returning to Edinburgh, I conducted the first rounds of analysis on data on NVivo using a combination of in vivo along with some descriptive first cycle coding methods. In vivo coding was helpful as it allowed me to focus on the language used by ling'en Christians to better understand them (Saldaña 2021). In the first cycle of coding, I created 885 nodes. I then conducted a second cycle of pattern coding to summarize this large amount of data into more manageable units. From the second cycle I constructed several categories each with multiple subcategories. Of these many categories, I constructed the following four key categories<sup>16</sup>. In 2023, these categories were largely abandoned, but remained helpful, as follow write-ups and supervisory discussions pointed towards a focus on religious practices vis-à-vis the theoretical model discussed below. Following this shift I re-coded interview data by

---

<sup>15</sup> I immigrated to the United States at the age of five. My parents required me to speak Mandarin at home and I took weekly Mandarin lessons at "Chinese language school" (*zhongwen xuexiao*). Following my university education, I immigrated to Beijing where I worked in a Chinese company for three years. During this time, I also began attending a local unregistered Protestant church. Following my return to the United States, I continued to attend Mandarin congregations and fellowships. Some of my friends have said that my Mandarin abilities (speaking, listening, understanding) is approximately at the level of a native Chinese college graduate.

<sup>16</sup> The categories were (1) resources and tools to engage the "spiritual" world; and the resulting (2) freedom and (3) intimacy; and (4) fear of ling'en from both insiders and outsiders of ling'en Christianity. Some of these themes made their way into the main chapters of this study.

religious practices, which guided the write up of main chapters. It is my hope that the reader will appreciate the abundance of messiness that I experienced during topic selection, fieldwork and data generation, analysis, and write ups. This is characteristic of the interpretivist approach (Butler and Spoelstra 2023).

### *Ethical, legal and data protection issues*

This study applied for and received Level One Ethical Approval from the School of Divinity of the University of Edinburgh. The assessment conforms to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018 (Legislation.Gov.Uk 2025). All data was stored on university provided cloud storage in OneDrive with two factor authentication restricted access.

### *Theoretical Framework: Modalities of Doing Religion*

As this thesis investigates SGV ling'en Christianity through its religious practices, it employs and builds upon Chau's modalities of doing religion framework. In this section I first introduce the framework. I then discuss three issues that it overlooks which this thesis seeks to address. First, it largely ignores Christianity; second, it is primarily concerned with Chinese living in Greater China; and third, it largely ignores religious practices through which individuals and communities engage the public space (I define this term below). Finally, I engage with the existing literature that has employed Chau's modalities framework and discuss how this study seeks to advance existing analyses.

The origin of the framework is articulated in Chau's 2006 book, *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. To summarize: one of the most prominent debates in the anthropology of Chinese religion centers on whether Chinese religious life is fundamentally unified or inherently plural. This discussion was sparked by an exchange between Maurice Freedman and Arthur Wolf. Freedman argued that China's deep political and cultural continuity likely fostered a coherent religious system, despite superficial differences between elite and popular expressions. He proposed that all religious practices in premodern China operated within a shared symbolic and ritual framework. In contrast, Wolf rejected the notion of a single Chinese religion,

emphasizing the lack of a preaching priesthood and the irreconcilable differences between elite esotericism and peasant religious practices. He argued that these differences reflect genuinely distinct systems rather than variations of the same core.

Chau expressed intuitive alignment with Wolf's view but acknowledges the value in Freedman's effort to uncover order in religious diversity. Rather than settling the debate by choosing between unity or fragmentation, Chau suggests two alternative approaches. The first is a more dynamic approach: viewing Chinese religious life as shaped by both unifying and diversifying forces. This processual perspective shifts focus from identifying core structures or discrete systems to analyzing the tensions and interactions that drive religious convergence and divergence. In this view, the study of Chinese religion becomes an exploration of the competing forces that shape religious expression across time and social strata (Chau 2006, 73-74).

The second approach is by circumventing the debate entirely. Instead of *religious conceptions*, Chau (2006, 74-75) creatively suggested that focusing on Chinese *religious practices* would help clarify the debate. He argues that in the long history of religious development in China, different ways of doing religion evolved and coalesced into five distinguishable modalities. Below I present each along with a brief description and some examples from Chinese religiosity and ling'en Christianity:

1. **Personal-cultivational:** involves a long-term interest in cultivating and transforming oneself with varying goals depending on the religious tradition. Practices include sutra chanting, recitation sessions in a monastery, and keeping a merit/demerit ledger. Ling'en practices include reading and meditating on the Bible privately, tongue prayer in private, and participating in harp and bowl worship.
2. **Immediate-practical:** aiming at quick results using simple or magical techniques, and most practiced by common folk with the key desire being "magical efficacy" (*ling*). Practices include the use of divination materials,

talismans, consulting spirit mediums, offering incense, and ritual cursing. Ling'en practices include receiving healing and deliverance and exorcism and speaking prophecy.

3. **Relational**: emphasizing the relationships between humans and deities as well as between humans. Practices include building temples, making offerings to ancestors, ghosts, and deities, celebrating deities' birthdays, and establishing and maintaining religious communities. Ling'en practices include attending Sunday worship gatherings, using social media throughout the week to connect with other believers, and making pilgrimages to ling'en institutions.
4. **Discursive/Scriptural**: involving mostly the composition and use of texts. Practices include compiling, editing, and debating about scriptures, discoursing about the Way, and preaching. Ling'en practices include receiving training at seminaries, preaching and listening to sermons, and writing commentaries on biblical texts.
5. **Liturgical**: involving elaborate ritual procedures conducted by ritual specialists. Practices include state rituals, various rites, funeral rituals, and exorcisms. Ling'en practices include conducting baptisms and weddings, and ritualistic training in preparation to lead healing and deliverance and worship sessions.

This study is an extension and critique of the modalities framework. In particular, it addresses the three major issues of Christianity, migrant Chinese (outside of Greater China), and religious practices that engage public space. Regarding the first two, the Chinese have historically migrated to almost every part of the world in significant numbers, and as such, it would be useful to consider if and how the modalities apply to Chinese migrants outside Greater China.<sup>17</sup> Second, millions of Chinese have adopted

---

<sup>17</sup> I discuss Chinese migration in chapter one, with a focus on Chinese migration to the United States.

Christianity as their own faith. In 2024, Christianity is no “foreign religion” (*yangjiao*)<sup>18</sup> to millions of Chinese. According to the 2021 Chinese General Social Survey conducted in 19 provinces in China, about 1% (around 14 million) of respondents identified with Christianity of which are Protestants (Pew Research Center 2023a). However, the report notes that counting Christians in China is difficult due to political sensitivity, conventional measures of self-identification not capturing religious experience (for example, the report cites that those who engage in Christian practices may not necessarily identify with Christianity), and various sampling issues (Pew Research Center 2023a). Outside of China, Christianity is practiced by 1.3 million Hong Kongese (of which 900,000 are Protestants) (Hong Kong Yearbook 2024); by 21.6 percent or 111,000 Chinese Singaporeans according to the 2020 census (U.S. Department of State 2024); by 2.46% of the population in Taiwan in 2013 (Statistical Yearbook); by 11.1 percent of Malaysian Chinese or about 780,000 according to the 2010 census (Husin and Awang 2016); in the United States by 23% or 1.2 million Chinese (Pew Research Center 2023b); by 20.2% or 350,000 Chinese Canadians according to the 2022 census (Statistics Canada 2022); and by 20% or 115,000 Chinese in the United Kingdom<sup>19</sup> (Huang 2023; GOV.UK. 2020).

As we can see tens of millions of Chinese, including those who have migrated out of Greater China, practice Christianity. Since Chinese Christianity is religion that Chinese people practice and immigrant Chinese who consider home outside of Greater China are Chinese then this study proposes that immigrant Chinese Christianity ought to have a contributing voice to the modalities framework. As such, this study seeks to view SGV ling'en Christianity through the lens of modalities of doing religion to interrogate both ling'en Christianity as well as the modalities framework. With that said, a key premise of this study is that the flexibility of modalities framework, namely its characteristic of

---

<sup>18</sup> This term came into widespread use in the nineteenth century and carried a pejorative meaning (Sun 2011, 59).

<sup>19</sup> The rise of Chinese immigrant population in the United Kingdom is in part due to the 150,000 to 200,000 British National Overseas (BNO) visa holders migrating to the United Kingdom from Hong Kong between 2021 and 2023. In the calculation of the Chinese Christian population, I added 175,000 to the 2011 census finding of 393,141 people from the Chinese ethnic group living in the United Kingdom to approximate the 2023 population.

cutting across different religious traditions thus applicable to the anthropological study of all religions practiced by the Chinese, legitimizes the endeavor of this study.

The third issue with the modalities framework which this thesis addresses is that it overlooks religious practices by the Chinese that seek to influence the public space.<sup>20</sup> The term “public space” is adjacent to “public sphere in the political realm” (German: *politische Öffentlichkeit*), a term originally coined by the German social theorist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas as “made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state” (Calhoun 1992, 176). Unfortunately, Habermas has largely overlooked the extent to which agency in the public space is effective in East Asian contexts including China. Given the role of religiosity in Chinese contexts of public space (which I delineate in chapter seven) and the lack of public space engagement in Chau’s modalities, I propose a sixth modality:

6. **World Management (WM):** practices which primarily seek to shape society and politics. Practices include religious leaders appealing to emperors, protesting and rebellion, establishing political entities based on religiosity, and sociopolitical activism driven by religious convictions. Ling’en practices include consuming political commentary on ethnic social media and sociopolitical activism.

As of 2024, several studies have engaged with Chau’s modalities framework in the study of Chinese Christianity to some degree. Megan Christine Rogers (2018) found that Protestants in a Suzhou church primarily engage in the discursive/scriptural and relational modalities in the practices of rigorous study of the Bible and related materials and daily prayers to foster an intimate relationship with God and other believers. Rogers also hints at engagement with the liturgical modality (Rogers 2018, 149-150, 184-186). She mentions in a footnote that out of her twenty interviews with Protestants, only one

---

<sup>20</sup> Chow notes that “public sphere” (coined by Habermas) and “public square” (used in the United States since the 1980s) have their own contextual idiosyncrasies and do not map directly onto the Chinese context. In his book, Chow instead chose to use the term “public space” to denote the space between the state and family (Chow 2018, 4-6).

mentioned the practice of speaking in tongues due to his previous time spent in a Pentecostal church in London (Rogers 2018, 146).

In contrast to Rogers fieldwork findings, Cao Meng (2020) conducted fieldwork in the poverty-stricken Lu County in the middle of Henan and found that most churchgoers are from marginalized groups in search of social support and charismatic healing in the wake of the decline of popular religion. In the Lu County context, the “daily-practical” modality is primarily for healings and blessings; the liturgical and scriptural modality for instruction of belief and practice; and the self-cultivational modality for knowledge and deepening relationship with God (Cao 2020, 172-174). Where Rogers found little talk of healings, Cao’s (2020, 180-182) work found that narratives of the “healing power of the Lord” circulating in the village is a way of constructing and maintaining Christian healing efficacy. Interesting, her study makes no mention of Pentecostal-charismatic nor ling’en Christianity, perhaps reinforcing the idea that in mainland China, rural Christianity as a whole (as opposed to ling’en in particular) places significant emphasis on spiritual healings and miracles (Kang 2016, 73).

Bram Colijn (2019b) examines Southern Fujian Christian converts who abstain from participation in certain communal rituals (e.g., those that are considered “superstitious”). Their use of abstention highlights the tension between ritual obligations towards the church community and their ancestral lineage. Perhaps the study that most thoroughly employed the modalities framework is Colijn’s analysis of an unregistered “house church” (*jiating jiaohui*)<sup>21</sup> in Xiamen. Colijn (2019a) described all five modalities at work in the congregation: (1) weekly Bible study meetings centered around the discursive/scriptural modality; (2) communal evening prayers, acting and singing practice (in preparation for the Christmas performance), and English lessons are personal-cultivational practices; (3) weddings, funerals, baptisms, Sunday services belong to the liturgical modality; (4) miracle stories of prayer healing as part of testimonies are considered immediate-practical practices; and (5) communal utterances

---

<sup>21</sup> Or “House Church”. McLeister (2019) has criticized the binary of “Three-Self” and “house-church” designation of Protestantism in China. In an article, McLeister shows that an aesthetic approach to examining Christianity reveals commonalities and points of comparison and contrast between these “two groups”.

of prayers and singing of hymns, addressing each other as “sisters” (*zimei*) and “brothers” (*dixiong*), taking group trips to enhance social relationships (*guanxi*) are practices belonging to the relational modality. While comprehensive, this analysis provides limited insights Xiamen Christian understanding of their religious practices.

One of the few journal articles that discusses Chinese Christianity apart from Protestantism is Harrison’s (2010) analysis on how the Second Vatican Council transformed aspects of Shanxi Catholics. Shanxi Catholics, unlike many others around the world, embraced the changes and were among the first parishes in China to adopt the new rituals. These include rituals that “express a Chinese identity” such as tomb-sweeping ritual on the feast of All Souls Day.

Outside of China, Montira Junnawatt (2022) has studied the religious practices of eight Thai women – half of whom are descendants of Chinese immigrant families – and all converts to Christianity from Chinese religion and Thai and Lao Buddhism. She found that her participants regularly presented their Christianity as a superior way of being religious in the personal-cultivational modality. They viewed Christianity as offering a superior set of techniques for self-improvement (striving to become a “new person”) and hoped that their non-believing family members would appreciate their improvement and take on the Christian worldview for themselves (Junnawatt 2022, 119). They sought to maintain family ties by seeking permission or acceptance from their families through these cultivational practices and in doing so, the distance between certain forms of Chinese religions and Christianity is reduced as both religious perspectives emphasize individual cultivation (Junnawatt 2022, 99). As for the other modalities, Junnawatt notes that some women of the study spoke of Bible reading – which would fall under the discursive/scriptural modality. The “liturgical modality” is present in this study in the form of family ceremonies such as the veneration of the ancestors, but no emphasis is placed on elaborate rituals that require specialized leadership. The “immediate-practical modality” is seen in prayers or meditation practices undertaken to address an immediate need. The “relational modality” is seen in relationships to ancestors, monks, the gods, or (after conversion) to the Christian God, or to Jesus (Junnawatt 2022, 118).

Richard Li (2018) studied Chinese migrants in Britain with a focus on religious conversion as key to understanding the continuous growth of Chinese Christian communities. While Li (2018, 128) does not interrogate this religious community via the modalities, he highlights the cultivation of religious and communal belonging and finds the liturgies (in particular, a question asked during baptism) as conveying the importance of new believer's adherence to religious practices including daily Bible reading and prayer.

The fact that several studies have considered the modalities framework in their analysis suggests that the framework is applicable to Chinese people doing Christianity. Nevertheless, there are a few shortcomings with these studies. First, apart from Colijn's article, these studies do not investigate and test religious practices against all five modalities. While this in itself is not an issue as Chau (2011a, 554) himself notes that different religious traditions seem to prioritize different modalities, I contend that it would be beneficial to begin with a more thorough application of all modalities – and from there, researchers can determine if and which modalities are more relevant to ling'en and other Christianities. Second, the existing discussion and engagement with the modalities is, for the most part, cursory and more importantly do not investigate the understandings behind the practices. Third, they do not analyze the relationship between Chinese Christian religious practices and Chinese understandings beyond religious traditions. For example, Rogers (2018, 15) notes that Chinese Christians foster an intimate relationship with God and other believers but strangely does not further interrogate these relationships through the lens of guanxi (social connectedness), a concept which she raised a handful of times in her study.

In response to shortcomings with the modalities framework and subsequent scholarship that has employed the framework, this is the first monograph length thesis which seeks to contribute to this discussion by applying Chau's modalities framework to analyze a variant of Christianity<sup>22</sup> practiced by Chinese migrants in the United States in hopes of

---

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, as far as I'm aware, there is no monograph length publication in which any religious traditions have been analyzed via the modalities framework through which their religious practices are categorized into all five modalities and analyzed.

producing new insights into the religious practice of Chinese Christians and the overlapping areas of Christianity and Chinese religiosity and culture.

Beyond a straightforward application of the modalities framework, this study employs layered thinking to provide greater understanding to ling'en Christianity as well as uncover, discuss, and critique some of the presumptive understandings inherent to Chau's modalities framework. Regarding ling'en Christianity, layered thinking helps to respond to some questions such as why do some immigrant Chinese Christians embrace ling'en while others reject it, what are some of the understandings behind ling'en religious practices, and how does ling'en Christianity differ from the more popular Chinese American mainstream evangelicalism? At the same time, this thesis challenges the underlying assumption that Chinese Christianity reflects an exclusive hermeneutic of religiosity (Oostveen 2019). This is a perspective which Chau (2006, 60), in part by excluding Christianity in his modalities framework, and participants of this study partially hold. Thus, while this study begins with the modalities framework to categorize and examine ling'en practices, it is also interested in uncovering the interactions between the layers and in doing so, revealing the uniqueness of SGV ling'en Christianity and turning away from theological and doctrinal differences between evangelicalism and ling'en.

## **Chapters Overview**

In chapter one I provide overviews of Chinese immigration to the United States, the development of immigrant Chinese churches with an emphasis on post-1960s migratory patterns and their impacts to the Chinese church. I also introduce fieldsites, problematize attempts at translating and defining "ling'en", and discuss conversion from evangelicalism to ling'en.

The remaining chapters, two through seven, are organized by the modalities. They appear in the following order: personal-cultivational, immediate-practical, relational, discursive/scriptural, liturgical, and world management. Broadly speaking, the first three

modalities encompass the religious practices that draw participants into ling'en Christianity.

In chapter two (personal-cultivational), I explore participant narratives of encountering and learning ling'en as a process which highlights a particular transformational quality of ling'en Christianity. Namely, the goal of many ling'en practices such as speaking in tongues, personal spiritual formation (*lingxiu*), small group gathering, and personal worship singing is to cultivate oneself to become increasingly receptive to gandong. Gandong is a complex response interpreted as the presence of the Holy Spirit mediated through ling'en gifts and practices. Ling'en Christians place emphasis on developing oneself in experiencing gandong. The cultivation of gandong is thus a personal priority amongst ling'en Christians.

Chapter three (immediate-practical) centers on ling'en practices including healing and deliverance and prophetic visions. In this analysis, I uncover the ling'en cosmology as an "overlap" cosmology between Chinese religiosity and mainstream evangelicalism. It is within this cosmology that ling'en seeks to disrupt connections between individuals and harmful spiritual entities. I also highlight ling'en belief in the superiority of the magical efficacy of the Christian God while also borrowing techniques and beliefs from Chinese religiosity.

In chapter four, I argue that ling'en Christians seek to develop an intimate relationship with God (and with the Holy Spirit) which in turn drastically reconfigures and how they make and sustain guanxi (social connectedness) with other individuals. Practices such as the casual conversations and prayers of small group gatherings, potluck meals and gatherings, and serving believers and seekers become ways in which ling'en Christians not only serve others but function as evidence of their intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, guanxi with God may also have caustic effects on human social connectedness.

Using several sources of ethnographic data, chapter five (discursive/scripture) uncovers ling'en view of Christian scripture – those that overlap with mainstream evangelicals as well as uniquely ling'en perspectives. The chapter then shows that ling'en discursive/scriptural practices attempt to legitimize and teach Christians to believe in the scriptural basis for other ling'en practices.

In chapter six (liturgical) I delineate the concept of “equipping and training” (*zhuangbei xunlian*) as central to the development and training of both formal and lay ritual specialists within ling'en communities. In this chapter I argue that the possibility of an “informal” training space (i.e., training that is not associated with seminaries and bible colleges that usually result in certificates and diplomas) has made it possible for a rise of female Christians to operate as ling'en ritual specialists. This phenomenon helps us gain a better understanding of gender dynamics within Chinese Christianity.

In the final chapter seven, I propose a new modality called “World Management” which encompasses the ways in which Chinese people engage in religious practices that seek to shape public space. In this chapter I argue that through ling'en practices such as sociopolitical participation and activism, consuming ethnic news commentary, and following the narrative of Christian nationalism, ling'en Christians promote Chinese immigrant needs and respond to fears of secularization and perceived social and moral decay.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have introduced the research topic, conducted relevant literature review, provided a main research question along with subsidiary questions, and detailed the methods and theories that this study is grounded upon. I introduced the theoretical framework for this study: Chau's modalities of doing religion and outline the main chapters of this study. In the next chapter we will gain contextual knowledge relevant to the study including an overview of Chinese immigration to the United States, the fieldsites of this study and the region known as SGV, as well as a discussion of the term “ling'en”.

## **Some Notes on Hanyu pinyin and Simplified Chinese**

Religious practices, concepts, names, and specialist vocabulary are presented primarily in two formats. The first appears in the order: English translation (often within quotation marks) followed by, in parenthesis, the Hanyu pinyin romanization system. Appearing less frequently is the order: pinyin followed by the English translation in parenthesis. The presence of pinyin intends to respect emic language, as well as highlight the Chineseness of the concepts and limit conceptual domestication into English (Venuti 2012).

Names are presented surname first followed by given name. The exception is for scholars who have chosen to present their given name first followed by surname. For participant pseudonyms, I use the dominant romanization system of the birthplace of the participant.

## Chapter One: Chinese Immigration and Christianity in San Gabriel Valley

### Introduction

This chapter covers several topics that are important for understanding the context of this study. They include an overview of history in Chinese migration to the United States, an overview of Chinese Christianity in the United States with a focus on Protestant churches that emerged from Bible study groups (*chajingban*) in the 1960s through the 1990s, many of which have transitioned into full-fledged ethnic churches. I then provide an analysis of the three fieldsites of this study, discussing their leadership structure and religious activities. In the last section I detail the meaning of the term *ling'en* given the previous sections to pave the way for the remainder of the thesis. We will see how the diversity of development amongst *chajingban* has shaped and problematized defining “*ling'en*”.

### Chinese Immigration to the United States and “Chineseness”

The history of Chinese immigration to the United States is varied, complex, and characterized by a long history of Chinese mobility.<sup>23</sup> Yang (2001, 72) argues that history of immigration from China can be divided into two stages, each stage with several waves of immigrants. The first stage of immigrants covers the first one hundred years beginning in the late 1840s. Most of the first immigrants came from the Siyi region of Guangdong and worked as contract laborers on plantations, in mining, and later the transcontinental railroads and as merchants (Zhou and Liu 2017, 407). Historian Erika Lee (2003, 19), who traces her matrilineal lineage back to the gold seekers in the 1850s, rejects a uniform view of 1882-1943 commonly characterized as the Chinese exclusion era. Instead, she traces American gatekeeping ideologies that originated in Chinese exclusion as it developed in several periods during this first stage. It was also during this first stage (between 1840 and 1940) that nearly 20 million Chinese left their

---

<sup>23</sup> While this study is primarily concerned with Chinese immigration to the United States following the Hart Cellar Act, I recognize that Chinese migration patterns and stories are vastly more diverse. For a broader perspective, see Holland 2007 (Chinese migration to Canada); Latham and Wu 2013 (migration to the EU); Benton and Gomez 2011 (migration to Britain); Mazza 2016 (migration to Latin America); Mohan and Lampert 2013 (migration to Africa); and Miles 2020 (social history of Chinese migration from 1500 to the present).

homes in southern China (including Hong Kong, Xiamen, Shantou, and Hainan Island) to Southeast Asia, some descendants who would make their way to the United States later (McKeown 2010).

The second stage of Chinese migration to the United States began in the mid-1960s as significant policy changes occurred on both the United States and China sides. On the United States side, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart-Celler Act) was signed into law, replacing the discriminatory national origins system and opening the country to receive Chinese immigrants from not only mainland China but Greater China and elsewhere. The new system heavily favored highly educated workers while also allowing families to reunify. Then in 1971 the General Assembly of the United Nations voted to admit the People's Republic of China into the United Nations. In the following year, United States President Richard Nixon made his historic visit to Beijing to normalize diplomatic relationship with the People's Republic of China. Beginning in 1979 mainland China began sending large numbers of students and scholars to the West in hopes to catch up with Western science and technology. Thus the "second wave" is characterized by a normalization of relations between China and the United States.

Following the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*wenhua dageming*) in mainland China (1966–1976), in Indonesia the September Thirtieth Movement (*Gerakan 30 September*) resulted in a regime change and led to wide scale killings of supposed Chinese sympathizers of the Communist Party (PKI) in 1965 and 1966 under Sukarno (Zhou 2019, 2-3). Many of these Chinese migrants, fearful of being tortured or falsely accused, fled the country and migrated to the United States (Cunningham 2008). Also beginning in the 1960s were waves of immigration of ethnic Chinese from Burma to the United States of which the first group comprised mainly of educated professionals and skilled workers (Chang 2014).

The impact of Hart-Celler Act also allowed for Chinese migrants from other regions, leading to the diversification of post 1980s Chinese immigration. For example, during

the 1980s and 1990s, many highly skilled Hong Kong immigrants settled in the San Francisco Bay Area and Greater Los Angeles. Immigration from Taiwan followed “White Terror” and martial law in Taiwan until 1989, in which Taiwanese<sup>24</sup> fleeing political persecution and seeking freedom and democracy in the United States. This initial wave of Taiwanese immigrants was comprised mostly of well-educated professionals and those seeking graduate education. In the late 1980s, there was another wave of ethnic Chinese immigrants from Burma (changed to Myanmar in 1989) (Chang 2014). Between the late 1990s to early 2000s, ethnic Chinese evangelicals fled from Indonesia’s second largest city, Surabaya, due to economic crisis and entered the United States as non-immigrant visitors. Thousands of them overstayed their visas and worked as day laborers in Philadelphia while seeking asylum. In 2005, their hopes for asylum were shattered as the outcome of the *Lie v. Ashcroft* case set a precedent for the rejection of claims that there existed “pattern or practice of persecution of Chinese Christians in Indonesia” (Setiyawan 2015, 14-16, 22). With that said, between 1980 and 2010, 65% of Chinese immigrants to the United States came from mainland China in a new global migratory phenomenon called “new Chinese migrants” (*xin yimin*) (Zhou and Liu 2017). This was in part due to the passing of the H-1B legislation in the 1990s as a way of firms in the United States to hire skilled professionals. As such, throughout the 2000s, a significant portion of Chinese migration take the path of education followed by obtaining their immigration visas through employment (Zhou and Liu 2017, 409-410).

Historian of Chinese migration Steven B. Miles (2020) notes that classic studies of migration often identify push and pull factors that motivate people to leave. Some push factors for Chinese migration have been poverty, natural disasters (e.g., flooding, draught) leading to famine, overpopulation, and warfare, while pull factors have been higher wages, better living conditions, and more employment opportunities. Miles notes that while this model has explanatory powers, it fails to support sustained (lasting across decades) immigration as well as kinship groups migration that is characteristic of

---

<sup>24</sup> Taiwan differentiates between “mainlanders” (*waishengren*), those who fled to Taiwan following the communist victory, and “Taiwanese” (*benshengren*), ethnic Hoklo and Hakka who settled on the island prior to or during the Japanese colonization of Taiwan.

Chinese migratory patterns. Studies have shown that migration decisions may not be made entirely at the individual level and more at the family level, as such migration with the support of family reflected a desire to diversify family resources while reducing investment risks (Choi and Peng 2016). Through migration supported by kinship, a pattern known as “chain migration” emerged. In chain migration, new migrants learn from previous kin migrants and gain information about travel routes, immigration regulations, housing and work opportunities, and receive resources. Thus, while push and pull factors are significant in Chinese migration patterns, Miles demonstrates that chain migration leading over time to a particular culture of migration across diasporic networks is a more accurate analysis of Chinese migratory patterns. While chain migration of the familiar nature described by Miles is not evident in this study, another form of chain migration – that is, support offered to new migrants through the church – is evident. Elsewhere Chinese Christians have likely experienced familial chain migration such as Zhejiang immigrant Christians to Europe (Cao and Lin 2024) and Ap Chau migrants to Elgin, Scotland leading to the expansion of the True Jesus Church in the United Kingdom (Liu 1998).

Interestingly, Miles (2020, 4-13) acknowledges the problems that scholars have with the term “diaspora” – that is, the term being applied to the Jewish experience and denoting a people who have been expelled from their home; dangers of viewing Chinese migrants as one monolithic group; and a tendency to essentialize the Chineseness of the people studied – however he retains the use of “diasporas” to denote some coherence to the topic while rejecting the idea of monolithic migration. Other scholars such as the historian and sinologist Gungwu Wang have also rejected the use of “diaspora” because of its misconstruing a homogenous Chinese population perpetually loyal to China, denying immigrants the opportunity to integrate into adopted countries. In Wang’s (1993, 926-927) tripartite differentiation, *huaqiao* refers to those Chinese nationals who temporarily reside abroad; *huaren* are those who locate their cultural origins in China but are politically oriented to their adopted countries; and *huayi* are those who well integrated into adopted countries and only distantly and ethnically connected to China. For many, the preferred term is the inversed form of “Chinese

overseas”, which is used to refer to all ethnic Chinese living outside Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the People’s Republic of China (the term “Greater China” is often used to describe this region collectively). Furthermore, “Chinese overseas” emerged from the 1960s as a field of study which focuses on the experiences of Chinese migrants in host countries where their experiences are typically excluded (Miles 2020, 8-9). In this sense, this study seeks to document the experiences of a particular group of Chinese migrants.<sup>25</sup>

In the context of overseas Chinese migration, the ideas of the scholar of Confucianism Tu Weiming, who argued that a renewed sense of “Chineseness” located within the diaspora might serve as an example for a center supposedly in moral and cultural decline. Tu advanced the concept of a “cultural China” as an area of cultural homogeneity spanning diasporic nodes. However, to some, especially those who felt themselves to have been assimilated into the cultures and contexts in which they lived or to be pursuing autonomous projects, claims for such an imagined community of exiled Chinese intellectuals sounded like an appeal to an elitist, ethnic fundamentalism (Kuehn et al. 2013, 4). Chineseness is thus less about the character of some ethnicity or nation than about the collective manifestation of cultural and political intents (Hoon and Chan 2021, 2). By comparing the constructions of majority (“Greater China”) and minority Chinese (e.g., Southeast Asia), the myth of an “organic” China that dispenses the “truest” form of Chineseness may be dispelled, thereby allowing us to de-essentialize the idea of Chineseness (Hoon and Chan 2021, 4). Following this de-essentialization, in this study I use the term “Chinese” and “Chineseness” to include migrants – both temporary and permanent – from all regions. With that said, participants of this study were born mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan.

---

<sup>25</sup> I recognize that this term excludes a wide population of internal migrants – for example the millions who migrate from rural to urban China in pursuit of better lives. Similar to migrating out of the country, internal migrations reflect changing sets of push and pull factors as well as the development of migratory subcultures (Zhao 1999; Huang et al. 2018). Take for example the development of “slums” (*chengzhongcun* lit. “village in city”) within metropolitan cities which attract rural migrants because of their social accessibility, affordability, and cultures (Zhang et al. 2003; Zhang 2009).

## Chinese Protestantism in the United States

In this section we turn our attention to the history of the Chinese church in the United States. While unfortunately the United States Census discontinued the collection of people's religious beliefs beginning in 1980, we can turn to studies conducted by Pew Research Center. Pew (2012) found that roughly half (52%) of Chinese Americans claimed no religious affiliation. Affiliation with Christianity followed with 31%, then Buddhism at 15%, 2% as other religion, and 1% as unsure. In a more recent report, Pew (2023b) found that amongst Chinese Americans affiliation to Christianity had declined to 23% while the religious unaffiliated increased to 56%. Christianity remains the largest religious affiliation amongst Chinese Americans. For those who responded with Christianity in the 2012 report, Pew provides further groupings: 13% as evangelical or "born again" Protestant, 9% mainline Protestant, and 8% Catholic. Pew asked all Protestants if they would describe themselves as a Pentecostal and/or charismatic Christian. Among Chinese American Protestants, 10% described themselves as Pentecostal and 19% as charismatic.<sup>26</sup>

This data suggests that there are over 100,000 Chinese American Christians who identify as either charismatic or Pentecostal, with potentially significantly more who might identify as "ling'en" or consider themselves partially ling'en (I discuss this in more detail in a section below). While this is no small number, they are spread across the United States and oftentimes in the numerous cities with high populations of Chinese Americans, thus drastically limiting their ability to form larger congregations. Furthermore, the history of charismatic Chinese American Christianity is far shorter than that of mainstream Chinese American evangelicalism. For example, during the Azusa Street Revival from which many Pentecostal congregations including minorities were formed, the Chinese population in America was less than 100,000, comprising of 0.1%

---

<sup>26</sup> Pew defines "Pentecostal" as a Christian who belongs to a denomination or independent church that emphasizes the gifts of the Holy Spirit, including speaking in tongues, divine healing and direct receipt of divine prophecy, which are seen as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pew defines "charismatic" as a Christian who engages in spiritual practices that are considered gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues, but is not a member of a Pentecostal denomination. Most charismatics belong to Catholic, Orthodox, mainline Protestant or evangelical Protestant denominations (Pew Research Center 2012).

of the total population of 93 million (Census.Gov. 1914). For these reasons, ling'en face more challenges in finding a religious community as immigrants in the United States than their evangelical counterpart. Somewhat fortunate for ling'en who live in SGV, there are a handful of communities for them.

The history of Chinese Christian congregations in the United States has been closely linked to immigration laws in the past. Their slow growth, due to exclusionary migration laws in the 1800s and 1900s, began to see a slow uptick with the Magnuson Act of 1943. By 1952, there were a total of sixty-six Chinese Protestant churches across the United States. Then following the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, the floodgate of Chinese immigration was fully opened and by 1994, Chinese churches in the United States increased more than ten-fold to 697 (Yang 1999, 5-6; Tseng 2006). Several factors can account for the rapid growth of Chinese congregations during these decades, among them the relatively large number of highly educated professionals who are part of a church community and can offer leadership and financial resources to support the growth of the church (Tseng and Chuck 2009, 3).

Joy Tong and Yang (2017) have noted that Protestant churches founded after 1943 typically began as Bible study groups, which were led by Chinese men with graduate degrees and a Confucian adherence to strict, normative rules.<sup>27</sup> One Taiwan-born immigrant, Su Wenfeng, to the United States who later became a pastor in a mainstream evangelical Chinese American church provides a helpful overview of the development of Chinese Protestant churches beginning in the 1950s. Su gathered the writings of dozens of church lay and pastoral leaders, tracing the beginnings of the precursor to contemporary migrant Chinese Protestant church to the 1950s. As examples, the New York Chinese Christian Group (*niuyue zhongguo jidutu tuanqi*) met in Manhattan beginning in 1950, while the Minnesota Twin Cities Chinese Christian Fellowship (*mingzhou shuangcheng huaren jidu tuanqi*) began meeting in in 1958. Su then traces the growth of Bible study groups between the 1960s and 1970s as waves of

---

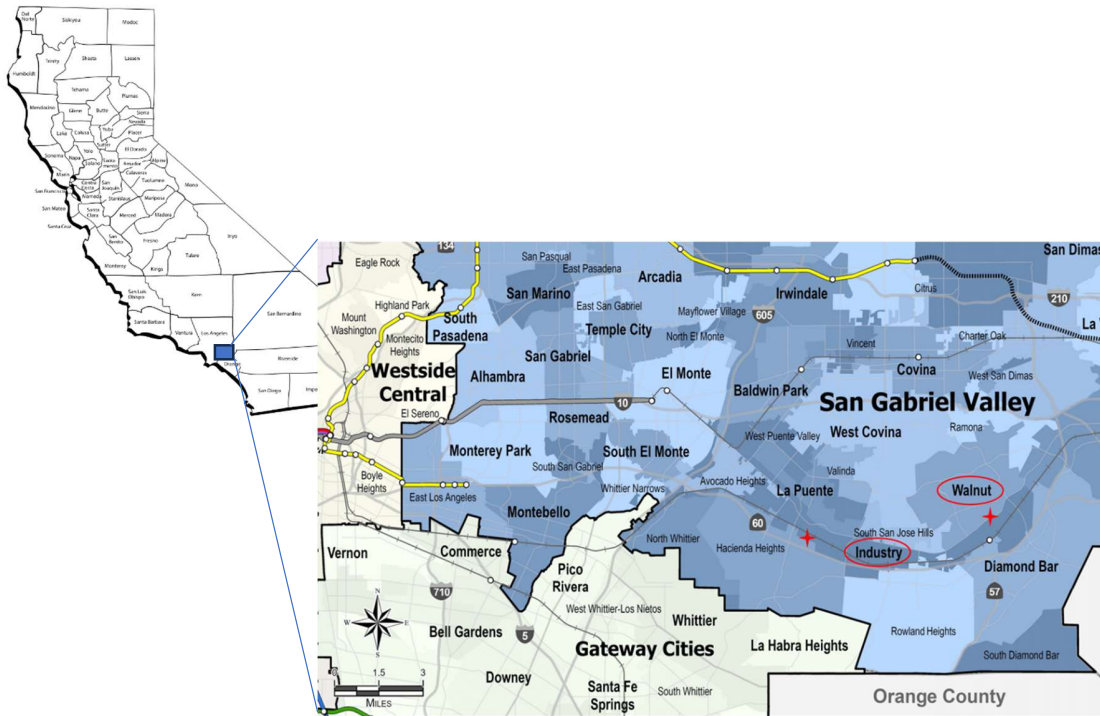
<sup>27</sup> Tong and Yang (2017, 332) define those normative rules as surrounding issues related to personal behavior and church activities. For example, these rules are against "uncontrolled emotionalism", "over-zealous frenzy", "chaos", and church schisms observed in early charismatic movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

students migrated from Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and other areas. He claims that at this point almost every university with migrant graduate students had Chinese Bible study groups (Su 2017, 8-15). By the 1980s, most of the earlier Bible study groups had transitioned into full-fledge churches with their own buildings. While new independent Bible group groups formed during this period, most of them were closely associated with local migrant churches. It is also during this time when a handful of immigrant Chinese Christians turned towards so called “Third Wave” Pentecostalism<sup>28</sup>, a movement closely associated with the fieldsites of this study. Following the 1989 Tiananmen Square protest, the migrant church saw a drastic rise in the number of intellectuals, students, and asylum seekers. Then in 1992, the United States passed the Chinese Student Protection Act of 1992 sponsored by Nancy Pelosi and Slade Gorton, granting permanent residence for Chinese nationals who migrated to the United States between June 1989 and April 1990 in response to the Tiananmen Square protest (Fu 1995). In these brief forty years, we see that there are several factors contributing to the migration and the Christianization of Chinese students, intellectuals, and asylum seekers –these and more contribute to the diversity of the contemporary Chinese church in the United States. While this study focuses primarily on what I call the “ling’en-ification” (*ling’en hua*) of some migrant Chinese Christians and churches, it acknowledges the other aspects to some degree.

---

<sup>28</sup> “Third wave” is a catch all term that is “nearly impossible to define: [it] comprises 18,810 independent, indigenous, postdenominational denominations and groups that cannot be classified as either pentecostal or charismatic but share a common emphasis on the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts, Pentecostal-like experiences (not Pentecostal terminology), signs and wonders, and power encounters” (Van der Laan 2010, 204).

## San Gabriel Valley, its Chinese Migrants and Ling'en Institutions



*Figure A map of the southwest part of SGV. The eastern red star is the location of ARC and VOH. The western red star is the location of GCCI.*

In this section, I will briefly describe SGV highlighting its strong Chinese and Chinese Christian presence to help the reader better visualize the study in its physical and cultural context. SGV lies just east of the city of Los Angeles and covers roughly 200 square miles or 520 square kilometers. The name is derived from the San Gabriel River which flows through the region. Originally agricultural, the valley has fully urbanized into 31 cities. SGV is one of the most ethnically diverse regions in the country. In 2017 there were around 1.54 million people residing in SGV. Second to Hispanics, Asians make up nearly 30% of the population, or about 456,000 people. The influx of Chinese to the region began in the 1970s with migrants from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Burma, and other places.

More recently, mainland Chinese represent the majority of Chinese immigration and have in recent decades reshaped the region. For example during my fieldwork in 2019 and 2020, “99 Ranch Market” (colloquially called *jiujiu dahua* by Chinese migrants) and other Chinese supermarkets have become popular places for Chinese migrants to purchase ingredients for home and restaurant cooking (see Figure 2). An even more recent example is Tiger Sugar, a chain shop that sells boba tea (*zhenzhu naicha*) which opened a store in SGV while I was conducting fieldwork. Tiger Sugar is headquartered in Taichung, Taiwan and bubble tea was invented in Taiwan in the 1980s. There has also been a rise in Mandarin language services such as legal centers, nail and hair salons, and restaurant supplies. This reflects the transition from Cantonese speaking communities to make way for Mandarin speaking communities beginning in the late 1940s due to changes in migration pattern (Lai 2004, 319). Sociologists Zhou Min, Yen-Fen Tseng, and Rebecca Y. Kim have described SGV as an “ethnoburb”, characterized by its visibility of transnational migrants (some of which can be seen by shifts in commercial property) and their daily lives in ethnic communities without the need to assimilate to mainstream society (Zhou et al. 2009). While I was in the field, it was perfectly fine to use Mandarin Chinese throughout most of the day – whether talking to local Chinese residents, ordering food and beverages in local Chinese restaurants, and of course, participating in Chinese Protestant religious activities.

Figure 1 A Chinese supermarket in one of the many commercial squares in SGV (photo by author)



SGV is also home to many religious institutions. One of the most well-known is the Hsi Lai Temple (*foguang xishan xilaisi*), the largest Taiwanese Buddhist Temple in North America. The temple was completed in 1988 and has been referenced on occasion to encourage increased proselytization activity in the region by ling'en Christians. Within SGV there are more than 150 Chinese American Churches. A small handful belong to mainline denominations including Presbyterian Church USA and United Methodist Church. Others belong to denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention

Christian Missionary Alliance, and Evangelical Formosan Church (*luofu jiaohui*)<sup>29</sup> – a budding denomination which started with a single church founded in Los Angeles in 1970 and has since expanded to over 140 churches worldwide. However, the vast majority of Chinese American churches within the SGV are independent, local churches with no formal denominational ties. Additionally, within SGV there are three Chinese language speaking seminaries accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), an organization which provides graduate schools of theology with quality control: China Evangelical Seminary North America, Logos Evangelical Seminary – attached to the Evangelical Formosan Church, and International Theological Seminary. Furthermore two non-ATS accredited institutions are also located in the region: Global Enrichment Theological Seminary and Harvest Bible University. I examined the public information of more than fifty churches in SGV and found that nearly half of pastoral leaders in SGV have graduated from these five seminaries. These seminaries will likely continue to produce leaders for the immigrant Chinese church.

In the year before fieldwork, I began to investigate the region for ling'en organizations. I contacted a handful of church and seminary leaders as well as Chinese Christian scholars who were very kind and helpful in guiding me towards potential ling'en churches. After some preliminary investigation which included browsing the website of the churches, communicating with people who had attended the churches, and watching some of the online public videos, I confined my fieldsites down to three Christian organizations. One operates exclusively as a church. Another operates as a church with an attached daycare center. The third began as a retreat center for immigrant Chinese ministers and later added an education center and most recently, a church. It would turn out that this selection provided a more comprehensive understanding of ling'en in the region, including three types of ling'en organizations: (1) the one and only (as of 2025) immigrant Chinese Vineyard church which has adopted some Vineyard-like ling'en practices; (2) the far more common mainstream evangelical

---

<sup>29</sup> Short for *luoshanji taiyu fuyin jiaohui* (Los Angeles Taiwanese Evangelical Church), later renamed *luoshanji fuyin jiaohui* (Los Angeles Evangelical Church) and from which its English name, Evangelical Formosan Church, is derived. The term "Formosa" comes from the Republic of Formosa which was established in 1895 on the island of Taiwan and collapsed 151 days later following the Japanese invasion of the island.

church with ling'en characteristics; and (3) the immigrant Chinese ling'en training center with an attached church. In the next section, I provide an overview of each site and highlight their similarities and differences as well as interactions in recent decades. As the reader will discover, each site represents a unique development of the post 1950s/1960s Chinese immigrant church in the United States.

*Site One: Vineyard of Harvest in Walnut, California – A Chinese Vineyard Congregation*



*Figure 2 Vineyard of Harvest Church (photo taken by author)*

The Vineyard of Hope (*jidu fule zhijia*) is unique in that it is the only Chinese language ethnic member of the movement known as Vineyard Movement. In the United States, Vineyard USA (subsidiary of Vineyard Movement and headquartered in Stafford, Texas) encompasses 130,000 people in about 500 Vineyard churches across the United States (Bialecki 2017). Due to this and other characteristics which I describe below, I classify VOH as an “ethnic Vineyard church which adopts some Vineyard-like ling'en practices.”

The founding pastors, Reverends Kenneth Kwan and Robert Chou, were once committed members of Rutgers Community Christian Church RCCC (*ruoge jiaohui*), one of the largest immigrant Chinese evangelical churches in the United States. RCCC

founds its beginnings as Bible study group called the “East Brunswick Adult Fellowship” in 1967. Later it evolved into the present-day Rutgers Community Christian Church (Huang 2015, 75). Beginning in 1987, Kwan and Chou attended charismatic conferences including John Wimber’s Signs and Wonders and Power Evangelism, Kansas City Prophets gathering, as well as a handful of other meetings on prophecy and healing. Chou would return to RCCC where he and a handful of other members continued to study and experience miracles, healings, and exorcisms during the sabbatical absence of their then pastor, Xu Zongshi. Kwan would go on to graduate from Fuller Theological Seminary in 1990 and together with Chou, they planted a multiethnic church in Los Angeles. In the 1990s, the church adopted the small groups model (*xiaozu moshi*) with a focus on discipleship and evangelism. It also “witnessed the work of the Holy Spirit” amongst the congregation through the pouring of the Spirit, healing, releasing (*shifang*), and public confessions. Kwan and Chou’s evangelical background would both convince them of the validity of Vineyard’s theological stance and play a role in how Kwan organizes the church.

In 2001, the church purchased a building in Walnut, California. The name of the church changed from Vineyard of Harvest Church to Vineyard of Hope Church, and later its Chinese was changed to “Home of Christ and Joy” (*jidu fule zhijia*). The changes in name represented a shift in the general direction of the church – from its roots as the Chinese immigrant (primarily Cantonese and Mandarin before the 2000s and since then, Mandarin and Cantonese) Vineyard congregation in North America to its focus on the family and intergenerational faith at the time of my visits in 2021-2022.

Like many migrant Chinese churches in America, its members are ethnic Chinese from all around the world including Greater China and Southeast Asia. However, somewhat unique to the average immigrant Chinese church, Vineyard of Harvest is also in a transitional stage which is seeking to place more emphasis on intergenerational faith transmission and multiethnicity. For example, Dennis Liu<sup>30</sup> was pastor of the English congregation and co-pastors Vineyard of Harvest with Kwan. Leadership in the church

---

<sup>30</sup> In 2023, Liu was removed from church leadership due to a personal scandal.

is structured like most mainstream evangelical churches – with a male senior pastor. The pastoral team includes pastor (*mushi*) and evangelist (*chuandao*) where the former are generally more experienced and have received ordination (*anmu*) while the latter has less work experience in the church and has not received ordination. VOH has both male and female pastors, which is quite different from most mainstream evangelical churches that typically do not ordain women. In addition, VOH employs organizational titles such as paid director (*zhuren*) and volunteer coworker (*tonggong*).

At VOH, there are two congregations – one for Mandarin audience (with no Cantonese translation) and one for English audience. My fieldwork was primarily amongst the Mandarin audience. The main gatherings were Sunday morning worship (lasting around two hours), followed by an adult Sunday school (*chengnian zhurixue*), and mid-week fellowship (*tuangui*) gatherings which they call “little family” (*xiao jiating*) to denote their attention to relationship building. During my fieldwork, there were very few extra special gatherings due to the pandemic. From casual conversations, I learned that many years ago a group of more ling’*en* inclined congregants broke away and began their own gathering in a nearby location. Unfortunately, because they were primarily Cantonese speakers (which I do not understand nor speak), I decided against visiting them.

*Site Two: Great Commission Church International in Hacienda Heights, California; An Evangelical Plus Ling'en Congregation*



*Figure 3 Great Commission Church International (photo taken by author)*

The Great Commission Church International GCCI (*guoji dashiming jiaohui*) is one of the many mainstream evangelical churches with its founding because of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Chinese migration. It is different in that it later adopted ling'en practices due to its founding pastor, Philip Chen's encounters with Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity. Chen grew up in Taiwan and immigrated to Hacienda Heights (colloquially called *hagang*)<sup>31</sup> and was employed by GCCI. In the first few years, he received very little salary from the church and most of his income had come from the then Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru), a parachurch evangelical organization whose founder did not form close ties with Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity over the issue of speaking in tongues (Turner 2008, 91). At the time, Chen's view on ling'en gifts were aligned with

---

<sup>31</sup> According to the 2022 American Community Survey, Asian Americans represent the largest ethnic group in Hacienda Heights.

Campus Crusade for Christ and GCCI was, as he described, a “typical traditional church”. However, in the following years, Chen began to personally adopt ling’en practices such as speaking in tongues and soon cut ties with Campus Crusade for Christ. Chen described the church as becoming “open to ling’en” (*xiang ling’en kaifang*).

I classify this church as “evangelical with ling’en characteristics” and find that it is the most common type of ling’en church in SGV and the United States. Its evangelical roots are featured very prominently. For example, its name refers to the “Great Commission” of the Gospel books in the New Testament – a key feature of mainstream Chinese American evangelicalism; its Sunday worship shares many features with mainstream evangelicalism, including a full choir who wear white robes and a partial orchestra who come together to perform Chinese translations of traditional (*chuantong*) Christian hymnody. These so-called traditional hymns are twentieth century American and British congregational songs such as “Because He Lives” (*yinta huozhe*) and “Have Thine Own Way, Lord” (*pingni yixing*) (Music 2001).

The church began in the 1980s as a group of Chinese immigrants living in Hacienda Heights began to meet at different homes to fellowship, much like the origins of many Chinese churches. The group rented the Congregational Christian La Ole Amiotonu United Church of Christ building and took up the name “Hacienda Chinese United Church of Christ” (*hagang zhonghua lianhe jidu jiaohui*) while not belonging to the denomination known as “United Church of Christ”. They hired pastor Feili Chen who spent the early years teaching tithing and insisted that one tenth of the church’s general offering should be used as a mission fund. The 1990s was a period of growth and transformation for the church. Membership quickly expanded to beyond 100 members. An adult Sunday School was formed and would later become the “Equipping Centre” (*zhuangbei zhongxin*), a resource to be shared with three neighboring Chinese churches. By the end of the decade the church had formally transformed into a small group church.

In the next decade, the church focused on short term mission trips primarily to Taiwan and mainland China, evangelizing using collections of testimonies (titled “Please hear me speak”) and sermons. In addition to evangelism, the church used money to build several primary schools in Guizhou, China and in the mountains of Fujian, sponsoring over 6,000 students from impoverished families to attend primary and secondary schools, universities, and graduate schools. As the church continued to grow, the building was expanded again and by 2016, over 1,200 individuals attended on a weekly basis. The church is led by the senior pastor Chen Jiazheng (2019 to present).

The church is organized into “shepherding zones” (*muqu*) (as of 2024 there are eight) determined by location. Each zone is headed up by a husband-wife pair called zone pastors (*qumu*). These pairs might be theologically trained, not theologically trained, or in the process of receiving training at local Chinese language seminaries and Bible colleges; regardless, they have undergone an internal training course to take up these roles. All zone pastor couples report to senior pastor Chen and his wife who is also theologically trained. Zone pastors oversee fellowship gatherings and Bible study groups (known as “cell groups” *xibao xiaozu*) within their region. In cell groups, small groups of congregants (usually no more than fifteen) study various didactic materials including handouts which aid in the discussion of the previous Sunday morning’s sermon presentation. As far as I am aware, these churches do not have official membership (*huiyuan*). Through casual conversations, one reason for this is for the church to maintain an open-door policy. This encourages visitors (believers and non-believers alike) to feel welcomed. One outcome of this policy is that participants can (and do) switch churches with less formalities.

*Site Three: Agape Renewal Center in Walnut, California; Headquarter of Chinese Ling'en*



*Figure 4 Agape Renewal Center (photo taken by author)*

The final site is Agape Renewal Center (*aixiuyuan*). ARC is a unique institution – and amongst immigrant Chinese Christians there are no other institutions that are even approximately similar. I classify ARC as “ling'en training center with an attached church”. The beginning of ARC also goes back to the 1980s when Ernest Chan had a personal spiritual experience which he called being “baptized with the Holy Spirit” during a Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International meeting in Berkeley, California. Shortly after he began to speak in tongues. Chan would go on to found ARC in 1987 near San Francisco which relocated to Walnut in the 2000s (Lin 2020, 206).

October of 1987 commemorated the opening of ARC with 300 attendees from all over the world. The *xiu* in *aixiu* translates to “rest” and is shorthand for spiritual rest. ARC functioned as a retreat for pastors to refresh and recover. ARC saw rapid increase of interest amongst Taiwanese pastors and their church members – who attended

conferences with Caucasian American speakers such as Delores Winder, Jack Deere, and Richard Gazowsky. Prior to 2000, ARC had conducted much of its teaching in northern California. Since 2000, ARC established its first school in southern California. Subsequent branch locations have been established in other parts of the Sinophonic world including Kaohsiung, Taoyuan, Taipei, and Hualian of Taiwan as well as Singapore, Vancouver, and San Jose. In 2011, ARC purchased its current headquarters in Walnut, California (Figure 5). Based on casual conversations and fieldwork, ARC has had a massive influence on ling'en amongst immigrant Chinese churches. Whereas some mainstream evangelical participants consider ARC to be heretical (*yiduan*), ling'en Christians consider it a site of pilgrimage. Over the decades ARC has been the center for the training of countless ling'en leaders and ritual specialists. In addition, prior to 2010s, ARC had a much closer relationship with VOH and GCCI. Participants informed me that due to personal and theological differences, VOH and GCCI have distanced themselves from ARC.

ARC holds Sunday worship services at the location and re-opened in June of 2021. During these Sunday morning worship gatherings, it was not uncommon to see ling'en practices. However, I did not attend mid-week gatherings as they were shut down due to the pandemic lockdowns and cannot comment on the prevalence of ling'en practices during those. During my fieldwork, I did not see any advertisements for adult Sunday school. However, I did attend a handful of special gatherings that were held on Zoom and primarily for healing and deliverance (*yizhi shifang*), a practice which I discuss in chapters three and six). ARC does not run traditional fellowship gatherings, and instead they organize mid-week gatherings through themes such as "women's fellowship".

At ARC, staff members had both a pastoral title – most common being pastor (*mushi*) with a small handful of evangelists (*chuandao*) and elder (*zhanglao*). They also employed organizational titles including director and coworker. Contrast titles used in these fieldsites with ethnographer of Chinese society Mark McLeister's (2013, 236) fieldsite, where assistant pastors in the SGV are not called teachers (*jiaoshi*) but rather assistant pastor (*zhuli mushi*).

Beyond these three fieldsites, more than half of participants of this study spoke about Forerunner Christian Church (*muzhu xianfeng jiaohui*) located in Fremont, California in the San Francisco Bay Area. Participants consider FRCC a steppingstone from mainstream evangelicalism toward ling'en in that its Taiwan-born senior pastor, Jiang Xiuqin (Grace Chiang), has emphasized mystical teachings including the popular and highly accessible "inner life" (*neizai shenghuo*) series (Tong and Yang 2017, 334). Participants consider her teachings to be light (*qingwei de*) ling'en and many go on from FRCC to ARC in pursuit of deeper ling'en teachings.

Note that the ling'en individuals and organizations of this study are overwhelmingly born out of mainstream Chinese American evangelicalism. The founding pastor of VOH was a long-time member of the largest conservative evangelical Chinese American church in New Jersey; the founding pastor of ARC was previously the pastor of the Cumberland Presbyterian Chinese Church; and the founding pastor of GCCI was employed by the interdenominational Christian parachurch organization "Cru" (formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ). Yet all three leaders encountered "Third Wave" Pentecostalism of the 1980s which would go on to shape their understanding of ling'en Christianity (Van der Laan 2010, 204). Furthermore, a significant portion of this study's participants converted from mainstream evangelicalism to ling'en Christianity. As such, the fieldsites of this study share many features with evangelicalism including main worship service on Sunday mornings, adult Sunday school, and mid-week gatherings.

With that said, participants describe that in recent decades there has been a significant shift towards an "internalization" (*neibuhua*) of the understanding, production, and practicing of ling'en Christianity and ling'en gifts. In other words, over the past two decades these institutions began to rely less on non-Sinophonic speakers and teachers and more on Chinese leaders (many were trained at ARC) to shape their understanding of ling'en. My participants considered that this shift was very helpful as one participant said, "only the Chinese can truly understand what the Chinese need". By this he meant that Chinese ling'en leaders have an advantage in understanding Chinese migrants and

can tailor religious activities around their needs and understandings. As such, we could understand this as a self-theologizing process within SGV ling'en Christianity.

Additionally, based on the above analysis and categorization, we see that the conception of a ling'en church is not monolithic (or even possible). Of all three, type two, "evangelical with ling'en characteristics church", is by far the most prevalent amongst immigrant Chinese churches in the United States. Unfortunately, this study did not include a fourth type, churches belonging to denomination-like groups with ling'en characteristics such as Bread of Life church (*lingliangtang*) (Guo 2021). In the next section I discuss the problem of defining ling'en on an individual level based on interview data.

### **Why "Ling'en" and the Swimming Pool Analogy**

In a 2013 symposium, scholars of global Pentecostalism and Chinese Christianity gathered and presented a wide range of views on definitions and characterizations (Yang et al. 2017, 2). These and other scholars have used terms such as Pentecostalism or Pentecostals, charismatics or having "charismatic tendencies", Pentecostal-charismatics, and "spiritual" (*shuling*) to refer to Chinese Christians who emphasize the Holy Spirit and practice gifts of the Holy Spirit (Yang et al. 2017; Yang 1999, 161; Tsai 2017; Chambon 2017, 182; Liu 2017b, 200-212). Some of these Chinese Christian groups have more explicit historical connections with the so-called "first wave Pentecostalism" resulting from Azusa Street Revival in 1906. One such example is the True Jesus Church (Inouye 2018, 62). In a similar vein, participants of this study who were on staff at VOH identified themselves as Christians of the Vineyard Movement (*putaoyuan yundong*) due to VOH's membership in the movement. For this study, the term *shuling* (spiritual) also does not work because it is too broad and those Christians who do not consider themselves ling'en would certainly think of themselves as *shuling* (c.f. Liu and Liu 2023). For the remainder of participants, the lay ling'en Christian was not concerned with Pentecostal-charismatic movements. Instead, they heavily depended key biblical texts that are interpreted as relevant to ling'en gifts. I discuss this in chapter five on the discursive-scriptural practices.

My fieldwork agrees with Lin that P/pentecostal is not the preferred term as Chinese American Christians also do not use the terms “Pentecost” (*wuxunjie*) or “Pentecostalism” (*wuxunjie pai*) to describe themselves. Lin (2020, 9) suggests that in the Taiwanese context, C/charismatic is more appropriate as Taiwanese churches have been mostly affected by the global Charismatic Movement or Charismatic. McLeister (2019, 135) argues for the use of the original Chinese term to avoid drawing similarities with “Pentecostal” or “charismatics” from other contexts and to avoid assuming a sense of orthodoxy or theologically correct definition.

This study uses *ling'en* for the following reasons. First, participants of this study do not identify themselves as belonging to the “charismatic” (*ling'en pai*) or “Pentecostal” (*wuxunjie pai*) denominations or sects (denoted by the character *pai*); nor do they identify as belonging to “Third Wave” or “neo-charismatic”. Second, by using *ling'en* I want to avoid any generalizations and preconceived notions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy that might come with the English terms (Anderson 2017, 351-352). Third, by using the Chinese term I want to preserve some of its foreignness and remind the reader that this study is examining a Chinese expression of Christianity. Fourth, SGV *ling'en* is incredibly diverse by its own right and using English terms or movements may leave the reader with the wrong impression that it is part of a monolithic, bounded concept. Fifth, whereas Lin (2020, 10) avoids using the term *ling'en* because it may contribute to “(over)-emphasis on lived experiences at the expense of doctrines”, this study is centered on *ling'en* lived experiences and thus benefits greatly from the phenomenologically focused term.

While this thesis employs “*ling'en*”, it is not lost on me that there are many overlaps between *ling'en* and Pentecostalism, particularly of the U.S.-centric “Third Wave” and “New Apostolic Reformation” (sometimes also known as “Fourth Wave”) forms, in beliefs and practices (Anderson 2010, 14). Indeed, SGV *ling'en* shares many features with these Pentecostals and that *ling'en* Christians certainly fit under the generic, all-encompassing term of Pentecostalism. Nevertheless, this thesis respects emic perspective and preferences, and goes one step further by deeming them to hold and

engage in sufficiently different beliefs and practices to warrant the siphonic term as opposed to calling them “Pentecostals”.

Furthermore, this thesis typically uses “ling’en” as an attributive adjective. To accurately reproduce emic perspective, “ling’en Christian” (note the inclusion of the term “Christian”) is ideal because at the most basic level, SGV ling’en Christians identify themselves as “Christian” (*jidutu*), typically understood as the Protestant variety, and not “Pentecostal”. This self-label is significant in that they view themselves as bona fide Christians. Furthermore, they consider their religious practices, including so called ling’en practices, to be normative Christian practices. While the majority consider mainstream evangelicals to be genuine believers, a handful suggest that Christians who do not employ ling’en practices are disobedient to biblical texts. Few go even further and argue that mainstream evangelicals are spiritually blind (*shuling de xiazi*) even to the point of losing salvation (*shiqu jiu’en*). Beyond calling themselves Christian, ling’en Christians also accept the use of ling’en as an adjective to describe themselves under certain contexts, such as when describing themselves and some practices. It is much more common for them to say they seek to be filled by the Holy Spirit (*bei shengling chongman*), frame their activities and thinking in the Spirit (*zai lingli*), depend on the Holy Spirit (*kaozhe shengling*), etc.

A handful that I interviewed avoided the term ling’en primarily because of their attendance in a traditional church. They did not publicly practice the charismatic gifts similar to McLeister’s (2019, 143) findings that ling’en Christians did not speak in tongues in outward facing contexts like Sunday gatherings, but not for the same reasons. Whereas “Huanghaicheng” ling’en Christians avoided ling’en gifts to avoid unwarranted attention from the local state, SGV ling’en Christians deliberately avoided ling’en gifts in contexts where evangelical Christians are dominant. In these contexts, ling’en Christians speak of hiding (*yincang*) their ling’en gifts for the sake of avoiding conflicts within the church. The fact that SGV ling’en Christians express the need to hide ling’en practices in certain contexts (such as when attending mainstream evangelical gatherings) reinforces the fact that they are a minority amongst Chinese

American Christians and that mainstream evangelicals have not always tried to understand their ways of practicing Christianity.

A key observation from the data is that there are different understandings of ling'en between participants. In his fieldwork, Yang observed a differentiation between light ling'en (*youdian ling'en*) and radical ling'en (*jiduan ling'en*) or heavy ling'en (*zhongdu ling'en*) (Yang et al. 2017, 6). I want to expand on this understanding and clarify how the term is used by SGV ling'en. Since Yang's study was not conducted on ling'en Christians, his characterization of ling'en is understandably not as nuanced as my fieldwork suggests. My observation is that light and radical are characteristic of language used pejoratively by non-ling'en or anti-ling'en to describe ling'en and their practices. I did not hear anyone use heavy (*zhongdu*) to describe ling'en. Furthermore, light (*youdian*) and not very (*bu tai*) may be used by non-ling'en to comment in a descriptive and non-pejorative way on another's ling'en practices. For example, one non-ling'en participant said: that pastor is a little ling'en.

To better illustrate the nuance of the language used in SGV to talk about ling'en, I propose a swimming pool metaphor. In this swimming pool there is a shallow end, a deep end, and a gradient of increasing depth between. In this metaphor, ling'en Christians are in the swimming pool while non- and anti-ling'en are outside the pool. The depth of the pool represents an integrated view of the frequency of the ling'en practices, their institutional association, and the participant language of degree (*chengdu*) of ling'en practices. Generally speaking, the shallower end is comprised of what SGV ling'en Christians typically consider to be beginner ling'en practices which include speaking in tongues (*shuo fangyan*), emotional and physical responses that arise out of "being filled by the Holy Spirit" (*bei shengling chongman*), visibly ecstatic worship such as raising hands during worship, swaying body, and clapping to the rhythm of songs during worship singing, and as many participants consider, Jiang's inner life teachings.

As we move towards the middle of the pool, SGV ling'en broadly begins to include practices such as conducting personal healing and deliverance (*yizhi shifang*), performing auxiliary prayers during exorcisms (as opposed to the lead exorcist), and increased familiarity with spiritual warfare language in private and communal prayer. On the deeper end of the pool, we have our ritualistic practices such as conducting healing and deliverance and exorcisms, but also what SGV Christians consider advantaged practices such as interpreting dreams (*jie yimeng*) and speaking prophecies (*shuo yuyan*). Many of these advanced practices are taught at ARC and are on occasion practiced in other fieldsites. Most, if not all, of the ling'en rituals that ritual specialists (chapter six) conduct would be considered at the deep end of the pool. In this metaphor, individuals who do not practice these and other ling'en gifts are outside the pool. Finally, an individual may enter the pool at different depths, move between depths, and leave/re-enter the pool throughout their life.

Implicit in the swimming pool language is the issue of degree of spiritual maturity, also referred to as degree of familiarity. From their perspective, ling'en Christians hold somewhat contradictory conceptions of maturity and familiarity. In some cases, maturity is interpreted as having more ling'en gifts. In other cases, gaining ling'en gifts is perceived as superficially mature but spiritually immature (*bu chengshu*). In my assessment, the determinant for maturity is much more complicated than familiarity of ling'en gifts and can be more accurately reflected in a holistic evaluation of the individual and their "life" (*shengming*). This life includes a wide range of attributes including familiarity with the Protestant Bible (usually ability to memorize and interpret biblical passages), harmonious family life, and committed service at church, among others. For ling'en evaluation of a believer's life, ling'en gifts are an additional factor.

The swimming pool metaphor is helpful for several reasons. First, it reflects the diversity of ling'en within SGV. Furthermore, ling'en is not stagnant and SGV Christians have the option to move into the pool by adopting ling'en practices, move between the depths (as many participants expand their repertoire of ling'en practices through the years), and

leave the pool (as in the case of two participants who abandoned ling'en<sup>32</sup>). Second, it helps explain the use of light and radical language and beyond. In my field, the logic is that no matter where you are in the pool, those who are in a deeper section are typically referred to as “more ling'en” (*geng ling'en*) while those who are in the shallower end may be called “not really ling'en” (*bu tai ling'en*) or “not very ling'en” (*bu shi hen ling'en*). People may also call those in deeper waters pejoratively as “radically ling'en” (*jiduan ling'en*) but also those who are in shallower waters pejoratively as “not ling'en enough” (*bu gou ling'en*). The metaphor also reflects the ling'en Christian understanding that ling'en gifts can be taught, learned, and practiced – similar to the ways in which a person can learn to swim in the deeper end of the pool.

Thus, from the swimming pool metaphor we also gather that the use of descriptive qualifiers (e.g., too ling'en) is not based on some agreed upon sets of practices. Rather, they are entirely dependent on who is saying them. A non-ling'en may consider speaking in tongues “radical ling'en” while a ling'en who on occasion privately practices healing and deliverance will consider a pastor who regularly interprets dreams as “radically ling'en”. The metaphor works not only for individuals but also for institutions. Based on interview data, ARC is generally considered to be at the deeper end of the swimming pool. Pastoral leaders from VOH and GCCI told me that since the late 1990s, they have gradually begun to distance themselves from ARC (due to several reasons, not all of which are directly related to ling'en practices). As such, they view themselves as shifted towards the shallower end; this transition is reflected in interviews with lay members of these organizations as some consider ARC to be “too ling'en” while others do not. Finally, the swimming pool metaphor helps us to recognize the diversity of ling'en practices within SGV. There is no such singular, bounded concept of ling'en. Practices vary between individuals, between institutions, and within institutions. With that said, the fact that ling'en is not monolithic or bounded does not prevent us from examining their religious practices and understandings. Therefore, we should avoid conjuring up a list of normative ling'en practices and assume that every ling'en Christian practices each one. With that said, there are some basic practices that most, if not all,

---

<sup>32</sup> To clarify, they did not apostatize.

ling'en Christians are at least somewhat familiar with. In the swimming pool metaphor, this would be akin to getting wet upon entering the pool.

Finally, the swimming pool metaphor gives readers a way to observe and distinguish ling'en Christianity by focusing on its practices, rather than individual and institutional beliefs, which are even more diverse than religious practices. As an example, when asked about personal understanding (i.e. beliefs) of what the Holy Spirit is, participants gave wildly different answers – ranging from the Holy Spirit as a gentle voice, a fiery presence, a close friend, a powerful wind, etc. To be sure, many of these images can be found within the text of the Protestant Bible. However, throughout the interviewing process I struggled with their diverse beliefs as participant responses to belief questions did not fit neatly into any theological categories which I had received during previous theological training. Given the diversity of beliefs, examining religious practices eventually seemed like the more reasonable approach. Chau's modalities provide the framework to do exactly this.

I contend that the post-1950s immigrant Chinese (particularly from mainland China) Christian tendency towards non-denominationalism is a key explanation for the visible absence of denominational formation, resulting in a diversity of ling'en. There are at least two major factors that prevented mid-20th century churches from joining denominations. First, in mainland China, Chinese Protestant attitude towards denominationalism began poorly. For example, the highly influential church leaders Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee vehemently attacked foreign denominationalism and considered denominations to be unbiblical (Chow 2013a, 6; Hu 2017, 163). Second, while mainline Protestant denominations had mostly ignored Chinese congregations (Tseng 2006, 128), leading to migrant churches having to proselytize, fundraise, and grow by themselves. This was further exacerbated by the fact that most of the United States saw limited Chinese immigration.

While VOH is unique in that it belongs to the Association of Vineyard Churches, there is no single denomination to which all immigrant Chinese ling'en churches belong.

Instead, SGV ling'en Christians draw their practices from a wide range of sources – ranging from Northern California's FRCC to Bethel Church in Redding to the Bread of Life Church in Torrance. As such, the current field in SGV is not a single coherent unified system, but rather a diffuse, shifting collection of churches, institutions, pastors, lay leaders and believers who learn, practice, and teach ling'en Christianity. As expected, between the various fellowships and churches of this study, while there is limited agreement on what is a ling'en practice (e.g., tongues, is broadly speaking, considered a ling'en practice), beyond this there is not much agreement. For example, how and when tongues should be used, how to conduct a particular ritual, what is the cosmological basis for a particular healing, etc. As such one minor theme within SGV ling'en is the concept of checking the authenticity of an individual's ling'en gifts (in a vein similar to that of a community checking for the authenticity of an individual's claims of the Christian faith). This is particularly true when an unknown person (who claims to have ling'en gifts) joins a ling'en gathering; caution towards authenticity is the default position. With that said, there are a small number of immigrant Chinese denominations or denomination-like churches in SGV such as the Bread of Life (*lingliangtang*) church and Evangelical Formosan Church (*taifu jidu jiaohui*) that have attempted to add boundaries to the concept of ling'en by bracketing out legitimate from unaccepted practices (Hsu 1990, 21-22).

### **Ling'en “Conversion”**

In this section we turn our attention to a key theme from interview data, namely conversion from evangelicalism to ling'en. Below, I delineate what ling'en participants mean by the two concepts of evangelicalism and conversion.

For ling'en participants, “evangelicals”, “evangelicalism”, “evangelical church” is primarily denoted by three terms: *fuyin pai* (evangelical sect), *chuantong* (traditional), and *baoshou* (conservative). *Fuyin* is usually accompanied by *pai* to denote the evangelical Christian and church since *fuyin* by itself denotes “the Gospel” or “the good news”. *Chuantong* and *baoshou* are often used synonymously by ling'en participants. *Baoshou* more often represents a negative assessment of the ways they formerly

practiced Christianity. While *chuantong* comes with undertones of tradition based in time, *baoshou* centers on a critique of tradition based in religiocultural practices. These terms may leave the reader with the impression that ling'en are taking differing stances on social or theological issues, i.e. socially and theologically liberal positions such as affirming LGBTQIA+ people and the social gospel. However, this is not the case. *Chuantong* is nearly equivalent to the descriptive idea, "this is how we practiced Christianity and what we believed prior to becoming ling'en". Therefore, from an emic perspective there are debates over where boundaries around what and how are considered normative and legitimate Christian practices. One undertone of this study is that ling'en Christians place less stock in the legitimacy of religious practices by tradition and more on their immediate usefulness. In this way, ling'en Christianity is emically considered a superior, more relevant way of doing religion.

When participants speak of their conversion from evangelicalism to ling'en, they do not use the Chinese term *gai zongjiao* "to change religion" or *gai xinyang* "to change beliefs". Rather, when participants want to indicate changes in their religious beliefs and practices from mainstream evangelicalism to ling'en they employ three terms, *gaibian* (to change), *fanzhuan* (to inverse), and *gengxin* (to renew). *Gaibian* is generally used to describe changes in the ways participants think about Christianity and its key ideas such as Jesus, the Holy Spirit, ling'en gifts, etc. For example, one participant who was formerly opposed to ling'en following some ling'en experiences changed (*gaibian*) her attitude and became less oppositional to ling'en. As such, *gaibian* here does not indicate a change in religious affiliation but rather a change in component beliefs and practices within their understood bounds of Christianity. The second term, *fanzhuan*, translated as "reverse" or "inverse". While it is like *gaibian* in that it also reflects an internal change in beliefs and practices, participant use of *fanzhuan* suggests that they view these changes as having a sweeping, radical effect on the individual. In some cases, they speak of their "*fanzhuan* by ling'en Christianity" (*bei ling'en fanzhuan*) or "*fanzhuan* by the Holy Spirit" (*bei shengling fanzhuan*). *Fanzhuan* is thus characterized by its totality and often its suddenness.

Contrast to *fanzhuan* is the third term, *gengxin*, as in to be renewed by the Holy Spirit (*bei shengling gengxin*). Implicit in the *gengxin* language is often a gradual transformation to ling'en and away from old ways of practicing Christianity. Following this renewal, a small handful of participants view some of their former component beliefs – such as not being able to pray in tongues – with increased suspicion. Two participants went further and cast doubt as to whether mainstream evangelicals were saved (*dejiu*) or that evangelical salvation could not be guaranteed due to their vulnerability to the forces of evil (*xie'e shili*). The use of these terms suggests that in the minds of ling'en Christians (who were formerly evangelical), ling'en Christianity is understood as a new way of practicing Christianity. However, unlike their conversion to evangelicalism, my data does not point to their turning to ling'en requiring any formal rituals such as (re-)baptism. With regards to the modalities, conversion – both gradual and sudden – generally occur as participants engage in religious practices of the personal-cultivational and immediate-practical modalities. Religious practices of the remaining four modalities – chapters four through seven – generally teach, train, and shape ling'en Christians in ling'en religious practices and understanding. In this way, the thesis is roughly organized in a way which correlates to the process of an individual's conversion from evangelicalism to ling'en and mastering the ling'en way of doing religion.

With that said, I will continue to use the term conversion, but I am referring to the concepts of *gaibian*, *fanzhuan*, and *gengxin*. In the few participants who converted from non-Christian belief or no religious belief to Christianity, I will make it clear that such conversion is the case. I will also use the terms evangelical, evangelicalism, and mainstream evangelicalism but when used from the ling'en perspective, I am referring to the concepts of *chuantong* and *baoshou*.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have laid out an overview of the historical, physical, cultural, and institutional contexts necessary for analysis of ling'en religious practices. I also problematized the definitions of “ling'en Christian”, “ling'en church”, and “conversion” to

ling'en. While this chapter has highlighted the variability within SGV ling'en, this is not to say that we cannot find any major themes. In the next chapter we begin our excursion into the six modalities of Chinese religiosity with an examination of ling'en personal-cultivational practices that produce gandong.

## Chapter Two: Gandong Production and Cultivation Through Ling'en Practices

### Introduction

In this chapter, we consider some of the religious practices of SGV ling'en Christians that I categorize under the personal-cultivational modality. This study begins with personal-cultivational practices as participants overwhelmingly report these practices as central to their conversion to ling'en Christianity – the other practices being those of the immediate-practical modality. Following this shift to ling'en, participants produce and sustain cultivation of *gandong* through practices in which individuals encounter the Holy Spirit.<sup>33</sup> Gandong corresponds to a cluster of emotions, physical responses, and future intentions interpreted as inspired by the Holy Spirit and experienced as the drawing near the Holy Spirit. The central characteristics of this cultivation are *repeating* religious practices *aimed at* the production of *gandong* with the *goal* of transforming the individual into more capable "ling'en *gandong* masters"<sup>34</sup> (i.e. those who achieved high masteries in the personal reception and experience of *gandong* and the production of *gandong*). While the first two characteristics (repeating practices; *gandong* production) are drawn directly from ethnographic data, the specific goal (i.e. becoming a capable *gandong* master) is one which I argue to be the underlying cultivational motivation amongst ling'en Christians. The cultivation of *gandong* represents a ling'en response to the "problem of presence" – a paradox of God's presence and absence in lives of Christian believers – by generating presence in the form of *gandong* (Engelke 2007).

The key religious practices that ling'en use to produce and cultivate *gandong* are learning and using ling'en spiritual gifts (e.g., speaking in tongues, speaking prophecies), singing worship songs, and attending special ling'en gatherings, among others. Through these practices, participants cultivate themselves into more enthusiastic *gandong* masters. This chapter delineates two forms of *gandong*: "emotional experience" and "communicational experience" *gandong*. The chapter then

---

<sup>33</sup> McLeister (2012, 218) also found *gandong* ("moved by the Holy Spirit") in his mainland China fieldsite. He observed that it is closely connected to glossolalia and other supernatural activity.

<sup>34</sup> The term "master" is evocative of religious masters in Chinese religiosity, for example *fashi* (Daoist ritual masters of exorcism), *fengshui* masters, qigong masters, and the *tianshi* Heavenly Master Zhang Daoling.

shows that ling'en participants employ two mechanisms to ensure the production and cultivation of gandong. The goals of ling'en cultivational practices are to trust (*xiangxin*) and to know (*zhidao*) that the Holy Spirit is present, working amongst, and blessing (*zhufu*) the ling'en Christian. In other words, the cultivational aspect highlighted here is the process of acquiring religious experiences to gradually come to some cognitive and emotive self-knowledge and experience of the divine.

### **Personal-Cultivational Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity**

Chau (2006, 75) characterizes religious practices within the personal-cultivational modality as primarily involving a long-term interest in cultivating and transforming oneself, that is, to develop oneself over an extended period toward some goal, which vary across religious traditions. For example, within religious Daoism there are personal-cultivational practices in the pursuit of immortality (*chengxian*); of reincarnating into a better life or achieving nirvana (*chengfo*) in Buddhism; in becoming a person of virtue or approach closer to sagehood (*chengsheng*) in Confucianism<sup>35</sup>; and of cultivating the inner body through *qigong*.<sup>36</sup> The premise that goals can vary across religious traditions is critical in the analysis of personal-cultivational practices amongst SGV ling'en Christians because as this chapter argues, many of their practices reflect a desire to develop oneself over an extended period.

Chau provides an insightful example in a 2011 publication. In it he describes spirit mediumism of Taiwanese religious life in which people of all demographics (though women are more common than men) become possessed by deities and call themselves "spirit mediums" (*lingji*).<sup>37</sup> Focusing on the *lingji* themselves, Chau (2011b, 72) suggests that their goal is to get in touch with the original spirit through cultivating the possessed

---

<sup>35</sup> The recently excavated Confucian text *Wuxing* (Five Kinds of Action) describes the process of cultivation of five virtues: benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), wisdom (*zhi*), ritual propriety (*li*), and sagacity (*sheng*) (Csikszentmihalyi 2004, 7).

<sup>36</sup> Scholar of Daoism Livia Kohn (2008, 114-115) has written about *daoyin*, a cultivational style of Daoist healing and one forerunner of *qigong*.

<sup>37</sup> Alison Marshal (2003) has argued that "spirit mediums" is not the preferred translation because *lingji* does not involve spirit possession. Instead, the spirit guides the *lingji* on how to move and what to do with no consciousness on the part of the *lingji*. For this reason, Marshal prefers the translation "diviner of the spirit".

spirit to “higher and higher forms of spiritual accomplishment”. Interestingly, the goal of cultivating these spirits is to attain personal happiness, to reduce personal suffering, and to help build a harmonious and peaceful world. These *lingji* do not require monetary payment – the payment they receive is from the various benefits they receive through the process (Chau 2011b, 73). Here he has provided the reader with a clear description of the goal and mechanism in how these *lingji* engage in personal-cultivational modality.

One key observation that Chau makes is that the shared element within this modality is the concern with one's own ontological status and destiny denoted by the characters *xiu* (to cultivate, to repair) and *cheng* (to become, to complete). Chau's focus on cultivation processes centers on humans, while avoiding discussion of the supernatural. On the contrary, participants of this study believe that the Holy Spirit is an indispensable partner in the ling'en cultivation of gandong. Ling'en Christians (and Chinese Christians in general) cultivate other aspects – for example they cultivate biblical knowledge with the goal of leaving an intellectual legacy within the religious community (they sometimes refer to this as “head knowledge”, discussed below), cultivate the heart to produce the Fruits of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22-23), cultivate a sinless life by rejecting sin in hopes of entering God's kingdom, and cultivate intimate relationships (more precisely, *guanxi* which I discuss in greater detail in chapter four) with God and with “brothers and sisters” (*dixiong jiemei*)<sup>38</sup>. While these are all viable arguments to make, participants of this study point towards ling'en Christians' increased (from when they were evangelicals) and intensified desire for the cultivation of gandong.

Chau notes that in attempting to achieve goals of cultivation individuals utilize various practices. Such practices may be viewed as “technologies of the self” in the Foucauldian sense; they are methods and techniques by their own means or with the help of others through which human beings transform themselves in order to attain a

---

<sup>38</sup> In SGV ling'en, *dixiong jiemei* is the overwhelmingly used term for “brothers and sisters”. In other Chinese Christian contexts, *zimei* for “sisters” and *dixiong zimei* “brothers and sisters” are used. *Zimei* is more common in mainland China (Dunch 2012, 276; Colijn 2019a, 199; McLeister 2012, 177). *Xiongdi* and *zimei* were used by Hong Xiuquan (Kilcourse 2016) and amongst some Chinese Protestants in Tokyo (Ambros 2006) while *jiexiongdi* was used by Wu Leichuan (Starr 2008, 159). It seems that Chinese Christians employ a variety of familial terms to denote kinship relationship between believers.

certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Chau 2019, 27-28; Palmer 2011, 185; Palmer et al. 2011, 72-73; Foucault 1988, 18).

In mainland China, Chinese Christians have been found to be engaged in religious practices toward a variety of cultivational goals. For example, Cao (2011) writes extensively on female Wenzhou Christians who focus on the cultivation (*zaipei*) of their spiritual lives. Cao's observation is that they do so primarily through repeated "spiritual cultivation meetings" (*peilinghui*), which are dominated by women so much that they are also called "female mass meetings" (*nüzhong hui*). On the other hand, male Christians in both Wenzhou and Shanghai tend to cultivate other aspects. These include their relationship with other entrepreneurs and cultivating character by embracing Christian values and morals resulting in a decreased acceptance in giving bribes, belief in biblical moral absolutes, a shunning of activities that go against their beliefs, and a turn towards prayer for their business problems (Fiedler 2013, 149; Tong 2013, 180). Another cultivational goal that scholars have found amongst mainland Chinese Christians is the cultivation of a Christian life primarily through the intellectual studying of the Bible aided by textbooks (Kang 2016, 142-144; Fiedler 2013, 149).

Within Chinese American Christianity there are many religious practices that are cultivational in nature. These can range from cultivating the individual to cultivating relationships – though in most cases cultivational practices affect both realms. Some examples are reading and meditating on the Bible, participating in individual and group prayer that cultivational in nature, listening to pastors and speakers at church services and conferences, and individual and group worship singing, among others.

Furthermore, amongst Chinese American Christians there is a subset of practices that are characterized by their intense meditative and contemplative characteristics such as reading spiritual materials (*shuling ziliao*), contemplative prayer (*modao*), and activities within church organized retreats gatherings (*tuixiuhui*). These and other can be subsumed under the term "spiritual cultivation" or "spiritual practices" (*lingxiu*) where *xiu* signifies these practices as cultivating some long-term interest. For example, the

“cultivation of Christ’s life within the believer” and the cultivation of biblical knowledge are familiar goals.

Within the context of ling’en cultivation of gandong, practices include praying for or being prayed for ling’en gifts, speaking and praying in tongues privately, praying in tongues in unison, singing worship songs, reading spiritual formation books that teach the cultivation of ling’en gifts, and sharing gandong with others, sometimes in the form of prophecies (*yuyan*), among others. Participants note that these practices do not ensure that gandong will be experienced. Thus, the aim is for the long-term cultivation of gandong is to become a “gandong master”, that is an individual who has achieved mastery in experiencing and producing gandong. To do so these practices train (*caolian*, a character pair highly suggestive of the process of personal cultivation) the individual to become more receptive toward experiences of gandong. While it can be argued that the examples of cultivational practices above (i.e. cultivation of the mind, cultivation of relationships, cultivation of morality and behavior, etc.) sufficiently demonstrate the relevance of this modality in examining Chinese American Christianity as a whole, I argue that ling’en Christianity is unique in its cultivational mechanisms and goal. In the next section, a case study exemplifies participants’ transition from mainstream evangelicalism to ling’en and the resulting change in cultivational strategies and goals.

### **From Cultivating “Head Knowledge” to Gandong**

The Lis immigrated to Canada from mainland China in the early 2000s, converted to North American Chinese evangelicalism, and were baptized in and attended a mainstream Chinese Canadian evangelical church.<sup>39</sup> A few years later, they relocated to southern California to live closer to Mr. Li’s parents who had immigrated there prior to them. There, they continued to attend an evangelical Chinese American church and

---

<sup>39</sup> There are of course many differences between Chinese immigrants in Canada and the United States. Talbot (2021, 16-19) provides a summary of migratory patterns of both groups. These differences shaped the development of Chinese Canadian and Chinese American evangelicals (Nagata 2005, 115-119; Tse 2021, 183-207). Additionally, Huamei Han (2011) has written on the ways Chinese Canadian evangelicals have been marginalized by the unique ways through Canada’s nationalism and racism despite its reputation of being a welcoming society for immigrants. This is against the backdrop of 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada and its desire for more educated, skilled immigrants from China than even the United States (Holland 2007, 159).

devoted themselves to it, spending up to a dozen hours per week on church activities and serving as “group leader” (*zuzhang*)<sup>40</sup>. Leaders are usually held to higher standards than non-serving members and volunteer coworkers (*tonggong*).

As she recounted the following traumatic experience during our interview, Li’s (female, 60s) voice became shaky and was discernably sad, upset, and frustrated. Years ago, she was living with her husband, children, and in-laws. Life was stressful and over the years Li’s relationship with the in-laws deteriorated. Though she and her husband rarely fought one day, to her surprise, he “suddenly left and never came back home.” Abandoned and having lived in North America for fifteen years with no opportunity to build her own career, the future looked grim. Li could not make sense of her situation. On the one hand she and her ex-husband had few marital conflicts and were committed Christian lay leaders. Li also strongly believed that God would take care of them due to their loyalty to the church and to God. However, to my surprise she labeled herself a “Sunday Christian” (*zhuri jidutu*). She does not employ this term in the “nominal Christian” sense – someone who attends church a few times a year or one who claims the name Christian but does not have a “relationship with Jesus” (Baggini 2016, 39; Day 2011). To the contrary, as a group leader, Li was looked up to by her communities for commitment to the church and performance of strong religious convictions. Instead, she is referring to a specific perceived contradiction in her religious experience. By “Sunday Christian” she explained that while others respected and appreciated her, her religious faith was built on and remained in the realm of “head knowledge” (*tounao de zhishi*). By this she meant that her religiosity was not based on a holistic (heart and mind) understanding of Christianity. To her, a lack of holistic understanding was the reason for perceived problems in individual temperament, relationships, religious practices, and beliefs. Li told me that she became extremely depressed and even struggled with thoughts of suicide for a time. She described herself as being at a religious crossroad: either abandon the Christian faith entirely or find a new path to understand the Christian

---

<sup>40</sup> Group leaders are typically lay members of a mid-week gatherings responsible for a wide range of responsibilities including establishing rapport with members and visitors, teaching Christian teachings and instruction group members, and organizing small group activities.

faith. It is significant to note that several of my participants who converted from evangelicalism to ling'en reported similar "crossroad" moments. Clearly, none of them chose to give up the Christian faith (that is, to apostatize)<sup>41</sup>. However, this lack of data is very much the result of this study's enrollment strategy: drawing participants that were, at the time, active in church activities. In fact, due to difficulties that came with COVID19 lockdowns, it could be said that my enrollment would find those most committed to the Christian faith and church. As such, apostasy is an entirely absent topic in this thesis and certainly one worth exploring in amongst SGV ling'en. Returning to Li, this new path of ling'en would have to offer something different than cultivating head knowledge.

In the weeks following her ex-husbands disappearance, Li met a female ling'en Christian during a mid-week fellowship gathering of her own evangelical church. The ling'en Christian gave a short talk about her experiences of gandong with the Holy Spirit through speaking in tongues, and the positive impacts it had on her marriage. At some point near the end of the gathering, they briefly spoke and exchanged phone numbers. Later they connected over the phone and Li shared about divorce and struggle with faith. The other lady responded:

I realize why I attended that gathering to give my testimony (*zuo jianzheng*). I was baffled when I was invited to go... I'm not very familiar with them. But God moved (*gandong*) me to go and so I went. It was God who allowed us to meet and moved me to call you.

She invited Li to their home where a group of ling'en would pray for her to speak in tongues. In our conversation, Li implied that speaking in tongues would somehow alleviate her severe depression. This reinforces the belief that tongue prayer has real-world effects. In the case of Li, those real-world effects were not for the restoration of her former marriage but rather as an antidote to her suffering and faith crisis. When they circled her and began praying in tongues, Li was shocked as it was her first time

---

<sup>41</sup> In the Chinese, the most likely phrasing would be "to no longer attend church" (*bu qu jiaohui le*) or "to no longer believe in the Lord" (*bu xinzhu le*) as opposed to "apostatize".

hearing this form of prayer but followed their instructions to relax her body. After some time of prayer, Li told me that though she was greatly moved in two ways: first, she described tongue prayer as being very beautiful and very powerful. Secondly, she was moved by the fervor of those praying for her.

Combined, Li interpreted these *gandong* as coming from God. Though she was greatly moved, she was still “resisting *gandong*” (*kangju gandong*). She was highly suspicious towards tongue prayer due to former evangelical teaching that praying in tongues ceased with the first apostles of Jesus, thus not available to her. She was also used to praying in the mode of head knowledge – that is the process of forming and organizing thoughts in the mind and speaking it in prayer format. Therefore, to experience this EE *gandong*, Li and other participants recognize the need to change their beliefs (i.e., from cessationism to continuationalism) and their learned practice of prayer. Later that evening, she convinced herself to “put aside these doubts” because tongue prayer is “not what [she] could understand through reason.” Note that she reasoned her way out of the role of reasoning in prayer. She told me that once she stopped “resisting” (*kangju*), she felt the sudden rush of *gandong* and spoke her first prayer in tongues. Her initial response was, “God loves me so much. I was about to abandon him, but instead he gave this gift to me.” By “this gift”, Li refers to speaking in tongues.

In many interviews, ling’en Christians often shared their understanding of the concept of head knowledge. The idea itself deeply resonates with the influential Chinese church leader Ni Tuosheng (Watchman Nee) and what he had to say about head knowledge and the Fall:

Man ate the fruit of the tree of good and evil, and the result was death. We see that after Adam and Eve sinned, the greatest effect on them was that they gained knowledge... in other words, the first subjective result of the physiological effect of the Fall was that their “head” became larger than before (Ni n.d., My translation).

By “their head became larger than before”, Ni did not mean that their heads became physically larger. Rather, he was referring to the effect of Adam and Eve having gained knowledge from the sinful act of disobeying God. Therefore, head knowledge is the direct result of the first sin of rejecting God. More importantly is that this interpretation reveals the core issue that ling’*en* Christians have with head knowledge. Head knowledge includes information that does not promote connection with God (which is itself dictated by the community). For example, advice on how to improve marital relationships yet does not point toward God or involve God may be criticized as head knowledge. However, the same information presented with explicit connections to God (or to the Holy Spirit, to the Bible, etc.) will be far less likely to be received as head knowledge. The process of turning otherwise good information into acceptable knowledge that does not reside primarily in the head is what could be called “spiritualizing” (*shulinghua*). Undoubtedly Ni’s interpretation has had a significant impact on Chinese Christians due to Ni’s overwhelming influence, including those who migrate to the United States and become ling’*en* (Chow 2013a, 41-63; Bays 2012, 132-134).

Amongst ling’*en* Christians the term head knowledge carries multiple pejorative meanings. Sometimes it functions as a scapegoat during mid-week gatherings as an imaginary barrier to stop the flow of information that is perceived as dangerous or heterodox. It is also a contradictory concept. It presupposes that didactic practices such as having certain discussions about the Bible are off limit. Yet as we will see in chapter five, ling’*en* Christians are very concerned with didactic and discursive practices in ways that undergird ling’*en* religious practices of other modalities. It also functions as a blanket statement used to condemn a host of issues. As an example from my field observations, when someone is accused of behaving proudly (*jjiaoao*), one commonly cited reason is due to having too much head knowledge. Amongst ling’*en*, the primary counterweight against this head knowledge is to have sufficient spiritual experience (*shuling de jingli*), usually manifest as language and practices characteristic in the ling’*en* community. When spiritual experience is insufficient, anyone with an abundance of head knowledge can be criticized – including pastors. This precisely reflects Li’s critique of mainstream evangelicalism: that traditional evangelical churches have

focused on teaching head knowledge and that evangelical pastors have too much head knowledge and insufficient spiritual experience. She blamed these issues for her inability to live out what she considered to be good Christian living in her private life. Li was not alone in this belief; several participants – including trained ling'en (formerly traditional evangelical) pastors – expressed a similar admonition of head knowledge.

Ling'en participants, including Li, find that an appropriate response to the failures in cultivating head knowledge is instead to cultivate *gandong* (being moved or touched). *Gandong* in the ling'en context refers to a point in time or a period during which an individual experiences strong positive emotions such as feeling loved, feeling encouraged, feeling understood, and feeling moved to do something. *Gandong* are special experiences which can be bracketed out from the mundane. They usually last for minutes or a fraction of a minute but may also extend to much longer periods of time. Across an extended period – such as during a long worship singing session – an individual may feel *gandong* on and off throughout the experience. *Gandong* is frequently accompanied by physical sensations such as tingling in certain parts of the body, numbness, chills, or warmth in the stomach and chest area. Participants also frequently reported shedding tears during experiences of *gandong*.<sup>42</sup> *Gandong* is important for ling'en because they believe it functions as an alternative (or more accurately, additional) to head knowledge. Repeatedly, ling'en participants draw upon their experience as former evangelicals to criticize mainstream evangelicalism for their disregard of *gandong* and over-emphasis of head knowledge.

A common criticism lobbied by mainstream evangelicals towards ling'en Christians is that ling'en Christians are “too emotional” (*tai qingxuhua*). This perception is not unique within Chinese Christianity (see Anderson 2010, 20). However, in their study of linguistic expressions of the Chinese body part term *xin* (heart, mind), linguistic scholars Tie Yi and Luo Yongxian place the suffix *gan* (feeling) and its numerous pair characters (e.g., *ganwu* “feel-understand” or perceive, perception; *ganxiang* “feel-think” or thought, impression; and *gandong* “feel-move” or touched, feeling moved) under the “thought”

---

<sup>42</sup> Cao and Kang Jie reported shedding tears during Christian prayer meetings (Kang 2016, 185; Cao 2011, 113).

domain. By doing so they maintain that *gan* as a perception is closely related to thoughts (Tie and Luo 2023, 466-467). They conclude that in the Chinese language, the “heart” occupies a key position in cognition, perception, and emotion. By noting that the heart is the central organ for thinking, the Chinese understanding of *gandong* should not be relegated to a purely emotional and non-thinking category. This linguistic insight suggests that *gandong* as a Chinese concept is to be understood as central to both feeling and thinking, both emotion and reason. As we will see, while ling’*en* *gandong* centers around emotions and physical responses, it is certainly not without its own logic and careful thinking on the part of the ling’*en* Christian.

### **Introducing Emotional Experience and Communicational Experience *Gandong***

*Gandong* is used in two unique ways by participants: what I term “emotional experience” (EE) *gandong* and “communication experience” (CE) *gandong*. The following is an example of EE *gandong*:

By means of worship singing, the Holy Spirit moved (*gandong*) me. (*jiezhe shige, shengling gandong le wo*)

In the above example, *gandong* is used as a verb (the Holy Spirit *moved* me) and is activated by the practice of listening and singing worship songs. Another example of EE *gandong* can be with *gandong* in the noun form:

The pastor’s sermon today allowed me to experience the moving (*gandong*) of the Holy Spirit. (*jintian mushi de jiangdao rangwo jingli le shengling de gandong*)

In these examples, *gandong* results from practices (e.g., listening to a sermon, singing a worship song) that evoke strong, and often sudden, emotions. Participant data includes a wide range of emotions such as joy, regret, assurance, and comfort. Often, but not always, this experience is accompanied by physical sensations such as weeping, a warm sensation in various parts of the body emanating outward, or exhilaration to the point of not being able to stay still. EE *gandong* is characterized by its focus on the

interiority of the individual. While outward physical reactions may be intense, their significance is that they reflect stirrings in one's interiority. As we will see below, EE gandong plays an important role in the conversion to ling'en.

The other form of gandong – CE gandong – chiefly appears in the noun form:

God gave me an instance of being moved (gandong). (*shen geilewo yige gandong*)

While the literal translation is “an (one) instance of being moved (gandong)”, a more meaningful translation would be “God has given me an idea/thought (gandong)”. Here, CE gandong operates as a thought (*xiangfa*) or insight (*kanjian*). CE gandong also appears in the verb form:

God has moved (gandong) me to do... (*shen gandong wo quzuo*)

What is clear is that CE gandong works very differently here than in EE gandong in that the former is concentrated on the interior emotional state of the individual, the latter centers on future, potential action of the individual. While the action-oriented CE gandong does not preclude emotions, its main purpose is clearly not to describe an emotional experience. Instead, it is to express the idea that God has “communicated” to the individual towards particular action(s). This communication is usually described as being “moved (gandong) in the heart” (*xinli you gandong*), also “heard or felt in the heart” (*xinli ganjue dao, xinli tingdao*). In these examples we see a clear shift, moving beyond emotions and towards action. Having explained EE/CE gandong, we move on how these function amongst ling'en Christians.

### *Conversion through the Production of EE gandong*

In this section I draw upon ethnographic data to demonstrate that EE gandong is critical to conversion. I also show that participants continue to seek it beyond conversion; in other words, they cultivate gandong. To do so, I differentiate between the “first

experience” of EE gandong that participants deemed significant enough to highlight in their narratives, and the experiences of EE gandong that follow.

In total, twenty-three ling'en participants cited EE gandong as central to their turning to ling'en from evangelicalism (n=16), no religious (n=3), Buddhism (n=3), and popular religion (n=1). Clearly, EE gandong has significant transformational power amongst Chinese American Christians. Many studies have focused on the importance of “love” and “heart” in conversion (Yang 1998; Scorgie et al. 2022).<sup>43</sup> While love is a key emotion in conversion to Christianity and that the heart is believed to be the primary location of these interior stirrings, EE gandong could be described as a cluster of emotions. This is because participant data clearly states that love is not the only emotion that precedes ling'en conversion. Regret, sadness, and joy are cited by participants as strong emotions that produce EE gandong and lead to conversion. Therefore, we can visualize EE gandong as a cluster of emotions that operate within the heart leading to ling'en conversion. Beyond conversion, ling'en participants express a continuous strong desire for EE gandong. In other words, they are not satisfied with the single instance of EE gandong surrounding conversion but instead seek to continuously re-experience EE gandong or the cultivation of EE gandong.

Amongst participants, the first EE gandong is so powerful and impactful that it can often be pinpointed to a specific time in the past. For instance, a frequent location of experiencing the first gandong amongst participants is during the “Encounter God” retreat (*yujianshen yinghui*). Yang (female, 40s), immigrant from Taiwan, who was baptized into the Christian faith in 2012 and member of VOH, was one such participant:

---

<sup>43</sup> For example, Yang 1998's participants cite “love of Christ” and “love of the Lord” as central to conversion. Scorgie et al. 2022 has a discussion on love as well as “being touched”. The interviews for Scorgie et al.'s study were conducted in English. I highly suspect the participants were using the English terms, “touched” and “moved” to refer to gandong.

When I truly began to be moved (gandong) by the Holy Spirit was in December of 2012... it was when our church helped organize the “Encounter God” retreat for us. On that day I wept a lot.

Yang’s first experience of gandong is typical amongst participants in that EE gandong is accompanied by a range of strong emotions such as sadness, shame, assurance, or feelings of being loved, which often elicit physical responses such as shedding tears, kneeling, and feeling numb, among others. Participants found that EE gandong particularly attractive because they inspire behavioral changes in daily life, which in turn makes the Christian faith more “authentic” (*zhenshi*) for them. This is important because by this they mean that their Christian faith no longer remains in the realm of head knowledge but has been meaningfully bolstered.

The relationship between EE gandong and ling’en practices is not unidirectional. EE gandong may inspire ling’en practices; for example, Li was moved to pray in tongues. Ling’en practices may also directly or indirectly cause EE gandong. I observed that practices that are either correlated to, the cause of, or caused by EE gandong include speaking in tongues, participating in worship singing – both actively singing or passively listening – listening to a sermon, reading the Bible, praying, and “meditating on Scripture” (*moxiang jingwen*). Note that many practices in this list are not exclusive to ling’en Christianity. This raises the issue of the uniqueness of ling’en ways in understanding these practices. I propose that gandong production is central to ling’en ways of employing these practices.

One clear indication that gandong is central to ling’en practices is that when practices are not accompanied by gandong, they are valued less by the ling’en participant. This logic applies to a wide range of practices, usually for traditionally non-ling’en practices such as singing worship songs. When the individual sings worship songs but does not feel gandong, the practice of singing worship songs has less value because it did not

produce gandong.<sup>44</sup> To further demonstrate the importance of gandong production amongst ling'en Christians, I refer to one participant who considers herself ling'en but does not regularly attend a ling'en church; instead, she chooses to go to a mainstream evangelical church due to a falling out with her former ling'en church. She told me that she continues to speak and pray in tongues privately as a means of cultivating gandong. She found that the religious practices at the evangelical church did not produce sufficient gandong, and when her private tongue prayer did not sustain gandong, she would attend a ling'en special gathering to "recharge" gandong. This not only highlights the important role of gandong in ling'en but also suggests that there is the issue of depleting and replenishing gandong. With such importance placed on gandong amongst ling'en, it is not surprising that Li sought for the intentional and persistent production of gandong, which played an important role in her sustaining of ling'en Christianity. To be sure, gandong has an important place in the broader Chinese American evangelicalism<sup>45</sup> yet this study finds that its role in ling'en Christianity carries far more weight.

Therefore, we can say that it is not the practices themselves that are ling'en, but rather the accompanying gandong which determines whether it is ling'en or not. When the activity is not accompanied by gandong, it can be effectively understood as "not ling'en" from the emic perspective. Take for example Ch'en (male, 60s), a retired Taiwan born Chinese American living in SGV and attending Great Commission Church International. He recounts an experience prior to his first EE gandong:

---

<sup>44</sup> Although I have no case evidence, I would posit that amongst ling'en Christians even religious practices such as speaking/praying in tongues must be accompanied by gandong. If they are not accompanied by gandong, even these practices are worth less. In other words, ling'en practices cannot (or should not) be made obligatory and rely heavily on the production of gandong.

<sup>45</sup> Historian Mark Noll (2014, 22) notes that evangelical Christianity originated in pietistic movements during 17<sup>th</sup> century to protest ecclesiastical formalism and appeal for a religion of the heart. To reference what "heart" is, Noll (2014, 23-24) cites both emotional and physical changes – joy and warmth – in individual experiences.

The first time I attended a [ling'en] conference, wow, the speaker said that evening a spirit of joy had come down. Wow, many people were laughing hysterically... to see them laughing hysterically in public was for me very curious.

By "curious", Ch'en meant that though he was at the gathering and participated in various practices (such as singing worship songs and praying), he remained outside the influence of gandong. On the contrary, some of those near him experienced EE gandong while engaged in the same practices. Simply put, while the practices produced gandong for others, it did not for him. And here is the most important part: Ch'en did not consider the experience to be personally ling'en. This demonstrates the close relationship between ling'en practices and EE gandong. In the following evening, his experience drastically changed:

I saw people begin to weep, and then people began to cry out loudly. It was infectious... why were people crying? But I still had an attitude of "watching a play" (*kanxi*). After a while I thought to myself "why did you come? Don't you want to experience God?" I decided to quiet my heart and lower my head. I asked God "how much do you love me?" At that moment, I suddenly saw a vision of the Lord Jesus Christ with his arms extended out. He said, "I love you this much," and I saw the blood spilling from his hands. When I heard and saw that I suddenly felt very regretful (*tonghui*). For the first time I was very moved (gandong). Then without being able to control myself, I began to weep.

Here we see that Ch'en made the decision to allow himself to be influenced by gandong. In both evenings he participated in the religious practices at the gathering. However, the crux is whether he allowed himself to experience the gandong. Ch'en described himself during the second evening as participating in ling'en practices – though they did not change substantially between the two evenings. Thus, we see the centrality of gandong production in ling'en practices.

From both Ch'en and Li's stories the participant's first experience of EE gandong is powerful but first requires a change of internal attitude towards EE gandong. The so called "resisting" due to certain theological ideas (e.g., cessationism) and cultural norms (e.g., people should not express strong emotions in public) are some of the most frequently cited obstacles to experiencing EE gandong. For example, in the case of Ch'en, had he not allowed himself to cry in public, he would not have experienced EE gandong. One important aspect of understanding EE gandong as a cultivation of the individual is that turning away from "reasons for resisting" is not a one-time activity. The individual must train himself or herself to constantly turn away from resistance, thereby allowing them to become more capable of experiencing EE gandong. It is a continuous and apophatic process of "letting go" or "setting down" (*fangxia*) of one's own preconceptions about what is proper, decent, and conservative Christian, and learning to embrace EE gandong. In anthropologists Luther Gerlach and Virginia Hine's process model of conversion, this "letting go" is described by step four called "decision and surrender". Whereas Gerlach and Hine were vague on the importance of this step, this is a pivotal and necessary step in the conversion to and remaining in ling'en (Gooren 2014). Furthermore, this repeated process of (or cultivation of) "letting go" can be viewed as similar to early Daoist practices of cultivation by negating, forgetting, or emptying the contents of consciousness found in ordinary experience to achieve sagehood (Roth 1996, 127). Where these early Daoist put away consciousness, Christians getting to know ling'en must let go of certain theological and cultural norms.

We can also draw an important observation from this data. Ling'en religious practices are not always exclusively practiced by ling'en Christians. What makes a religious practice ling'en is if it produces gandong. In this way, whether an activity is considered ling'en should be (and usually are) determined by the individual and communities that engage with gandong. As such, gandong production is a central feature of ling'en. This challenges the translation of ling'en as "Pentecostal", "charismatic", "Pentecostal-charismatic", or other English terms as ling'en practices (which I contend is characterized by gandong production) is equivalent to religious practices typically associated with Western Pentecostal-charismatics (Anderson 2010, 16). This insight

also partially explains the diversity of ling'en that we saw in chapter one. That is, the production of gandong varies between individuals, between institutions, and within communities.

### *Repeating EE Gandong Production*

Whereas this first experience is central to their conversion and most commonly through EE gandong, it is the pursuit of subsequent cultivation of EE gandong that is central to this chapter's argument. Participants speak of two main pathways in which they cultivate (or repeat the production) of EE gandong. First, through attending ling'en conferences (particularly throughout the 1980s, 90s, and early 2000s) and second, in the recent two decades, through worship singing during church service. They note that accessibility to ling'en activities through the 1980s and 1990s was particularly difficult. Some had to travel across the United States to attend ling'en gatherings. For example, Pan (female, 70s) and her husband, now retired and living in Los Angeles, lived in Chicago for two decades until 2015. While they were residing in Chicago, they encountered ling'en during a local gathering (not Sunday service) in which ling'en Christians were invited to speak about the Holy Spirit and its gifts. Moved by that experience, they traveled to Northern California several times per year to "pursue ling'en" (*zhuiqiu ling'en*) at FRCC beginning in the mid-1990s. Though their terminology is that of pursuing ling'en, the underlying motivation of ling'en Christians going for ling'en spiritual gifts is the less important objective. The more important underlying motivation is their seeking of gandong production through ling'en spiritual gifts. Again, this is because ling'en practices that do not produce gandong have less value to the ling'en Christian.

In their description of how they came to practice ling'en, multiple participants elucidate what can be viewed as an ever-increasing need to pursue more gandong-producing ling'en practices. For example, participants who experienced gandong at FRCC or GCCI may decide to deepen their ling'en practices by visiting ARC. Participants repeatedly cite ARC as the "trailblazer" amongst Chinese American ling'en Christians in terms of hosting ling'en practices that produce gandong. It is well known in the

Sinophonic population of SGV, the United States and the world as the bastion of ling'en in part due to its expansionary efforts into places like Malaysia and Hong Kong (Lin 2020, 207). According to Pan, the location of ARC is the primary reason SGV is the perfect location for people to learn about ling'en Christianity. To the contrary, she notes that the lack of a similar ling'en headquarter in the Chicago area is also ling'en is less accessible in that region.<sup>46</sup> Most, if not all, of this study's participants have attended at least one activity at ARC for its gandong cultivating practices.

According to participants, the other main source of EE gandong is worship singing, which is an important feature of ling'en Christianity.<sup>47</sup> One such participant, Bao (male, late 40s), told me that he had previously attended a traditional church (*chuantong jiaohui*). His use of the term traditional referred in part to the church's custom of having a solitary organ (*fengqin*) for background music during worship singing. After relocating to SGV and attending GCCI, Bao noted that regarding worship singing at the new church that he...

wasn't used to it at first because it is relatively lively (*huopo*) ... but after slowly integrating into it, [felt] that worship should be filled with fervor (*reqing*) for God.

Note that Bao was not accustomed to this livelier form of worship at GCCI. During my field visits to GCCI, I observed that the worship set includes an acoustic guitar, electric guitar, piano, digital piano, and drum set. Combined with an energetic worship team, worship singing is indeed a very lively event with participants clapping their hands (sometimes clapping above their heads), bouncing up and down to the beat of the music, and swaying back and forth. This style of worship singing moved (gandong) Bao. Though he was at first not accustomed to it, the repeated experiences of EE gandong compelled him to remain at the church. In fact, in our interview he noted that the

---

<sup>46</sup> In more recent years, ling'en has become more accessible through the Internet. For example, FRCC and ARC have YouTube channels that show live Sunday worship services.

<sup>47</sup> In their study of Progressive Pentecostals, Miller and Yamamori (2007, 221) describe Christians as being "touched" by God. See also Ingalls and Yong 2015, 57.

worship style and its production of EE gandong was a central reason for his choice to become a regular attendee of the church.

From the opposite perspective, central to the worship service is the worship leader. This individual is usually responsible for choosing which songs to sing, what order to sing the songs, and indicates to those on and off the stage the number of times a song's chorus and verse are to be repeated. Therefore, the worship leader functions as planner, lead vocalist, prayer leader, and director. According to Wan (female, 40s), the goal of a worship is to stir up gandong, and this is accomplished in part through their carefully pre-selected song choices and spontaneous on-stage decisions. Worship leaders may employ "worship songs" which are characterized by upbeat tempos, community-oriented lyrics emphasizing "us" (e.g., *women*), loudly sung, and often used at the start to "raise people's excitement up". Another type of song, called the "praise song", are typically slower tempo, quietly sung, and "intimate lyrics expressing devotion, love, and desire for God" (Ingall and Yong 2015, 7; Dueck 2017, 31). When used together, "worship and praise" (*jingbai zanmei*) can both stir up EE gandong.

In addition, the choice of songs, how they are organized and directed during worship singing sessions is also relevant. One of my ling'en participants, Wan, served as a worship leader at ARC. She was particularly enthusiastic about her ability to stir up gandong amongst attendees. She notes that her primary objective for worship singing is so that,

I will pray for God to move their spirits in the worship I lead, and I will ask God to make my worship distinct from the worship of other brothers and sisters. I don't mean to stand out and make people think I'm impressive; that's not what I mean. What I mean is to make a distinction so that they understand why my worship is different from theirs. It's because there is the presence of the Holy Spirit here, and there is no Holy Spirit there, and they should long for the Holy Spirit.

Wan told me that to make her worship “distinctive” she spends several hours in prayer in the days before leading worship singing. During these sessions, she reports that God communicates to her through gandong, or more accurately, through prayer and meditation which produce gandong. For example, it is through God’s gandong that she determines which songs to use. Here we get an idea of how the second type of gandong operates, which we will discuss in greater detail in the next section. When her worship leading is well received and produces collective EE gandong, the CE gandong is authenticated and as a result. This collective intense reaction is akin to the “collective effervescence” that Durkheim described as produced during joint participation in religious rituals, “red-hot sociality” (*honghuo*) amongst Shaanbei people (Chau 2006, 156-159).

Thus far I have shown that amongst ling’en participants repeatedly engage in religious practices that produce gandong. In doing so, they must first learn to reject personal tendencies of “resisting” gandong. Amongst ling’en, the desire to experience EE gandong is not a one-time event like Christian baptism. Participants continue to cultivate EE gandong through various practices such as attending special gatherings as well as forms of worship singing that produce gandong. Ling’en practices are a technology of the self to make meaningful real-world changes through influencing the interiority of the participant. In the following sections, we shift our focus to the second form of gandong, CE gandong.

### *Actualizing and Authenticating CE Gandong*

While EE gandong is very important to ling’en Christians, I contend that by itself, it cannot fully explain the cultivation of gandong amongst ling’en. There are two main reasons for this assessment. First, while I have highlighted the importance of EE gandong to ling’en Christianity, similar experiences can be found within mainstream evangelicalism. For example, in the interviews for a study conducted amongst Chinese evangelicals, participants spoke of being “touched” or “moved” deeply by their encounters with Christians which contributed to their conversion. These English terms correspond with the concept of gandong, and I suspect if these interviews were

conducted in Mandarin, participants would use *gandong* and possibly *chumo* (touch) (Scorgie et al., 2022). Since EE *gandong* were experienced amongst non-ling'en Christians, we have a challenging time arguing that ling'en *gandong* is unique. Second, EE *gandong* is necessarily a first-person experience and while it has value for the individual, its significance for everyone else is reduced. Thus, we turn our focus to the second type of *gandong*, CE *gandong* – which I found to be highly important and unique to ling'en Christians. As a brief reminder, the core idea of CE (Communicational Experience) *gandong* is that God has communicated an idea to the individual towards particular action(s).

The key difference between EE and CE *gandong* is the verifiability of the latter. Authenticating *gandong* is essential to ling'en because there are many cases where inaccuracies in prophecy (a religious practice which has its foundations on CE *gandong*) have discredited charismatic movements in places such as Taiyuan (Chambon 2017, 193-194) or when faith healers whose miracles are dismissed as fraudulent by the outside world raise suspicion within the religious community (cf. Thompson 2005). In other words, CE *gandong* demands proof of spiritual success whereas EE *gandong* does not require proof (or to be more precise, the proof is in the reliability of the speaker). Within ling'en, verifiability is important in part because since *gandong* is democratized (i.e. available to all ling'en Christians). In other words, when CE *gandong* is verified, the people and experiences surrounding that CE *gandong* are trusted.

Take the following as an example to highlight the difference between the role of verifiability between EE and CE *gandong*. Suppose a ling'en Christian said that God has moved me to eat only an apple for lunch (CE *gandong*) to lose weight, it is the simple matter of observing whether I eat only an apple for lunch to confirm or reject the CE *gandong* and/or my obedience or disobedience to it. On the other hand, if because of EE *gandong* the ling'en Christian feel intense sadness but shed no tears (or vice versa: if I am shedding tears but not because of EE *gandong*), it is difficult to confirm or deny the presence of EE *gandong*. I would have to explicitly tell the other person of the presence or absence of EE *gandong*, and even then, they may not believe me. As such,

CE gandong has the advantage of being more verifiable. Because it operates in the realm of the verifiable, it holds substantially more weight in ling'en Christianity, which is above all, looking for verifiable signs of the work of the Holy Spirit. With that said, this section focuses on the authentication process of CE gandong. When CE gandong is confirmed, it not only strengthens the legitimacy of the individual in which the gandong resides, but more importantly, the concept of CE gandong amongst ling'en participants and their desire to cultivate CE gandong.

For more than three years, ARC continues to hold a weekly gathering called "Miracle Reappears" (*shenji zaixian*). In these two-hour long gatherings, forty-five minutes are dedicated to (1) prayers for healing and (2) testimonies (*jianzheng*) of healings from previous weeks. In the prayers for healing, the first step is for the pastor to introduce which acts of healings he intends to do. This is done through the language of CE gandong. Take for example, during one prayer for healing session the pastor said the following:

I wrote down many illnesses to pray for. Tonight, I will not abolish the gandong of the Holy Spirit. Please stand up if you can, and let's pray for healing. It is not me who heals you, but it is Jesus. It is Jesus.

The pastor suggests that he has remained in communication with God throughout the week. This communication could be maintained through prayer, meditating, and other actions. When he receives an item or items to pray for, he writes it down. During this session, he reinforces the idea that these items for prayer are from God, in other words the result of CE gandong.

In my review of dozens of "Miracle Reappears" video clips, CE gandong is always utilized to confirm the prayers for healing. By attributing the prayers as divinely communicated, participants in these healing sessions ready themselves to be called out to receive healing. In any given session, the pastor may go through three to five groups of illness, for example one item might be healing for the "nervous system, inflammation

in the brain (*naobu fayan*), and Parkinson's disease". Another item might be "anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and anorexia". This is a real example and highlights the fact that there is often no discernable pattern to these sets of illnesses. Even so, the pastor will attempt to verbally categorize them by "parts of the body" (*shenti de buwei*). The pastor spends approximately five minutes per set of illnesses. He first asks those who suffer from any item(s) in the set to stand up. In any given set, between three and ten people will stand up while the remaining (usually a majority) will remain seated. He then prays for them to receive healing. During these prayers his eyes are usually closed, but he also opens them throughout the prayer to observe the participants. On occasion, the pastor will ask participants to place their hands on the area with the illness or pain to suggest that God will heal that part of the body mediated through his prayers and their hands. Quite frequently, the pastor will ask participants to do brief physical exercises, such as head rotations for those who suffer from neck pain. Note that these physical exercises resemble some of the movements in the ancient Chinese martial arts of Tai Chi (*taijiquan*) which has evolved into a form of low-impact exercise. Throughout these prayers and exercises, he repeatedly asks his participants whether they feel better or not. Some visibly nod up and down (signaling an agreement with the pastor) while others remain still. This is repeated for three to five sets of illnesses before the next section. Combined, these actions reinforce the idea that God intends to heal these illnesses, and this desire is channeled through the pastor, his CE gandong, prayer, and exercises. The pastor speaks gently but confidently that God hears his prayers. My observation is that the pastor has more than sufficient Weberian charismatic authority, and as such, his CE gandong is highly respected amongst congregants.

Following these prayers for healing is the second piece of confirming CE gandong. During each session, a few (usually three to five) testimonies from previous weeks are presented as "evidence" of healing. These are shown through projection of PowerPoint slides for all participants to view. Another pastor, or leader in the church, will read these out loud slowly and deliberately. The following are two examples, one short and one longer. The first is from a ling'en woman in her 50s who was suffering from arthritic pain

in her knees. Due to her knee problems, she was unable to visit ARC and instead chose to watch the livestream at home.

The day before yesterday I watched the Thanksgiving Day “Miracle Reappears” video recording. After I heard Reverend Fan Hongtai’s prayer, both of my knees stopped hurting. Thank you, Jesus. Praise Jesus. Amen. – Sister Wang

The second testimony is provided by a woman in her 40s. Contrast to the first testimony, she attends “Miracle Reappears” in search for physical healing.

When I was 43 years old, I experienced irregular menstruation, sometimes it would come and sometimes it would not. Even when it did, it was very minimal. After going to the hospital for an examination, I was told that I had premature ovarian failure. I was prescribed a lot of medication, and I also tried various herbal remedies, but there was no significant improvement. Three months ago, I attended a healing prayer meeting where Pastor Fan declared healing miracles. I followed his instructions, declared my faith, and placed my hands on the lower abdomen, specifically on the uterus and ovaries. Something miraculous happened: I received healing from God! It has been three months now, and my menstrual cycles have been regular, with a significant increase in the amount of menstrual discharge. I am grateful to our Heavenly Father for His healing, making me a woman with perpetual health and youthfulness! – Sister Zhao

The reading of these “testimonies” produces two effects. First, they confirm that the pastor’s gandong is divinely inspired. As of 2023, for at least three years on a weekly basis the pastor’s charismatic authority continues to strengthen through CE gandong and its actualization verified through testimonies. Second, they may create further gandong amongst the audience, generating a snowball effect of gandong. This example also demonstrates that the confirmation of CE gandong is both located in the individual (seen through the individual testimonies above) yet at the same time realized only when others see and hear. In this sense confirmation of CE gandong is democratized, rather

than being held solely in the hands of the religious elite. However, a major effect of the confirmation of CE gandong is the centralization and accumulation of spiritual authority for the pastor.

Not all participants hold the same high level of charismatic authority as the pastor above. The issue of confirming CE gandong was raised with several participants. Indeed, ling'en participants frequently emphasized the importance of the "ability to discern" (*fenbian nengli*) whether CE gandong came "from God, from the self, or from Satan" (*laizi shen, laizi ziji huo laizi sadan*). How does one make such a discernment? One participant, Ting (female, 40s), shared with me her internal process.

In the process of interacting with the Holy Spirit, I would typically begin by inquiring within my heart whether the gandong comes from God or not. I seek a sense of peace or confirmation either through a feeling or a guiding truth from a Bible verse. With that, I can better confirm whether the gandong is from God. If I have not received confirmation, I usually refrain from acting. As a human, I still have many subjective elements. Whether it's in my service (*fushi*) or interaction with God, I should be more cautious.

This is more or less the process that ling'en participants use to scrutinize the source of their gandong. Participants may find support from the Bible – and their interpretive methods include both spiritual interpretation (*lingyi jiejing*) and literal interpretation (*zimian jiejing*). If such support can be found, then it is confirmed to be from God. What is certain is that in their scrutinizing of CE gandong, participants will describe the process as seeking to "conform to the Bible" (*hehu shengjing*). In essence, participants will use "conformation to the Bible" as strong reason to legitimize CE gandong.

In Ting's response we also see the importance of having peace in the heart (*xinli you pingan*) when confirming the source of CE gandong. Curious about the mechanism behind this test, I asked her if she sought peace in her heart regarding my interview request. Ting replied that she did indeed seek and receive peace. This signifies that for

Ting and other ling'en Christians, even mundane, earthly events (as opposed to "supernatural" events such as ling'en healing of illnesses) may be perceived as significant due to their possible connection to CE gandong. This is in part because they view God as directly involved in most, if not all, aspects of life. Therefore, there is a need to cultivate within oneself the ability to discern the legitimacy of CE gandong on a regular basis.

As Ting continued to explain her reasoning for accepting the interview, I wondered if this was simply a case of gaining peace from God or was it more complicated. In previous years, my spouse and Ting were classmates at China Evangelical Seminary North America. My first meeting with Ting was with my spouse, and I had introduced myself and my interest in researching ling'en Christianity months prior to the interview. During our interview, she told me that she felt that "the evangelical sect (*fuyin pai*) seemed to completely reject the Holy Spirit... and that the two groups, *fuyin pai* and *ling'en pai* had become very extreme (*jiduan*)." By "extreme" she means that the differences between the two groups in their views of the Holy Spirit had become so disjointed that there seemed little hope of compromise and unity.

As someone who practiced ling'en, Ting was clearly frustrated at the ling'en and evangelical division that she witnessed in seminary and church. As such, Ting was personally interested in addressing this difference as she felt Chinese American Christians are, or should be, both evangelical and ling'en. For this interaction, we see that "having peace" in the heart is not exclusively a "supernatural" event. Rather, it is a matter of developing mutual trust and shared interest.

Finally, CE gandong can be authenticated. For example, in one prayer session Ting said that she had gandong to pray for someone's headache. At that time, another person said that they were indeed having a headache and had been silently asking God to heal her. Ting's ability to speak actualized CE gandong has also increased her charismatic authority within her context.

The purpose for confirming gandong is to reinforce the belief that the Holy Spirit is at work within and amongst Christians. Whether confirming through the Bible, praying and finding peace, or in community, participants note that the recognition of gandong comes with repeated exposure. As one gets better at hearing God's voice, they are more easily able to discern whether a gandong is from God or not. Therefore, it is critical that ling'en regularly scrutinize the source of CE gandong through the pathways mentioned above. This section has demonstrated that the authentication process of CE gandong is complex and vague. But when it is convincing to the participant and others, it can transform (or has the potential to transform) into a verified CE gandong. When an CE gandong is confirmed, those who witness it reinforce their belief in CE gandong, and religious specialists increase in charismatic authority. Both groups cultivate their ability to receive and confirm CE gandong.

#### *When CE gandong fails*

Before an analysis of when CE gandong fails, I note that ling'en participants did not attribute the source of gandong to themselves, Satan, sin, or any number of harmful deities. On the one hand, ling'en Christians were comfortable talking about the wickedness of human beings (including themselves), the effects of sin in their lives, and Satan. For example, in my interview data the concepts of sin and Satan were discussed, albeit usually in a very distanced manner. They were fine to acknowledge that they are sinners (e.g., "I know that I am a sinner") and that Satan is active in the world (e.g., "Satan frequently attacks Buddhists") as general beliefs. On the other hand – and this is very important in understanding ling'en conception of gandong – participants did not explicitly connect gandong with sin nor Satan. For example, they would not say "Satan moved (gandong) me" or "it is the sin in me that moved (gandong) me". It seems that gandong cannot be explicitly tied to these and other malevolent concepts. In this way, gandong is ontologically in the realm of the holy. I hypothesize that the reason for this is the same as why CE gandong requires authentication: the sanctity of gandong cannot be encroached upon, in fear that the desecration of gandong may threaten the core ling'en belief of the existence of the Holy Spirit and its activity amongst ling'en Christians.

With that said, there are inevitably times when CE gandong does not actualize. As an example, if an individual makes a prophetic claim (originating as a CE gandong) regarding a group of people but the claim fails, how is this situation resolved? Does the failure cause participants to trust CE gandong and/or the individual less? Does it increase their stringency in standards for confirming CE gandong? Does it cause some to abandon CE gandong entirely? While all three could be defended with interview data, I contend that there is something more interesting happening amongst ling'en in response to failed CE gandong. In my observation and interview data, I notice that amongst ling'en participants there is a reoccurring language of "my gandong" that is used to deal with failed CE gandong. It seems that this is a critical strategy to "explain away" failed gandong and central to the legitimacy of CE gandong.

In our interview, Li used the term "my gandong" to explain an CE gandong which she previously thought was from God but eventually failed (i.e., the content of her gandong did not occur). Many ling'en Christians used this language too. The inclusion of the possessive "my" is an important linguistic marker because it denotes that the subsequent statements are understood as perhaps coming from the individual and not from God. It does not make the statement that the gandong *is 100% from* the person. Instead, what it does is add ambiguity to the gandong. In other words, it is an expression to make the claim that the gandong *is likely from* the person. "My gandong" operates in a unique way in that participants could, but do not use terms such as "my opinion" or "my feeling". The reason for this difference is because "my gandong" points to the potentiality of God's agency. In the case when "my gandong" actualizes, it demonstrates that "my gandong" and "God's gandong" or CE gandong are consistent. However, when CE gandong is not actualized, "my gandong" can be used to explain the failure of the CE gandong to materialize. Furthermore, in the event of failed CE gandong, participants juxtapose "my gandong" and "God's gandong" to highlight and explain the failure as incorrectly received CE gandong. Therefore, in these failed cases "my gandong" functions as an admission of misjudgment: that they were wrong in their earlier interpretation that CE gandong came from God, only to interpret and explain it later as coming from the self and inconsistent with God's gandong.

CE gandong operates in a precarious space because it opens one up for the possibility of being wrong. As such, the availability of admitting error through “my gandong” is critical in ling’en cultivation of gandong. If I pray for someone else’s sickness, only later for them to tell me that they were healthy, I could excuse myself through “my gandong”, but not “God’s gandong”. In this way “my gandong” is an acceptable exit by personally taking on some of the responsibility, while insinuating that the gandong *could* have come from God, but in fact *did not* come from God. After the dust settles, no single party carries the full blame. But most importantly, the Holy Spirit remains perfect and therefore continues as an unblemished source for future CE gandong. Because of this, the possibility and prevalence of “my gandong” amongst ling’en Christians is precisely what allows gandong to be a central component of ling’en. Contrast this to Chinese American evangelicals who expressed relatively and significantly more resistance in their use of CE gandong language.

As such, any insinuation of gandong associating with evil cannot be tolerated, as it could cause its importance to decrease or even collapse amongst ling’en. It would be akin to questioning the presence of the spirit in the “diviner of the spirit”, *lingji*. Contrast this with failures of divine efficacy in one rural China context: “instead of questioning the deity’s efficacy, one is taught to review oneself” (Cao 2020, 207). “My gandong” functions in a similar way to review oneself. Instead of looking for the responsibility in the supernatural, ling’en Christians are taught to look at problems in their own agency. Contrary to mainstream evangelicals who often look to their own “sinful desires” to explain problems, ling’en Christians did not seem to do this for gandong. However, whereas in the rural context, under the logic of a market economy, they will turn to other deities who might be more efficacious, the ling’en Christians I interviewed did not consider the possibility of turning to other deities. It seems that the strategy of “my gandong” is successful amongst ling’en.

When combining these two sections regarding CE gandong we can conclude that ling’en desire to verify CE gandong (e.g., through testimonies at ARC). CE gandong does not always need to be verified (consider that most “healings” at ARC do not

reappear as testimonies). In the case of failed CE gandong, ling'en participants can defer to the use of "my gandong". All these possibilities combine to contribute to the legitimacy of CE gandong. With its legitimacy intact, ling'en Christians can cultivate CE gandong through religious practices. As they become more familiar with gandong production, they more easily experience EE/CE gandong. When they master the cultivation of experiencing and producing gandong, they become what I call "ling'en gandong masters". Some of these masters go on to become ritual specialists, whose primary role is to continue the production of gandong. I will discuss this in chapter six.

## Conclusion

Thus far this chapter has focused on gandong as a ling'en cultivational goal as well as the religious practices employed to cultivate gandong amongst ling'en. In this section, I want to draw our attention to the personal-cultivational modality. In layered thinking, this section discusses the point of contact between ling'en Christianity and Chinese religiosity with regards to cultivational practices. One shared characteristic between ling'en cultivation of gandong and cultivational practices in Chinese religiosity is the recognition of "masters" within their practices. Masters earn their titles through extended training and may take on disciples. For example, within *qigong* there are countless *gongfa* (*qigong* methods) that are headed up by a charismatic *qigong* master who goes on to lead practitioners through training networks (Palmer 2007, 13). Likewise, ling'en gandong masters seek to influence individuals through ling'en institutions, relationships between ling'en institutions, and digital technologies. However, at a more basic level, ling'en gandong masters develop relationships with other individuals in personal ways. For example, one of my participants felt that she would not be able to participate in the interview alone. As such, she invited her "elder sister" (*jiejie*) to sit alongside and help explain when needed. Through the course of our interview, it became increasingly clear that the elder sister was far more experienced in interpreting and understanding gandong. There were times when the participant stumbled through explanations only for the elder sister to step in and clarify what was happening to the participant's emotions and body through experiences of gandong; the participant simply repeated "yes, yes" (*dui dui*). We can view their relationship as that of gandong master-disciple.

However, the differences in the point of contact of cultivational practices between ling'en Christianity and Chinese religiosity are many. Generally speaking, cultivational practices in Chinese religiosity center on the self as an isolated entity. For example, post-Maoist self-cultivation fevers focus on self-regulation of emotions, moral betterment, and personal growth. One example of these movements is the New Age *shen xin ling* (Body-Heart-Soul) which teaches practitioners to balance inner emotional flows and experience authentic emotional expression as pathways toward self-discovery and ultimately, to make sense of problems in life such as financial struggles and disharmony within the family (Iskra 2021). While ling'en cultivation of gandong also seeks to understand problems in life (e.g. Li's divorce) and in a sense, to heal from past trauma through positive emotions evoked by gandong, its primary goal is not for self-discovery but rather towards one's ability to "connect" (*lianjie*) with God through the Holy Spirit. From this, participants reported increased self-discovery and improved emotional interiority. Therefore, while the personal-cultivational modality as Chau (2011b) has described is primarily about crafting oneself, ling'en personal-cultivational practices are primarily about crafting one's ability to connect with God. Thus, the ling'en case study suggests the possibility of a social factor in cultivational practices, particularly for religious adherents who seek to cultivate a relationship with gods and deities and within a community of believers.

I assert that for ling'en, religious practices that produce gandong are highly important in their sustaining of religiosity. Compared to mainstream evangelicals, ling'en place much more value in gandong production. Recall that Li criticized evangelicalism for their lack of experiential knowledge. By this she is referring to experiences that produced gandong – and this is at the core of what attracted her to ling'en. Recounting her traumatic experience of divorce and its effects on her daily life, Li was clearly upset and heartbroken. But when she narrated her experiences of gandong, her voice became incredibly cheerful, sometimes to the point of excitement. This change – from sorrow to delight – exemplifies the cultivation of gandong in ling'en. Contrary to mainstream evangelicalism's head knowledge (as per participants' understanding), ling'en cultivation of gandong offers a unique pathway to Chinese American Christians in how they

practice Christianity. For participants, to experience gandong is to know that the Holy Spirit will continue to be present and “bless” (*zhufu*) the Christian. With this set, as I stated earlier the cultivation of gandong is only one cultivational framework to view ling'en Christianity. Although the study argues that it is one of the most important cultivations amongst ling'en, further research may uncover other distinguishing cultivational practices and goals amongst ling'en Christians. Throughout this chapter I have demonstrated that ling'en engagement with gandong has its own internal logic and is inexorably related with how ling'en Christians think about the Holy Spirit. In the next chapter we turn our attention to the immediate-practical modality and ling'en religious practices that aim at magical efficacy, further highlighting the importance of the Holy Spirit's work.

## Chapter Three: Ling'en Cosmology and Magical Efficacy

### Introduction

This chapter considers and analyses some of the more distinctive ling'en immediate-practical religious practices. These – like personal-cultivational practices – are central to participant conversion to ling'en. It argues that while both mainstream evangelicalism and ling'en Christianity hold a belief in divine magical efficacy of the Christian God, ling'en Christianity embraces a cosmology created through an overlap of Chinese religiosity (especially popular Chinese religion) and evangelical Christianity. In this created cosmological space, the religious practices of ling'en Christians emphasize a concept similar to that of Chinese religiosity's divine magical efficacy (*ling*, *lingyan*, *lingying*, *lingli*). This chapter first introduces the immediate-practical modality and immediate-practical practices within Chinese Christianity and ling'en Christianity. Since immediate-practical religious practices almost always interact with the supernatural world, I provide a rough outline of cosmology presented in Chinese religiosity. This chapter compare ling'en cosmology with Chinese cosmology as a medium to understand ling'en immediate-practical practices.

I then draw from ethnographic data to show how ling'en Christianity pull “ghosts and gods” (*guishen*) from Chinese religiosity, flatten them into a one-dimensional category of malevolence, and engage in the continual theological project of supernatural rupture. They do so by “cutting off” (*kanduan*) connections with evil spirits, but they are never able to fully destroy the evil spirits. The second part shows how ling'en Christians sensitivity to the spiritual world (*shuling shijie* or more commonly, *lingjie*) drives immediate-practical practices resembling prognostication (*zhanbu*, a subcategory of divination) of Chinese religiosity. Ultimately this chapter contends that SGV ling'en employment of immediate-practical practices highlight and function to preserve their cosmological space through its adoption of and maintaining a close relationship with entities and techniques that come from Chinese religiosity. In layered thinking, the layers are ling'en Christianity, evangelicalism, and Chinese religiosities where the point

of contact is cosmologies and immediate-practical practices. The interactions between these layers are *superficial rejection, adoption, and interdependence*.

### **Immediate-Practical Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity**

During his fieldwork on Chinese popular religion in Shaanbei, Chau (2006, 62) observed that people did not explicitly discuss their beliefs but engaged in activities that implied belief in supernatural forces. Chau lived in a temple dormitory and observed that a significant majority of visitors to the Black Dragon King Temple consulted divination devices. These devices, such as divination sticks (*qian*) and oracle roller (*gua*), were used for various purposes, many of which centered around present behavior to ensure future well-being. Such activities are also referred to as prognostication (often denoted by *zhan*), or the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or unknown by supernatural means (Lackner and Lu 2022). In some Chinese popular religions, divination blocks can be used to ask about the cause of existing concerns, means of resolution, and potential future outcomes. Additionally, divination slips (*qiuqian*) can predict future success or obstacles. Divination can be loosely defined as a practice of producing knowledge either based on divine or spiritual agency, or as an esoteric system of reference available only to trained religious specialists (Clart 2022, 347-348). In his field, Chau (2006, 101-102) identified fifteen common reasons for consulting divination sticks including decision-making for business success, determining the timing of marriage, and predicting examination outcomes. From these observations, Chau proposed two modalities that center on the concept of magical efficacy: immediate-practical and liturgical (see chapter six). The distinction between the two is that the immediate-practical modality seeks *to quickly experience* miraculous power through less elaborate, faster rituals (Schmidt-Leukel and Gentz 2013, 144). Thus, the key characteristics of immediate-practical modality are a belief in supernatural magical efficacy (*ling*), minimal ritual elaboration, direct, simple, and can be practiced by people of all backgrounds, requiring little to no ritual specialism.

Magical efficacy fundamentally operates on the belief that some supernatural reality exists and that it interacts with the material world in some ways. Thus, closely

connected (and indeed, underlying) the concept of magical efficacy is the examination of supernatural realities, or cosmologies within Chinese religiosity and ling' en Christianity. Anthropologist Emily Ng (2020, 5) provides a helpful rough sketch of the cosmology in Chinese religiosity: *yinjian* (*yin* realm) is the spiritual world, imperceptible to humans, and includes spirits, ghosts, and deities, while *yangjian* (*yang* realm) refers to the visible, living human world, often called the human realm (*renjian*). Spirits in the *yin* realm can influence the material world by possessing humans, and humans in the *yang* realm can impact the *yin* realm through rituals of material and symbolic exchanges, such as burning paper money or goods as offerings or substitutes.

Given this rough foundation of Chinese cosmology, in the context of Shaanbei religious practitioners Chau (2006, 66) summarized a few basic postulates at the core of their religiosity: that there are gods; that people should respect gods and that their religious practices should aim to please these gods; that gods can bless people and help them with their problems; that people should show gratitude through various religious practices; that some gods are more efficacious than others; and that people are allowed to seek help from other gods but must thank them all afterwards. It seems that amongst Shaanbei religious practitioners, harmful entities (or as Ng might suggest, *yin* entities) are a peripheral concept. Indeed, Chau observes that the belief in and concern for ghosts (*gui*) – both harmful and neutral – is not prominent among the Shaanbei people. He also notes that there are no specific rituals to appease wandering ghosts (Chau 2006, 50-51). However, he found that Shaanbei people do believe in two types of ghosts: the “paralysis monsters” (*tanjiezi*) and the “hairy ghost gods” (*maoguishen*). These ghosts are considered to possess powers similar to minor gods and are believed to be capable of causing illness or the loss of valuable possessions. Spirit mediums may either secretly worship these ghosts to harm others or be engaged to perform exorcisms and free individuals from the harm caused by the ghosts. However, Chau (2006, 51) finds that the discussion of ghosts or monsters is not extensively developed in Shaanbei.

Before we continue, I want to note that scholars have documented immediate-practical practices amongst Chinese Christians who do not consider themselves ling'en. This is important for two reasons. First, this demonstrates the incredible relevance of the immediate-practical modality amongst Chinese Christians around the world. Second, it provides us with a good starting point to compare ling'en immediate-practical practices with their non-ling'en counterparts. Amongst Chinese Christians, perhaps the most common immediate-practical practice is prayer. In the mainland context, prayer is conducted with the belief that it has spiritual power to affect others (Kang 2019, 200). They also use prayer to seek healing, sometimes in combination with the refusal to go to the hospital. In these cases, the Christian pointed to having the *xinxin* "faith" that God would heal and that other external forces were not required (Kang 2019, 233). Prayer is also used by the individual to petition God for his protection and benediction (Chambon 2020, 98). Some urban mainland Christians are taught to pray less for themselves and their families and to pray more about God's concerns, exemplified through the Lord's Prayer (Kang 2019, 238). While rural mainland Christians tend to emphasize miracles, bodily healing through prayers, and other ling'en spiritual gifts, urban Christians view these practices as backwards (Kang 2019, 247). On the contrary, the participants of this study challenge the notion that the dividing factors are rural/urban and education as most of the participants of this study are urban dwellers and highly educated (having college degrees or higher).

Chinese American evangelicals employ prayer for the success of the church's ministries, for the healing of the sick, and for the jobless amongst the congregation to find jobs (Yang 1999, 3). They also pray for the conversion of other Chinese, both immigrants and back home, and pray for funds (usually through tithing by congregants). When the desires of their prayers are fulfilled, they say that "God has answered their prayers" or "God has listened their prayers" (Yang 1999, 67-68, 83).

Thus, we see that Christian prayer here is defined as "individual and group petition to the Christian God to act (directly or indirectly) regarding an issue". Christian prayer also relies on the Christians belief in God's ability to "respond to the worshiper's concerns",

which is very similar to the definition that Chau gave for magical efficacy. The word “concern” is more reflective of Christian prayers, contrasting to “problems” in Chau’s (2006, 66) definition, as Christians do not only pray for problems (situations that are regarded as unwelcome or harmful) but also pray for divine acts that benefit the believer as well as more broadly, any issue that they may deem worthy of seeking divine aid. Furthermore, Christian prayer is different from Chinese popular religiosity (broadly speaking) in that it is a two-way communication, a conversation with God through which ling’en can expect God to respond in a few ways, including moving (gandong) the petitioner. Nevertheless, both Chinese popular religion and Christianity engage in practices that rely on the magical efficacy of their gods.

Now that we have surveyed immediate-practical practices amongst Chinese Christians who generally do not consider themselves ling’en, we turn our attention to ling’en immediate-practical practices for the remainder of the chapter. Amongst SGV ling’en, prayer is also a central immediate-practical practice through which they raise individual and group concerns to the Christian God. Here are some of their common immediate-practical practices:

- Quick prayers in community (praying at end of service, praying for each other in person before and after church gathering, praying during midweek gatherings), asking pastor, lay leader, and other individuals with more “spiritual authority” or “spiritual maturity” to pray for healing, guidance, and help usually for oneself or family member.
- Singing worship songs with themes of deliverance, healing, exorcism, etc. Examples from contemporary worship style (preferred by ling’en Christians) can be found: “Set Us Free”, “Heal Me, Lord”, “Jesus, You Heal”, “Healing love”, and “You are my Salvation”.
- Short form “healing and deliverance” (*yizhi shifang*) usually in the form of a prayer and reading biblical passages (as opposed to longer ritualistic healing and deliverance)
- Calling out to Jesus in the moment when perceived to be “attacked in the spirit”.

Compared with the urban mainland Chinese Christians who are called to pray for issues beyond themselves, ling'en prayers and other immediate-practical practices are strongly characterized by addressing their immediate needs. With that said, this chapter focuses on two ling'en immediate-practical practices: healing and deliverance (*yizhi shifang*) and prophecy (*yuyan*). Healing and deliverance can appear in both a longer ritualistic form (which I will discuss in chapter six) and short form prayers in which one or more believers pray for the physical, spiritual, psychological healing of others. Prophecy is the ability to perceive the past, speak about the present, and predict the future about another person; as I observed, prophecy speaking almost always occurs without ritual elaboration. As such I classify both practices under the immediate-practical modality.

One effect of these immediate-practical practices is the building up of confidence in the magical efficacy of the Christian God. Regarding this, there is a key difference between deities of Chinese popular religion and ling'en Christian perception of God. Chau quotes earlier scholars on the function of *ling* Chinese popular religion in that when the ling of deities' spreads amongst people, their reputation increases which is seen through a rise in popularity in temples dedicated to them. Here we see a religious marketplace effect at work: as some deities increase in popularity, others may lose popularity and see a decline in their temple activities (Chau 2006, 65). In contrast, ling'en religious practices and the resulting socioculturally constructed human response endeavor to keep ling'en Christians faithful to the Christian God as opposed to a particular ling'en institution. Furthermore, the majority of ling'en deal with failures of magical efficacy quite comfortably by claiming that it was not God's will (*bu shi shende zhiyi*) for such a thing to happen.

### **Ling'en Drawing Material from Chinese Cosmologies**

In the vignette which began the introduction chapter to this study, I recounted an experience of prayer during the two-day gathering, "Encountering God". I observed immediate-practical practices in action on the second day of the gathering in the sessions after lunch. During lunch, I looked around to see if I could recognize anyone from the first night. Most of the attendees and coworkers knew each other as the event

was primarily advertised to those who attended the church. Lunch time turned out to be a good learning opportunity as I chatted with both a handful of attendees and coworkers. While gatekeepers (lay and pastoral leaders) knew of my presence as a researcher, I was able to share with others my research interest. Many of them expressed curiosity about the topic and noted that this gathering is important in understanding SGV ling'en. Coworkers and one participant who had attended once before shared brief stories about people being healed and delivered (*yizhi shifang*) on the second day.

After eating and chatting, attendees formed two lines and walked back into the main sanctuary. As we passed through the two sets of double doors, coworkers stood on either side clapping rhythmically, warmly welcoming us back. I smiled and nodded to as many coworkers as I could and noticed the slight rise of excitement in my body as I walked back into the sanctuary where a familiar Chinese popular worship song was playing loudly over speakers. This helped to negate some feelings of the post lunch slump. After we returned to our seats, the volume of the music gradually declined as we were introduced to session four titled "complete deliverance" (*quanran de shifang*). This session centered on the themes of "occult practices" (*xieshu*) and cleansing of "evil spirits" (*xieling*).

Like all sessions, this one included "sharing" (*fenxiang*) from two coworkers. Two men took turns to walk to the front of the sanctuary and spoke about ten minutes each. The focus of the session and purpose of their speaking was to highlight their personal experiences with Chinese religiosities. One of the examples that caught my ear was their foray into the Persistent Sect (*yiguandao*), a Chinese sect that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in Shandong and made its way to other places including Taiwan, the place of birth of the speaker. Other examples included fortune-telling (*suanming*), eight trigrams divination (*bagua*), kung fu (*gongfu*), *qigong*, and ancestral worship, among other traditions and practices. The message demonstrates that participating in the practices of these religious traditions is dangerous because they are acts which invite evil spirits (*xieling*) into the individual. This results in the individual entering a state of

pollution (*wuran*). This state of pollution lasts until they are spiritually cleansed (*shuling jiejing*), which then frees the individual from the grips of evil spirits and allows them to experience the ideal state of spiritual freedom (*shuling ziyou*). Participants were told that a clean internal state was necessary for the subsequent filling of the Holy Spirit (*shengling chongman*). The logic is that participation in non-Christian religious practices makes one susceptible to (and in some cases, unconsciously invites) evil spirits (*xieling*) into the individual. However, this is not quite the same as demonic possession, which invokes ideas of complete domination by evil spirits. Instead, being polluted was more akin to milder and more common form of influence by evil spirits. The goal of the session was therefore to cleanse participants and create a spiritually clean slate, which they proposed was a prerequisite for the filling of the Holy Spirit.

The first step is to have attendees recognize that they have been “infected by evil spirits” (*bei xieling zhanran*). To do so, attendees were handed a packet with the title written in both English and Chinese traditional script: “OCCULT CHECK LIST” (*xieshu qingdan*) on the first page. The comprehensive list is divided into two columns: “self” (*ziji*) and “family/clan/ancestor” (*jjazu*) to indicate the primary source. The “self” column is for practices that the individual has practiced or continues to practice. At this point, one attendee asked an important clarification question about whether these practices had to be consciously performed. We were told that all practices – conscious or not, willing or not – should be considered as engagement in the practices. This is based on the belief that people can be infected by evil spirits without knowing it, just as people may be infected by a disease without knowing it. The focus is not on how the individual became infected but on the healing of the spiritual infection and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual infection is more apparent in the family/clan/ancestor column. We were told that “ancestral heretical practices” (*jjazu xieshu*) may be passed down the generations as household practices of tradition. However, the effect of these practices is understood to continue well beyond those who practice them. For example, an individual who does not continue household practices remains infected by their grandparents who practiced

them in the context of this gathering. As such, this implies an understanding that attendees are not only negatively affected by their own sins but also by the sins of their ancestors. The list itself is quite long<sup>48</sup>, with the names of dozens of deities each categorized as one of the following five groups: “heresy” (*yijiao*), “involvement with evil spirits” (*jiaogui*), “witchcraft” (*xieshu*), “fortune-telling” (*suanming*), and “pollutants” (*zhanran*). It also draws from other sources such as the Satanic Panic<sup>49</sup> of the 1980s United States including practices such as listening to heavy death metal, playing Dungeons & Dragons, and reading fantasy books, the Ankh symbol from Satanism (Sarat 2013), Free Masons, homeopathy, geomancy (*fengshui*), and even UFO fixation. Later I found out that the list is regularly updated to include newly reported items from attendee feedback. The ever-expanding, comprehensive list suggests that any religious practice that is not Christian as understood by this group of ling’en Christians as problematic. Religious studies scholar Douglas Cowan (2014, 745-746) has argued that in the United States, identifying and countering the occult was driven by the rise of fundamentalist Protestantism and the emergence of new religious movements following World War Two. Charismatic speaker Cindy Jacobs (2001, 203) provides an occult checklist. A quick comparison between Jacobs’s and the ling’en checklist shows that the ling’en checklist is many times longer, is comprised of more items drawn from Chinese religiosity than Jacobs’s understanding of the occult and has both “self” and “ancestor” columns. Jacobs’s list is only one page long and the only item that is distinctly Chinese is the “I Ching”. Jacobs’s lack of “ancestor” column highlights the significance of ancestral religious practices in ling’en understanding of the occult.

Participants were given ten minutes to place check marks next to the items that they practiced or knew were practiced by family members and/or ancestors. Having grown up with parents and grandparents that engaged in very few religious practices, I was unfamiliar with most items. Nevertheless, I recognized that most of them came from

---

<sup>48</sup> The list includes these and many other items: Ulkāmukha Pretarāja Bodhisattva, Flaming-Mouth Ghost King (*pudugong*), characters from the novel *Journey to the West*, Heibei Wuchang (Black and White Impermanence) or Seventh and Eighth Masters (*qiye baye*), Earth God of Wealth and Merit (*fude zhengshen*), and *Mazu*.

<sup>49</sup> Philip Jenkins and Daniel Maier-Katkin (1992) have argued that the movement reveals the enduring influence of conspiracy politics and fundamentalist religion in American life.

Chinese culture and religions. After I finished the survey, I observed that several participants continued to make numerous marks with their pens, indicating that the items on the form were relevant to those participants. The handouts were then collected by the coworkers.

A coworker then prayed for us to be cleansed of evil. The prayer was short (not lasting for more than three or four minutes), was not complex, and was not conducted by the pastor (even though he was in the room at the time). For this reason, I consider the cleansing prayer to be an immediate-practical practice. Contrast to this, liturgical practices are generally longer, complex, and require the expertise of a ritual specialist. These are general characteristics which differentiate immediate-practical and liturgical practices and there are certainly practices that do not fit neatly into either modality. The content of the prayer was that from the moment of the prayer onward, attendees would be purified of all *past* spiritual infection. Through this cleansing prayer, people join to create a sociocultural experience in which they believe that attendees are immediately purified of their spiritual infection and ready to receive the Holy Spirit. Cleansing prayers occur beyond this gathering – they appear whenever the opportunity to discuss potential spiritual infection arises. For example, they may be utilized following a sermon that discussed spiritual pollution, or after a mid-week gathering where spiritual pollution has been raised and following Sunday gatherings when prayer stations are available for those suffering from problems that are attributed to spiritual pollution. While the cleansing prayer at the gathering made the proclamation that we were all forever cleansed of our past, this apparently did not preclude the possibility of future re-infection. In this way, the cleansing prayer operates more akin to a treatment rather than a vaccine. As such, the fact that the cleansing prayer is repeatedly used to keep people spiritually clean is logical.

The handouts reappeared in the final session, where coworkers brought them out and ran them through a paper shredder that was placed on the stage. During this shredding (another discrete immediate-practical practice) it was explained that this was an act which symbolized a spiritual cleansing and a break from individual and ancestral “sinful”

past. “Successful” spiritual cleansing from past sins was evidenced as the event drew to a close with the brief “testimonies” (*jianzheng*) by two females whom both referred to immediate changes from the activities in sessions four and six. One said that her “body felt a little bit more relaxed” (*shenti ganjue qingsongle yixie*) following the shredding of the papers. Both were not Christians at the time of the gathering and may have converted to ling’en Christianity because of the powerful experiences brought on by these immediate-practical experiences.

To summarize, this vignette highlights ling’en Christianity’s adoption of cosmology and supernatural entities from three sources: Christianity (in particular, the Bible), Chinese religiosity, and American Christianity’s opposition to the occult following the rise of Protestant fundamentalism and new age religions. The resulting amalgamation of Christian/Chinese/American cosmology has two key characteristics. First, it categorizes most supernatural entities as harmful (and later we will see how ling’en flatten this category). Second, it provides a fertile foundation for ling’en immediate-practical practices that allow for the demonstration of magical efficacy of the Christian God and his power over harmful entities.

Before continuing with our analysis of two ling’en immediate-practical practices, I want to comment briefly on the difference between mainstream evangelicalism and ling’en Christianity. Based on conversations during fieldwork with and years of experience amongst Chinese American evangelicals, they tend to abandon the belief in existence of entities belonging to the broad category of Chinese supernatural realm following conversion to Christianity. They then hold belief in the Christian God and to the supernatural world presented in the Protestant Bible in part due to their tendency towards literal reading of the text. For example, broadly speaking mainstream evangelicals believe in the existence of demons presented in the Matthew 8:28-34 text as well as the deceiving spirit in 1 Kings 22:23-28 as examples. However, they generally do not dwell on these and other supernatural entities in their daily lives. To the contrary, ling’en Christians not only believe the existence of supernatural entities in the Protestant Bible, but as this section shows, they also believe in the supernatural entities of Chinese

and American religiosities. Therefore, I describe ling'en Christianity as creating (and re-creating) a cosmological space that overlaps Chinese religiosity and mainstream evangelicalism. In this space, ling'en believe in the supernatural supremacy of the Christian God while at same time hold belief in the real harm of other supernatural entities. This is evidence that ling'en draw from Chinese worldview, which includes cosmology of Chinese religiosity. With this "overlap" cosmology, it is easier to understand why immediate-practical practices including healing and deliverance and prophecy strongly resonate amongst ling'en.

### **Defeating Harmful Ghosts?**

In this section, I draw from interview data with a mainland-born Chinese American ling'en to analyze how ling'en engage with the harmful supernatural world. They do so primarily by "cutting" (*kanduan*) believers' connection with harmful entities. I consider the implications that this strategy has for the immediate-practical modality. While several participants shared their personal experiences with ghosts (*gui*), one individual stood out. Bao (male, late 40s) was born in a rural village in Hebei in the 1970s and lived there through the 1980s.<sup>50</sup> Residents of Bao's village worshipped local deities to cultivate harmony and balance between the natural and supernatural worlds through rituals and offerings. Bao's paternal side was particularly immersed in a local form of Chinese popular religion, with everyone else except the immediate Bao family members holding such beliefs. Unfortunately, Bao was not familiar with the specific deities that were worshipped amongst the villagers and so we cannot speculate on the specifics of the local deities. However, he remembered more general practices. For example, one of Bao's paternal granduncles was known for practicing what Bao called "involvement with evil spirits" (*jiaogui*), an immediate-practical practice through which he communicated with ghosts to appease them. Bao also reported that one of his granduncles at times

---

<sup>50</sup> Though Bao is the mainland Chinese participant most shaped by rural Chinese cosmology, casual conversations with mainland Chinese suggest that his perspective is prevalent amongst mainland Chinese with similar backgrounds. For example, one participant who had lived mostly in an urban Chinese setting but with parents who lived primarily in rural China frequently drew upon rural Chinese cosmology in his understanding of the world and his immediate-practical practices.

would use magical powers to call numerous snakes into Bao's yard through the recitation of curses, another immediate-practical practice.

Unlike most of the villagers, Bao, his father, mother, and paternal grandmother were Christians and known in the village for their efficacious prayers (immediate-practical) that could heal the sick and conduct exorcisms. For decades, the Baos led the village church and attracted people from nearby villages seeking healing and exorcism. Grandma Bao (*nainai*) also travelled along the mountainous trails for several hours to heal and evangelize neighboring villagers. Bao recounts a story from when he was very young of a neighbor who was "possessed by a ghost" (*bei guifu*):

She climbed naked onto the flat roof of our village house. She then ran around shouting, clearly not in control of herself. Grandma called for her to come down, but the crazy lady refused. Grandma began to pray out loud. Shortly later, the crazy lady returned to her normal self and rushed back home in shame.

The Baos' prayers helped the woman to return to her normal self, and the ghost left her. The Baos were able to detect ghost possessions through abnormalities in the natural world, such as people possessed by ghosts often speaking with the voice of another person or doing something that would normally be considered shameful, like the neighbor in Bao's story. The Baos' prayers were an effective weapon against these possessions, but just one of many options as villagers could turn to other local deities to seek magical efficacy.

For example, another neighbor of the Bao's worshipped a popular local deity and called upon the deity's power to conduct ritual healing and exorcisms. When other villagers became sick, they would invite this individual to their home. They would then burn incense, and "dancing the great deity/god" (*tiao dashen*) a shamanic ritual primarily practiced in Northwestern mainland China and is performed to communicate with deities or ancestors who speak through the spirit medium (Yang 2015; Chau and Liu 2020). In his retelling of the story, the rituals were efficacious, and the person became well.

However, after some time, many of the people would become sick again. Unable to provide follow-up help, they were told, “do not call us again, we do not want to make this money. Call the Christians to come, we do not want to help you anymore.” This suggests that amongst the villagers many were aware of the magical efficacy of Christians and their God.

Besides magical efficacy, Bao’s village demanded certain cultural practices in the form of rituals throughout the year. An important one that Bao discussed was the Lunar New Year. It was customary for people of the village to go to the cemetery to burn money, incense, set off firecrackers, and provide food offerings to honor and remember their ancestors (Blake 2011). This practice is rooted in the belief that the spirits of deceased ancestors can continue to influence the lives of their descendants, and that it is important to maintain a good relationship with these spirits. Food offerings are typically placed on an altar or table in front of a portrait or statue of the ancestor, and they are believed to be consumed by the ancestor's spirit. This highlights the diverse cosmology of Bao and the village. Even following conversion to Christianity, villagers knew they had to avoid (and sometimes even appease) local deities to avoid trouble in daily life.

However, avoidance seemed impossible for Bao as he recalled the many troubles he experienced as a child and young man while living in the village. Bao blamed the causal agent for his misfortunes on his infection from being associated with harmful ghosts and deities. During our interview, he described his past problems with seriousness and sincerity. Since his teenage years, Bao has had a problem with self-harm. He would cut his body and bash the walls until his hands were bloodied. When asked when this began, he explained that it first came to him through a fascination with Jet Li in his 1982 Chinese-Hong Kong film, *Shaolin Temple*. In the film, many young monks are seen to have ordination burn marks on their shaven heads, a practice of body modification that is a commonplace feature of Sinitic Buddhism (Benn 2007). Bao mimicked them and used the tips of matchsticks to set twelve burn marks on his arm. He was also consumed with anger and would take out his frustrations on himself. He told me about two incidents. One in which, when he was a child, he was wrongfully accused by a

teacher and in response, Bao held a burning tinder in his hand until it was extinguished. That created an infection and left a scar. After university, Bao got married. In his marriage, whenever he quarreled with his wife, Bao would lose control and punch the wall until his hand was bloody.

We see that Bao suffered from several physical, emotional, and psychological issues. By the time of our interview, Bao had been a ling'en Christian for several years. Thus, his interpretation of these past issues is deeply guided by his ling'en cosmology. Bao retroactively perceived his past behavior as "out of control" spiritual experiences. Thus, when ling'en speak of spiritual experiences, they can refer to either Christian spiritual experiences or non-Christian spiritual experiences. Bao also highlighted *wushu* (martial arts) as a spiritual experience. That is, *wushu* is not simply a form of martial arts but also a set of spiritual practices that opened him up to evil influences which coerced him into cutting. Bao said that once his interest to wushu set in, Satan could keep him "bound up" (*kunbang*) in destructive behavior. Bao argues that sinful behavior, and more broadly, sin, can all be the result of being bound up. Here it is important to note that amongst ling'en Christians like Bao, the boundary between ghosts and local deities is fuzzy. Whereas in Chinese cosmology, true deities cannot be placed in the *yin* category and thus primarily operate as dispensers of blessings, amongst ling'en, deities are almost always viewed as *yin* entities (Ng 2020, 5). This is because for ling'en, the supernatural space for dispensing blessings is reserved exclusively for the Christian God; no other deities can come into this space. Thus, for ling'en, ghosts and other deities are relegated to the *yin* space. Contrast to ling'en, within some Chinese contexts, supernatural entities are understood with far more nuance. Anthropologist Arthur Wolf (1974b, 145) argued that the types of supernatural entities worshipped there (gods, ghosts, and ancestors) mirrored the categories of people salient in people's lives: government officials, strangers, and kin. Gods were like officials in that they possessed the power to greatly alter the life circumstances of families and communities, for both better and worse. Ghosts resembled malevolent strangers who wreaked havoc in the lives of anyone that they came across. Like aggressive and potentially violent beggars, they needed to be appeased just to prevent them from causing harm. Ancestors

resembled familial elders who worked for the benefit of their descendants, though they could become angry if neglected.

Anthropologist Stephan Feuchtwang (2010) has shown that ghosts can be kin as well as strangers. In his analysis, ghosts are dead people who have not been given proper funerary rites and thus do not become ancestors. Second, Robert Weller (1987) points out that in rural Taiwan, in addition to wreaking havoc, ghosts can bring benefits to individuals if worshipped properly. Others note that urban interactions with ghosts (and strangers) can be spiritual, erotic, and energizing as well as dangerous, and that urbanization in mainland China is often accompanied by the transformation of ghost stories from dangerous depictions into a form of entertainment (Lee 2014, 59–70; Kipnis 2021, 52-53). Ghosts are propitiated so that they do not cause trouble; gods are worshipped for help; and ancestors are worshiped because one owes them something (Wolf 1974b).

Yet in Bao's understanding, the supernatural world is filled with harmful ghosts that torment his everyday life. Furthermore, in his understanding, it was not because Bao engaged in meaningful popular religious behaviors that caused evil spirits to torment him. Ling'en Christians believe that past experiences with non-Christian supernatural entities – whether intentional or not – causes the physical, social, mental, and psychological problems that individuals face in the present. Furthermore, ling'en demonology (the study of demons) is such that Satan (or the devil) is placed at the top over all other harmful ghosts and deities. In this way, Chinese cosmological features become subservient to Christian interpretation of the supernatural world. Below Satan, various supernatural entities exist – of which the most prominent amongst ling'en feature Chinese ghosts and deities.

Bao's grandmother's embodiment of Christianity, characterized by believers' ability to confront evil spirits through immediate-practical practices such as healing prayers (using tongues) and short exorcism prayers played a significant role in shaping Bao's understanding of the Christian perspective on the supernatural realm. A central concept

within ling'en Christianity – the belief in an unseen world inhabited by evil spirits that inflict harm upon people – became more accessible to Bao after he and his wife made the decision to convert to Christianity shortly after their migration to the United States in 2009. According to Bao, the church where he was baptized in Northern California (Bao did not mention if he was baptized while with his *laolao* but found baptism important enough to do so at this point in his life) did not emphasize ling'en understanding. However, after moving to SGV, they were invited by their neighbors to attend GCCI, where Bao was first introduced to ling'en during the “Encounter God” retreat. It was during this retreat that he received teachings on “healing and deliverance” (*yizhi shifang*). These teachings revealed to Bao that he had been tormented by evil spirits stemming from intergenerational curses (*jiazu zhouzu*), ancestral worship, and even his practice of Shaolin kung fu (*wushu*). These evil spirits had caused him to experience bondage, self-harm, and bouts of anger.

At GCCI Bao experienced a turning point in his life after being delivered from his evil spirits:

I remember that during the retreat I confessed and repented of my sins. I nailed my sins to the cross. I was filled with the Holy Spirit. I opened my heart to receive God's complete deliverance (*wanquan shifang*) for me. I felt like my life had undergone a significant cleansing, a profound transformation, and I felt much lighter.

Through Bao, ling'en Christians, and rural Chinese cosmology, we see a minor shortcoming with Chau's formulation of the immediate-practical modality. Namely that it mostly ignores the significance of harmful ghosts and deities. Chau notes that Shaanbei religious practitioners primarily engaged in the immediate-practical modality to resolve problems by seeking the aid of deities. However, ling'en immediate-practical practices suggest that people can approach problems from two angles. The first – as is common amongst Shaanbei religious practitioners and mainstream evangelicals – is to petition beneficial deities to step in and resolve their problems, some of which may be caused

by harmful entities. The other – as demonstrated by ling'en Christians – is to petition the Christian God to confront the harmful ghosts and deities that are perceived to be causing their problems. This is a minor but significant difference in that the former leapfrogs the malevolent forces while the latter highlights the malevolent forces in their immediate-practical practices. This second pathway of addressing issues may be relevant to Shaanbei religious practitioners as Chau (2006, 55) also found that Shaanbei “people go to see the spirit mediums for all kinds of problems but mostly for treating illnesses... these illnesses include soul loss and disturbances by bad spirits such as the *maoguishen*... so exorcism is an important component of their repertoire.” In this way, ling'en Christianity and Shaanbei religiosity share exorcism as an immediate-practical practice in the engagement of harmful ghosts and deities. Thus, the immediate-practical modality should be based on an additional postulate: *ghosts, gods, deities, and ancestors can harm people* (cf. Chau 2006, 66). The key difference I want to highlight here is that mainstream evangelicals tend to ignore addressing these harmful ghosts and deities. That is, they ignore this additional postulate with respect to the harmful entities of Chinese religiosity in part because their cosmology does not give much space for them. On the other hand, ling'en Christians base many of their immediate-practical practices on this postulate.

Throughout my handful of interactions with Bao, he appeared to me as a gentle, soft-spoken man; it was difficult to imagine the outbursts of rage that he described to me. When asked if his temperament changed following healing and deliverance, Bao claimed with confidence that he had changed. Furthermore, he told me that during COVID-19 lockdown he helped others with their anger, grief, and other negative emotions by communicating with them on Zoom. It seems that Bao had not only been healed of his violent outbursts, but he was able to help others overcome similar difficulties. In short, ling'en healing and deliverance was efficacious for Bao, highlighting the significance of immediate-practical practices for some immigrants with prior experience with Chinese religiosity. In my conversation with other multiple coworkers during the “Encounter God” Retreat, I observed that most if not all of them had attended the retreat as a participant at some point in the past. This demonstrates that the gift of

healing and deliverance can be acquired and used on other people to continue to show the magical efficacy of God to themselves and to others. It is also important to note that Bao not only performs healing and deliverance but continues to receive healing and deliverance. We can interpret this need for continued healing and deliverance as the reality that evil spirits and their influences cannot be permanently defeated by either baptism or healing and deliverance.

I contend that the goal of ling'en immediate-practical practices is not for the destruction of harmful ghosts and deities (i.e., no one prays that they are destroyed) but rather for the momentary relaxing of the ties between harmful entities and believers. As such, harmful ghosts and deities simply exist as a permanent fixture in ling'en cosmology. Under this understanding, the function of these harmful ghosts and deities is to cause trouble for human beings (e.g., by making them physically sick, by making them angry). To alleviate such troubles, ling'en Christians employ a set of immediate-practical practices to temporarily disrupt or cut bonds between human and harmful entities, offering respite. In other words, ling'en immediate-practical practices cure symptoms but not disease. In fact, this way of functioning is similar in Chinese religiosity such as religious Daoism in which its supernatural entities cannot be destroyed lest balance is upset.<sup>51</sup> However, there is scholarly work which suggests that in Chinese religiosity, harmful ghosts and deities can be tamed or controlled – for example by Confucian elites in attempts to demonstrate the greater magical efficacy of their tradition over others (Poo 2022). While the indestructibility of harmful ghosts and gods of ling'en resemble that of religious Daoism, ling'en places supernatural entities into two categories: God and his angels, and Satan along with other supernatural entities. This contrasts with the diversity of deities which exist in ranking and in harmony with each other (Suleski 2018). So, while ling'en cosmology shares structural features of religious Daoism, it drastically simplifies its ranking system. It is in this simplified (or dichotomized between good and

---

<sup>51</sup> Although according to one story, Confucian elites set out to prove that people should not fear ghosts. Through their wit and intelligence, they scared away, trapped, and killed ghosts. This story has been used by the Chinese state to reduce superstitious beliefs amongst the Chinese (Esler 2016).

evil) that immediate-practical practices retain their value by demonstrating the magical efficacy of the Christian God.

My interpretation is that while ling'en Christians openly condemn harmful deities, they do not seek to destroy them. Rather, they employ some immediate-practical practices aimed at temporarily cutting off a connection between human and harmful deities. This is in direct contradiction with what scholars of Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity describe as a "complete break with the past". Anthropologist Birgit Meyer (1998, 322) notes that amongst Ghanaian Pentecostals, the ritual of deliverance is not considered to take effect immediately but rather is regarded as a long-term process. Anthropologist Fraser MacDonald (2019, 124) echoes this idea in noting that "a total break with traditional culture is at best a theological project that can never be fully achieved in practice." I want to extend their arguments by contending that the underlying, unspoken goal of deliverance rituals, including ling'en healing and deliverance, is not only *not to destroy the bonds between harmful entities and humans* but that the entire project is sustained through the continued discussion and recollection of harmful entities.

Indeed, this analysis of ling'en Christian cosmology shows that in ling'en the continual struggle found in immediate-practical practices highlight the permanence and expansiveness of harmful ghosts and deities. On the one hand, through immediate-practical practices ling'en Christians learn to believe that Christianity has the power to defeat these harmful entities and cleanse the believer through ling'en practices that involve the basic elements of prayer (either self or by others), worship singing, and spiritual gifts. Yet on the other hand, ling'en Christians *must* adhere to the permanence of Chinese harmful ghosts and deities because of the simple fact that if they believed immediate-practical rituals "defeated them permanently", there would be far less (even perhaps, no source) of harm to ling'en believers. If that were to happen, ling'en immediate-practical practices may become entirely unnecessary. Thus, for the ling'en Christian, aspects of Chinese cosmology become critical in sustaining their religious practices and its sociocultural products, namely belief in the immediate-practical practices, belief in the religious specialists who conduct these practices, and ultimately,

belief in the magical efficacy of the Christian God. While this section has highlighted harmful deities, participant data suggests that not all aspects of Chinese religiosity is restricted in ling'en immediate-practical practices.

### **Borrowing from Chinese Cosmologies: Prognostication and Prophecy**

In this section, we turn our attention to a case study to see how ling'en Christian borrow and retool techniques from Chinese religiosity for the ling'en immediate-practical practice of speaking prophecy (*shuo yuyan*). This problematizes the earlier assertion that supernatural entities (besides God and his angels) have harmful effects on believers (e.g., Bao's *kunbang*). Ch'en (male, 60s) was born and raised in Taiwan. He was born into an entrepreneurial family in which many members regularly practiced Chinese popular religion, most frequently for the fortunes of their business and well-being of family members. Under his family's influence, Ch'en inherited a keen business sense and developed an intense fascination with the supernatural, and his religious pursuits centered around personally acquiring the ability of prognostication (*zhan*) about himself. In other words, Ch'en wanted to know his own future with certainty. Ch'en is an interesting case study because he represents migrants who take religion seriously, contrast to the participants of the study conducted by Scorgie et al (2022, 19).

In effort to gain the ability of prognostication, Ch'en explored various form of fortune-telling (*suanming*) in his younger years. These included mingli divination (*mingli xue*), Purple Star Astrology (*ziwei doushu*), and physiognomy (*shouxiang mianxiang*). He sought divination for himself and occasionally enlisted others to divine on his behalf. Over time, he earned a reputation as a proficient diviner, leading to his informal title as a Daoist demigod (*banxian*), although he confessed to me that he held significant uncertainty about his practices. As we can see, Chinese mantic systems are legion and found in the most diverse settings, from elaborate and formal temple altars to boisterous marketplace stands. This fixation with destiny is one of the most deeply rooted features of Chinese life and religiosity (Strickmann and Faure 2005, 1).

Of my participants, Ch'en was by far the most preoccupied with prognostication. According to Ch'en, accurate prognostication requires one to interact with the supernatural realm. He provided details of two practices that allowed for accurate prognostication: first, those who adopt "little ghosts" (*xiaogui*) from Thai popular religion, and second, those who appease "fetus ghosts" (*lingying* or *yingling*), a concept originating in Japan (Moskowitz 2001). Ch'en told me that he did not personally practice them but was confident of their accuracy as he had heard of others who engaged with them. Nevertheless, it is his belief that people can access the supernatural realm through communicating with the dead, and in this case, babies who have died. His logic is that since the dead babies are part of the supernatural world, they have access to knowledge that only ghosts and gods (*guishen*) have, including secret knowledge and knowledge of the past and future. Ch'en also insisted that local deities did not have access to the supernatural realm and therefore could not know the future. As such, diviners who relied on local deities are not able to provide accurate foresight into the future and secret knowledge.

Ch'en's view of supernatural entities in the process of prognostication provides an interesting counterbalance to Bao because here we see that not all supernatural entities (here he uses the term *ling*) are considered evil in themselves. Fetus ghosts have been portrayed by scholars in six ways: beneficent, location-associated, malevolent, harmful without intent, pitiful, and anxiety-related (Moskowitz 2001, 58-63). In the case of Ch'en, we add a seventh portrayal of fetus ghosts: prognostication. For Ch'en, his understanding of fetus ghosts is complicated; it is neither entirely malevolent nor beneficent. Instead, he views fetus ghosts as a medium through which an exchange can occur: the appeasement of the fetus for secret and future knowledge. In other words, the fetus ghost is a tool for diviners to use. Here we see a clear example of ghosts and deities that are traditionally classified as *yin* entities but not always perceived as harmful within Chinese religiosity.

After arriving in the United States, Ch'en went into the real estate business. He told me that he once owned over ten properties in Los Angeles and had a net worth of tens of

millions of United States dollars. Unfortunately, he lost much of it during the 1990s Southern California housing crisis. We will see later how he interpreted this series of financial disasters. While in the United States, Ch'en continued to seek an answer to his childhood question of destination after death. He studied Buddhism, Daoism, I Ching (*yijing*), and *qigong*. Ch'en notes with gleeful satisfaction that his *renduermi* has been opened. The *renduermi* are the two energy channels in the body that play a primary role in *qigong*. The two channels are the "conception channel" that runs through the center of the front, ventral part of the body, and the "governing channel" that runs through the back, dorsal part of the body (Yun 2020). In *qigong*, practitioners often focus on cultivating and balancing the flow of *qi* (variously translated as life breath, vital essence, etc.) through these channels to promote health, vitality, and spiritual well-being. With his *renduermi* opened, Ch'en claimed that he was animated with *qi*, able to move and spin about as a field of energy guides him. Ch'en also said that while these endeavors were for prognostication, they did not grant him prognostication.

Disappointed with these religious pursuits, Ch'en happened to come across Christianity when a friend invited him to experience the truthfulness of the Christian claim that "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Sometime following this challenge, his baby daughter became sick and had a high fever. Ch'en tried several ways to give his child medication, but she refused each time. He was desperate and remembered the Christian God that his friend told him about. When Ch'en prayed for healing, he was testing the magical efficacy of the Christian God. This is consistent with what some scholars have found that amongst Chinese Christians: "Jesus is worshipped because he turns out to be the more powerful God" (Fiedler 2013, 144). Ch'en's daughter got well the next morning, and he converted shortly after.<sup>52</sup> Note here that Ch'en's conversion to ling'en Christianity was based on an immediate-practical prayer that, to him, demonstrated the magical efficacy of the Christian God. Following his baptism into

---

<sup>52</sup> Ch'en's vow to become a committed Christian entail some sacrifices and shares characteristics with Buddhism's "leaving home" (*chujia*) (Katz 2019).

the Christian faith, Ch'en claimed that he ceased spiritual curiosities of Chinese religiosity.

Contrary to Bao, Ch'en did not speak of the need for healing and deliverance from his past associations with the practices of Chinese popular religion, even though he was significantly more involved (e.g., practicing divination to the point of becoming known as a demigod) than Bao. One explanation is that Ch'en did not seem to associate his former religious practices with evil spirits (*xieling*). Note that even with the fetus ghosts, he viewed them as practical objects to be used by diviners – even following his conversion to Christianity. Ch'en had become a ling'en Christian in his late 20s, well before his real estate failures. By the housing crash of the early to mid-1990s in Southern California and the subsequent loss of all his equity, Ch'en interpreted his failures not due to his past religious experience as one might assume given Bao's story. Instead, he attributed his unfortunate experience because of not following God's will. Thus, we see that the ling'en belief that misfortunes are caused by harmful ghosts and deities are not uniformly applied by ling'en Christians in their response to personal experience. There remains room for God to punish disobedient Christians – for their own good, of course as Ch'en understands.

Ironically, it was after Ch'en became more familiar with ling'en practices that he gained the ability to speak prophecy (*shuo yuyan*). Ch'en regularly used his prophetic abilities in ling'en gatherings as an immediate-practical tool to guide, warn, and encourage fellow believers. Ling'en believe that they receive these prophecies from God and that they can demonstrate the magical efficacy of God. For many Taiwan-born ling'en Christians such as Ch'en, prophecy is understood as more accessible to individuals with higher sensitivity to the supernatural world through spiritual detection (*lingjue*). This is an ability that allows people to see things in the supernatural world. Some also associate this heightened *lingjue* with “opening the Third Eye” (*kai tianyan*), a cultivational goal in Buddhism (Lin 2019). It is often used to refer to a person who has achieved great wisdom, insight, or the ability to see beyond the limits of normal

perception. They may be able to see ghosts and into the supernatural world. Another Taiwan-born participant, Pan (female, 70s), noted:

In a place like Taiwan, and I think in mainland China too, many people who worship Buddha have a high SQ [spiritual quotient]<sup>53</sup>. Upon birth they can see another world... one such person says “mom, there are so many people here and it’s so loud.” The mom thinks “it’s only the two of us here, there are no other people.” The mom knows that this child has an opened third eye (*lingyan*). So, from a young age, the child sees and knows who will suffer calamity.

And similarly, from Ch’en:

People actually have some spiritual sensitivity, and some people are more spiritually sensitive. They can see things they should not see, perceive the spiritual realm, and know about spiritual matters. Even some Christians can see visions, while others never experience such visions... these things do exist, but ordinary people generally do not encounter or understand them.

According to Pan and Ch’en, they believe that some people are gifted with a special ability to see into the supernatural world and detect supernatural events that impact the material world. According to these participants, those who convert from religions like Buddhism into ling’en Christianity have an inherent advantage of being able to peer into the supernatural world. Following conversion, their abilities are no longer spoken of in Buddhist terms but in Christian terms. Thus, Buddhist interpretation of opening the Third Eye and other advanced cultivational techniques transform people into Bodhisattvas who can “hear things thousands of miles away, can tread on water, can know the past and predict the future, and can shine like the sun, grow multiple bodies and show up in different forms as needed” (Lin 2019, 116). While some of these abilities are highlighted in ling’en, namely a limited ability to know the past and predict the future (e.g., prophecy and recognizing tears or *pokou*), Buddhism’s goal of cultivating the ability to manipulate

---

<sup>53</sup> Pan said this term in English, not Mandarin.

*qi* is to achieve individual permanence and bliss (Lin 2019, 116). To the contrary, ling'en supernatural gifts are primarily for the service of oneself and others. However, this service is not always welcomed. Whereas ling'en converts from Buddhism who cultivated their supernatural abilities are generally welcomed in ling'en communities, they are normally rejected in mainstream evangelicalism as we see from Pan's recollection of a woman she knew from church:

I knew a sister in Chicago who had high SQ. Her husband thought she was strange. We had to explain to him that it's because she's spiritual composition is different – God made her this way – but she has to learn. She may see things but cannot explain them. Some may feel they are strong in visions, and they will go to church and say this and that about the pastor. The pastor will be afraid of this person. This creates a lot of conflict.”

There are a few observations we can make about this translation of spiritual quotient into ling'en prophetic visions. First, having spiritual abilities that are directly related to Chinese popular religion is not considered evil or sinful to many ling'en Christians familiar with prophecy. On the contrary, these participants consider this ability an asset to their ling'en practices. Combining with the earlier understandings of what is considered evil (e.g., Bao's interaction with *wushu*) and what is not considered evil (e.g., Ch'en's understanding of fetus ghosts), we may understand that ling'en is open to borrow and repurpose elements from Chinese religiosity.

According to participant description, speaking prophecy is an immediate-practical practice as it occurs quickly (usually in the form of a prayer), with no ritual elaboration, and can be conducted by lay people without ritual specialism. Individuals may receive a prophecy but entirely lack insight into its meaning, and its meaning is often made clear by the recipient. In this case, the recipient is the one who perceives and understands the prophecy. In other cases, the one who receives the vision perceives and understands, and the recipient quickly comes to an identical interpretation. Still, in some other cases, the one who receives the vision tells the recipient his or her understanding

but is firmly rejected by the other person. It seems that prophecy and interpretation of prophecy in ways similar to tongues and interpretation of tongues in that someone may speak in tongues but not understand it until someone interprets it. However, the difference is that the interpreter of tongues cannot reject what the tongues-speaker has said whereas the recipient of the prophecy can reject the interpretation of the prophecy-giver.

No doubt the translation of prognostication (*zhan*) in Chinese religiosity into ling'en prophecy contains within it a certain degree of ontological and cultural preservation. This is essentially what Pan and Ch'en say when they argue that people can bring their supernatural insights from Chinese religious traditions into ling'en Christianity. However, the differences are also quite stark. Instead of proposing that foreknowledge is scattered amongst various deities (excluding local deities per Ch'en) and difficult to access, prophecies are perceived as an egalitarian gift that come from the Christian God. Rather than divination tools such as sticks and slips, the ling'en Christian relies on various non-material factors such as an unspoken communal agreement of their familiarity with the Bible and their personal relationship with God to give and interpret prophecy. Thus, some aspects of Chinese religiosity – such as *kai tianyan* – are valued by ling'en for their supernatural utility. However, other aspects such as geomancy (*fengshui*) are not borrowed. The difference, it seems, is whether the element from Chinese religiosity can be retooled for ling'en magical use. Thus, we understand ling'en Christians as selectively borrowing concepts from Chinese religiosity based on their applicability to ling'en immediate-practical practices. In this section, we see that they take what is relevant to prognostication, combine them with Christian and Jewish concepts of prophecy, and utilize them within ling'en cosmology and through ling'en practices.

## **Conclusion**

At the foundation of immediate-practical practices such as healing and deliverance and prophecy is the underlying ling'en belief in the magical efficacy of God. While Chau's (2006, 2, 64) definition of magical efficacy as the "ability of a deity to respond to the

worshippers' problems" in the context of Shaanbei popular religiosity is applicable to ling'en Christians, this does not fully describe the ling'en perspective. I propose that ling'en magical efficacy has an additional dimension in which the ling'en believer recognizes and submits to the agency of the Christian God. Individuals, such as Mr. Ch'en, who experience the power of God through immediate-practical practices are compelled to convert to the ling'en faith. When ling'en Christians employ immediate-practical practices, ling'en magical efficacy is perceived as a constant negotiation in which the ling'en Christian offers up her desires through prayer and petitions yet must remain willing to accept any number of responses by the Christian God. In this sense, she remains convinced in the efficaciousness of God (i.e. God is alive and interacts with the world) while at the same time keeps open the possibility of God changing the desires of the worshipper. I have not found evidence of gods of Chinese popular religion changing the desires of its religious practitioners to their material detriment. In this regard, ling'en magical efficacy extends beyond solving the individual's material problems to goals that may require the sacrifice of personal resources such as Ch'en spending much of his personal time and wealth to advance the aims of his ling'en church. Simply put, ling'en immediate-practical practices are not characterized by seeking good fortune or avoiding bad fortune but instead center on a careful negotiation between removing harmful lived experiences (e.g., Bao's sleep paralysis) and fulfilling their duties to God as faithful believers. On the part of the ling'en there is always the fear that unfaithfulness will put them into double trouble: opening themselves up to harmful entities and being bound up such that they are not able to call upon God through immediate-practical practices for help.

Earlier in the chapter, I noted that scholars agree that "complete rupture" from indigenous culture and religion is nearly impossible despite Pentecostal-charismatic repeated efforts to do so. On this basis, I have made the connection between ling'en practices of healing and deliverance and prophetic visions with Chau's immediate-practical modality in assessing ling'en Christianity. The immediate-practical modality is, above all, concerned with the real-world, beneficial impact that a deity has on its religious practitioners. This chapter shows that magical efficacy is a central feature of

ling'en Christianity as its practitioners rely on practices to continuously remove the harmful effects (such as being bound up, *kunbang*) of harmful ghosts and gods and to envision a future through prophetic visions. In doing so, we notice their close connection to Chinese religiosity and cosmology in that their cosmological framework is situated in the space between the cosmologies of mainstream evangelicalism and Chinese religiosity. In layered thinking, the point of contact of cosmology in the layers between ling'en Christianity and Chinese religiosity is far more complicated than discontinuity; it is characterized by *interdependence*, *appropriation*, *rejection*, and *holding Chinese religiosity responsible*. In turn the ling'en layer is made richer in that immediate-practical practices have more targets to work with.

By applying the immediate-practical modality to a form of Chinese American Christianity, we have uncovered several differences from which we can draw to extend the immediate-practical modality. First, whereas the immediate-practical practices of Chinese religiosity focus on magical efficacy through appeasement of the gods (e.g., by building temples), ling'en immediate-practical practices presume the magical efficacy of the Christian God and shift towards a consideration of the relational quality between the believer and God. So, where the magical efficacy of gods is tested within Chinese religiosity, it is the relational quality of believers that is tested within ling'en Christianity. One result of this is that whereas Chinese immediate-practical practices result in a marketplace of deities and supernatural entities (Chau 2011a, 548-549), each competing for influence and physical territory, ling'en turn to a marketplace of ling'en institutions, gandong masters, and ling'en ritual specialists (discussed in chapter six) for the development of relational quality between the individual and the Christian God. Thus, while ling'en institutions may maintain a significant degree of cohesion through the regular attendance of members, ling'en Christians are not restricted to commit or remain in one ling'en church. Indeed, my interview data is scattered with participants talking about leaving, joining, and visiting ling'en churches and institutions for various reasons including the frequent reason of seeking more advanced ling'en practice for personal betterment.

Second, ling'en tendency to draw and embrace supernatural entities from Chinese religiosity and then to re-categorize them as potentially harmful highlight the aspect of immediate-practical modality that engages with harmful entities. Contrast this to Chinese religiosity, where the immediate-practical modality is generally more concerned with appeasing deities for material benefit. Viewed this way, this immigrant ling'en community represents a repository of mostly harmful supernatural entities of which the vast majority come from Chinese religiosities. As new harmful entities are discovered (for example, through participant feedback on the "occult checklist"), the community's understanding of harmful entities grows as new items are added while old items remain. This repository is generally not subject to external control beyond the ling'en communities which they are used and therefore may represent a more complete view of supernatural entities of Chinese religiosities from all around the world. Thus, in layered thinking, the repository of harmful supernatural entities exists between the layers of immigrant Chinese Americans and ling'en Christianity.

## Chapter Four: Making and Sustaining of Ling'en Guanxi

### Introduction

This chapter focuses on how ling'en Christians employ various religious practices for the making and maintaining of guanxi<sup>54</sup>, a social phenomenon roughly translated as "social connectedness", "social networks", or "personal connections" (Yan 1996, 74-75). The key practices of this modality in the ling'en context include attending Sunday main worship service and mid-week gatherings, using digital social media tools to maintain contact, celebrating various holidays, and gathering as a family. I must note that most of these practices are not unique to ling'en Christianity and can be found in Chinese American evangelicalism. However, ling'en participants of this study insist that following their conversion to ling'en they place an even higher value on making and maintaining (or cultivating) personal guanxi with God. Some claim that it is only in ling'en that they can truly have an "intimate relationship with God" (*yushen youge qinmi de guanxi*). This is a central part of ling'en logic in how they manifest guanxi. They nurture their relationship with God primarily through the personal-cultivational practices discussed in chapter two. This chapter will show that alongside personal-cultivational practices, ling'en Christians use relational practices to make and maintain the various guanxi ties. They also form guanxi networks within the church through which they share resources, help new immigrant Chinese to adapt to life (sometimes temporarily) in the United States, encourage each other in the ways of ling'en Christianity, and fulfil other communal needs.

The chapter begins with an overview of Chau's relational modality and the relational practices within Chinese Christianity and ling'en Christianity. I then employ guanxi theory as a lens to delineate the key features of ling'en guanxi logic. The chapter then draws from interview and participant observation data to examine how ling'en Christians

---

<sup>54</sup> The Chinese characters for guanxi are *guan*, translate as "gateway" and *xi*, translated as "to link together". The metaphorical translation of the term indicates that people are linked together via a gateway in a closed network of relationships (Taormina and Gao 2010). Some scholars tend to view guanxi as one element of a uniquely Chinese normative social order (King 1991; Kipnis 1997; Hwang 1987) or treat guanxi as a practical means for advancing specific personal interests. Some other scholars have argued that guanxi is produced by the particular social institutions in China and that there is nothing inherently Chinese in the phenomenon (Guthrie 1998).

make and sustain the “human-with-God” (*renyushen*) guanxi ties; I call this the hG guanxi. This newfound hG guanxi then becomes essential in the making, sustaining, and altering of the more commonly understood “human-with-human” (*renyuren*) or interpersonal guanxi ties; I call this the hh guanxi. I then analyze hG and hh guanxi, each with two sections. For hG guanxi: the making of hG guanxi and the sustaining of hG guanxi. And for hh guanxi: the making and sustaining of hh guanxi, and the altering of hh guanxi. In the altering of hh guanxi I discuss the idea of ling’en guanxi as a triadic connection. The chapter delineates the ways in which ling’en emphasis on hG guanxi following conversion impacts their understanding of hh guanxi in multifaceted ways. This chapter draws on ethnographic data to analyze ling’en relational practices centered around small group gatherings and argues that ling’en hG guanxi ties reshape guanxi and its constituent parts, sometimes in unexpected ways, by placing God as *the* central figure in their understanding of guanxi.

### **The Relational Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity**

The relational modality centers on religious practices for making and maintaining relationships and producing and consuming sociality. In Chau’s (2011a, 551-552) mainland Chinese context, sociality is generated primarily through people gathering for ritual events and festivals, building temples, making offerings, spreading miracle stories, going on pilgrimages, and establishing religious communities. Chau argues that the religious realm is one of the most crucial arenas where guanxi is played out – not just between people in sociopolitical life but also between humans and deities, humans and ancestors, between religious co-practitioners, between people and sites of worship and spiritual empowerment, between deities, between ritualist specialists and their customers, between masters and disciples, and between the state and religious groups and traditions. For Chau (2019, 20), the key concepts in the relational modality of doing religion are *guanxi* and “social comings and goings” (*laiwang*). As this chapter will show, this understanding of sociality could be significantly nuanced through an analysis of its constituent parts. With these constituent parts in place (which I discuss below), I analyze ling’en sociality.

Regarding *guanxi*, several ethnographic accounts of Chinese Christianity have documented the key characteristics of personal relationship with God. As for religious practices, amongst mainland Chinese Catholics, individual Bible reading, prayer, and contemplation along with communal prayer are critical for maintaining personal relationship with God (Zhu 2017, 273). Despite the underlying belief is that studying theology was expected to improve relationship with God, Cao (2010, 110) found that participants studying formal theology did not significantly improve relationship with God. Some Chinese Christians find that emotional prayer is important in improving and maintaining relationship with God (Kang 2016, 186). In the United States, some Christians select worship songs to be used in church service in the promotion of better relationship with God (Yang 1999, 59).

As for expectations, Wenzhou Christians associate good relationship with God with good kin relationship, successful career, and higher moral standards (Cao 2010, 64-66). Amongst some Chinese Christians, relationship with God takes precedence over dating and marriage partners, with the logic that if dating someone leads to poorer relationship with God, it is surely not God's will (Chen 2008, 179; Kang 2016, 148). Relationship with God underlying the meaning to work amongst young urban Chinese Christians and central to navigating the two extremes of laziness and workaholism (Yoo 2021). Following conversion, college educated young Chinese men in Beijing valued intimate relationship with God and subsequently learned how to express their emotions through crying and laughing during worship and to confess their weaknesses (Yoo 2020).

For immigrant Chinese Christians, the significance of family is integral and a vital place where *guanxi* can be observed. The church and its community become a substitute for family and friend to compensate for the absence of extended families and loss of social connectedness in migration (Cao 2005; Wang 2022). The church is also where Chinese Christians – especially first-generation immigrants – enjoy the cultural elements of their hometown. For example, Chinese churches in France and Italy operated by immigrants from Zhejiang prefer Zhejiang-style cuisine for an after-service snack as well as preferring Chinese pastors with background from Wenzhou or Zhejiang since there is a

consensus that they are different from other overseas Chinese Christian leaders (Cao and Lin 2024, 3-4).

Sociologist Teresa Zimmerman-Liu (2017) offers an in-depth study of guanxi amongst the Local Churches, an indigenous Chinese Protestant group. She found that although facets of guanxi have changed in the Local Church context, it is a core aspect of the church. In the Local Church, the primary basis for guanxi relationships is based on membership in the church. And while Local Church practice guanxi in a way that can extend respect and deference to nonbelievers, the boundary between church members and outsiders is strong enough that guanxi bonds cannot form between Local Church members and outsider religious groups including members of other indigenous Chinese Christian groups. In a similar vein, historian Christie Chui-Shan Chow considers the networks of guanxi between family and friends as playing a crucial role in the conversion process. Furthermore, Chinese Adventists learn ways of ways of doing and understanding religion within networks which distinguish themselves from other Chinese Christians (Chow 2013b).

From this brief overview, we see that Chinese Christians prioritize their relationship with God, and that they negotiate other relationships (e.g., with dating partners, with other Christians, with non-believers) around their relationship with God. My fieldwork finds that ling'en Christians hold a similar view, albeit – as I contend – ling'en place greater significance on hG guanxi. Key ling'en relational practices include gatherings of various kinds (church sponsored and privately organized), participating in festivals<sup>55</sup>, interacting on digital social media platforms, and making pilgrimages to other ling'en sites as well as inviting external ling'en speakers. My goal in this chapter is to carefully interrogate how ling'en Christians manage their various relationships with God and with other people by employing higher precision analytical tools offered by “guanxi studies”

---

<sup>55</sup> While participating in festivals is primarily a relational practice, I leave this discussion primarily to the chapter seven on ritual/liturgical modality. This is because many Christian festivals are liturgical in nature. Many Chinese festivals which have been adapted into ling'en church life have also adopted liturgical elements.

(*guanxixue*) in the examination of ling'en relational practices. To begin the analysis, interview data with one ling'en Christian is representative of ling'en valuing hG guanxi.

### **Valuing hG guanxi over hh guanxi**

During our interview, Wan (female, 40s) recounted the story of how she left ARC despite having spent nearly a decade there as first a student, then later a coworker (*tonggong*). By the time she left, she had already established guanxi ties with several individuals in the organization and was deeply embedded in the narrower social network of ARC as well as the broader network that expanded out of ARC into the local Chinese migrant community and other ling'en and ling'en adjacent organizations. It is from this position of having extensive guanxi ties that this story resonates with a shared ling'en value: prioritizing hG ties, sometimes at the expense of hh ties.

One day, she was sitting in the sound room, navigating the controls as a part of her volunteer work. Unlike typical evangelical Chinese American church seminars during which speakers (usually pastors, seminary instructors, missionaries, and respected lay Christians) share pedagogical messages, the central goal of ARC seminars is to facilitate the experience of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit by engaging in various ling'en practices. Wan's gaze was on the controls and monitors when she heard a commotion on the stage. She recalls that "the dean (*yuanzhang*) suddenly rushed onto the stage saying they had found a diamond. The entire crowd rushed to the stage, all wanting to see the diamond."

This abrupt, mysterious appearance of a precious mineral is reminiscent of the "gold dust" falling from the ceiling at Bethel Church gatherings in late 2011 (Jones 2016; Bethel 2011). Senior pastor Bill Johnson calls it "glory cloud". Perhaps because gold is a valuable material, Johnson could argue that gold also has spiritual value, namely that its mysterious appearance was a sign of God's presence during gatherings (Law 2023). Similarly, at ARC the appearance of a diamond was construed as a divine presence. As people rushed to the stage to verify the miracle, the dean continued to fuel the excitement,

Look, this diamond is not too big. Should we ask for a one-carat diamond?  
Everyone shouted “yes, amen amen!”

Then should we ask for a two-carat diamond too? How about a three-carat diamond? People below began to clap and shout “amen” again.

Wan immediately left her post not out of duty but out of disgust. She said with a tone of repulsion, “I did not go. I was not used to it, and I did not agree with it.” When asked to clarify what she meant, Wan explained:

I'm very much against such things. I feel that our God is holy, and our faith should head towards holiness. If today I have faith in God in order to get things, I feel that faith is no longer pure. I feel that ARC has commercialized everything, selling God's blessings, God's love, God's power. Therefore, I did not go up, I did not participate.

Here we see that Wan's understanding of God's presence is different from what ARC teaches. Wan believes that desire for material benefit is a pollutant in believers' relationship with God. For Wan, “true faith” (*zhenshi de xinyang*) centers on an emotional connection (in her case, love) with God. As people went to the stage to see God's presence manifested as a piece of diamond, Wan unexpectedly heard a voice speak to her, “you can leave this place now.” She was shocked and looked around to see if someone spoke to her. But she was alone in the room as her sound room colleagues had left their stations. Wan asked, “Lord, if it is you. I need confirmation (*yinzheng*).” Wan explained to me that at ARC, gatherings usually end with one-to-one prayers. Some members have gained incredible reputations for their prophetic abilities and as such, many people line up to seek their prayers. However, due to time limitation, not everyone may receive their prayers. Wan, known for her work as a coworker (*tonggong*), was usually allowed to skip the line, receive prayers, and quickly return to her work. She expected no different behavior on that day. Mirroring the biblical test of “Gideon's fleece”, Wan asked God to reveal his intention by having two members who

regularly prayed for her to both *not* pray for her on that day. As she waited in line, neither person asked her to skip to the front for prayers, and in the end, neither of them prayed for her. Wan walked out of the building, confident that God was guiding her to leave. Immediately after returning home, Wan called her church supervisor to inform them that she would not be returning to work at the sound station.

While she knew this decision would have significant ramifications for her socioreligious life, she was committed to it. However, to minimize its impact, she concealed her true reason for leaving, lest she offend those who believed in the miraculous diamonds. This story is somewhat unique in that only three participants of this study broke away and discontinued their association with a ling'en organization due to feelings of disagreement over ling'en practices and beliefs. Nevertheless, it highlights a significant understanding of guanxi amongst SGV ling'en Christians, namely the priority of hG over hh ties. This is because her choice to leave and therefore cause existing guanxi to suffer was not effortless nor inconsequential. In Wan's leaving of ARC, we see at least three distinct sets of guanxi operating: first, between her and God; second, between her and her supervisor; and third, between her and other ARC members. Regarding the guanxi tie with her supervisor, Wan returned favor by accepting and filling the organization's need for a soundboard volunteer for their service to her. Regarding the guanxi ties with ARC members, those known for prophetic prayers return the favor of Wan's volunteering by allowing her to skip the queue. In each of these, we see a "back and forth" of favors and resources to sustain and maintain guanxi. Significant investments were made on Wan's part to maintain these ties. Yet in choosing to abruptly leave, Wan held the guanxi tie with God above the other ties. In her mind, her guanxi tie with God supersedes the others. This choice had significant consequences since following this break, she no longer returned to ARC and her ties with its members mostly disappeared by the time of our interview.

### **Guanxi and its Key Components**

For Chau (2011b, 80), the relational modality and Chinese sociality is based on the key distinctive concepts of "social comings and goings" (*laiwang*) and "social

connectedness” (*guanxi*). There are two main issues when implementing such a framework in this study. First, while Chau’s formulation of the relational modality considers the relationship between individuals and spirits, deities, and other supernatural entities, he notes that the religious practices of Chinese people allow space for skepticism and even atheism with regards to the existence of supernatural entities (Chau 2019, 19-20) On the contrary, ling’en sociality is centered on one having a healthy hG *guanxi* which demands minimal (or no) skepticism on the existence of supernatural entities, especially on the Christian God. As such, at a minimum, ling’en sociality extends the range of Chau’s relational modality by including Chinese religious practices that are grounded on a committed theistic position.

Second, although I appreciate Chau (2006, 148-149) highlighting *laiwang* in his study of Chinese religiosity in Shaanbei, ling’en sociality and relational practices reflect relatively less concern for *laiwang* for reasons I will explain later. Therefore, we may turn to scholars such as Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang (2016), who have suggested that *wanglai* (another term for *laiwang*) refers to the maintenance of *guanxi* (without any instrumental purpose) and is a constituent part of *guanxi*. Due to ling’en limited concern with *laiwang*, it is more reasonable to follow Yang’s general understanding in constructing a theoretical *guanxi* framework through which ling’en relational practices can be examined. Due to the differences in core concepts between Chau’s formulation of the relational modality (centered on associations, *honghuo*<sup>56</sup>, *wanglai*, skepticism toward the supernatural) and ling’en Christianity (centered on hG and hh *guanxi*, belief in the supernatural), there will be some limited discussion between the two ideas. I will, however, return to a fuller discussion of what ling’en brings to the relational modality in the conclusion.

I must note here that I am employing contemporary formulations of *guanxi* and its components to elucidate ling’en conception of *guanxi*. It is important to keep in mind that manifestation of *guanxi* varies across sociohistorical context.<sup>57</sup> According to

---

<sup>56</sup> *Honghong huohuo* and *renao* are other terms that are used to point to social vibrancy.

<sup>57</sup> See Barbalet 2021 for historical and contextual variations of *guanxi*.

sociologist Bian Yanjie (1994, 95-96), *guanxi* can refer to one of three things: (a) the existence of a relationship between people who share a group status or are related to a common person, (b) actual connections with and frequent contact between people, and (c) a contact person with little direct interaction. Others consider *guanxi* as a network of personally defined reciprocal bonds (*guanxi wang*) or a form of interpersonal relationship that is predominantly based on particularistic criteria or ties (Jacobs 1979; Yang 2016). Still others note that *guanxi* ties are particularistic in that they intend to obtain instrumental benefits and therefore call them “instrumental particular ties” or “instrumental particularism” (Walder 1988). The common thread across these definitions is that they all refer to social connections or social relations. In a later work, Bian (2019, 141) notes that at its basic level, “*guanxi* refers to a dyadic, particular, and sentimental tie that has the potential for facilitating the exchange of favors between the two parties connected by the tie.” He notes that for Chinese people living inside or outside mainland China, this tie is qualified by any blood or marital relationship. As such, kin ties are very likely to result in *guanxi* ties of varying degrees of closeness. For those without kin ties, parties can develop a *guanxi* tie by building up mutual obligation through repeated investments of resources into each other.

I identify the key features of *guanxi* based on numerous scholarly works on *guanxi* (Kipnis 2002; Barbalet 2017; Chau 2019, 34; Barbalet 2021, 151; see also Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002; Ruan 2017). I place them into three distinct phases of *guanxi* production and maintenance:

1. *Leading up to a connection*: “sameness” (*tong*).
2. *Sustaining a connection through instrumental reciprocity*: “social comings and goings” (*laiwang*)<sup>58</sup>, and “human debt to acquaintances” (*renqing*).

---

<sup>58</sup> Also appears as *wanglai*, “to go back and forth” and in the colloquial term *lishang wanglai*. Chang (2010, 438) separates *lishang wanglai* into its constituent parts where *wanglai* are the practices and that *lishang* are the principles behind those practices.

3. *Sustaining a connection through affection*: between kin arising from exchanges or “family affection” (*qinqing*), and between non-kin arising from exchanges or a more generic affection (*ganqing*).

“Sameness” (*tong*) is critical in paving the way to make a connection while also functioning as a base for when two or more persons have a commonality of shared attributes, identity, origin, or interest. Jacobs (1979) found the most common basis for *guanxi* in Taiwan to be kinship, from the same town or village (*tongxiang*), office coworkers (*tongshi*), classmates (*tongxue*), surname, and teacher-student relationship. For rural-to-urban migrant workers and those who immigrate outside of mainland China, many rely on *tongxiang* when amongst strangers. Bian (2019, 141) considers *tong* as an integral component in the formation of *guanxi* tie. Recall that Wan volunteered as a *tonggong* (coworker in the church), highlighting the importance of sameness of “service” (*fushi*) to the church, the church family, and to God. This sameness is essential in establishing *guanxi* ties between members in the church.

When parties are connected in *tong* (both kin and non-kin) friendships, reciprocity ensures the availability of assistance and support – broadly understood through the concept of *laiwang*, the coming and going of favors and gifts. The concept of *renqing* in the Chinese context elucidates the association of favor exchange and kinship obligation (Fei, Hamilton, and Wang 1992, 124-126). *Renqing*, in one sense, embodies the underlying feelings tied to obligations within human relations. It extends beyond, encompassing appropriate behaviors like showing respect, providing due sympathy, acknowledging favors, repaying debts, and more. Actions demonstrating *renqing* are considered as “giving *renqing*”, and the actual gifts exchanged in such circumstances are also referred to as *renqing* (Barbalet 2021, 62). *Renqing* also encompasses a broad range of culturally appropriate feelings for specific roles in a given situation. Failure to express appropriate emotions and adhere to customs, propriety, and social etiquette may result in the withdrawal of approval and loss of face (*mianzi*). While I place *renqing* as constitutive part of *guanxi*, historically it refers to a practice of instrumental particularism.

Besides reciprocity, there is an affective or emotional dimension of maintaining *guanxi*. This raises the question of why *renqing* is not placed in this category as it points to emotions. This is because the feelings and etiquette of favor exchange are persistent in *renqing* – in other words, the focus is on the fact that favor exchanges are obligatory, and feelings are a byproduct of that obligation. In cases where obligations are not recognized and favors not returned, *renqing* is considered nonexistent (Bian 2019, 21). Therefore, I place *renqing* in the instrumental reciprocity category while acknowledging it has an emotional dimension. The other emotional dimensions of maintaining *guanxi* are separated as *qinqing* and *ganqing*. The differences between these two are significant. First, *qinqing* simply means “family feeling” whereas *ganqing*, usually translated as affection or emotional commitment, points to genuine sentiment between people and has been widely regarded as the emotional basis of friendship (Barbalet 2021, 151). As we will see, both concepts are important amongst ling’en Christians.

Of course, these concepts manifest differently depending on context. For example, Xie Ailei’s (2016, 99-101) ethnographic study in rural China (Zong County, south of Hefei) revealed that due to the few formal channels for parents to get involved in their children’s education, rural parents employed *guanxi* strategies (such as strengthening pre-existing weak social ties) to exert influence in school involvement. Contrast this to another study on urban Chinese women’s practices of *guanxi* in which the scholars found that while women believed *guanxi* to be critically important, they tend to view *guanxi* producing social activities agnostically as instruments for work promotion. Furthermore, they found that while women had advantages over men in practicing *guanxi*, women who excelled at *guanxi* also attracted negative attention and considered to have controversial reputations (Xu and Li 2014). There are far too many more studies which have explored *guanxi* in various contexts to explore here (e.g., Lin and Bian 1991; Li et al. 2018). The purpose of this chapter is to explore these constituent parts of *guanxi* amongst immigrant Chinese ling’en Christians in the United States through an examination of their relational religious practices.

## Ling'en hG Guanxi Logic

### *hG Guanxi: Making a Connection*

To show how ling'en Christians make the connection in hG guanxi, let us return to the story of Li (she was introduced in chapter two). To recap briefly, she and her husband were previously committed mainstream evangelical immigrant Christians. Leading up to her husband leaving and divorcing her, Li acknowledged that the strain of their increased responsibilities at home (i.e. taking care of her in-laws and sister-in-law) and diminished communication with her ex-husband contributed significantly to the deterioration of their guanxi. The divorce left Li in a precarious position: having lived in North America for 15 years without the chance to develop her career, she was now alone with two children to support. Though the Chinese saying that "family shame should not be spread to the outside" (*jiachou buke waiyang*), Li put herself at risk by turning to trusted members of her church. Li's parents were too far away and could not offer any practical help. However, rather than receiving support, she faced criticism and blame from both congregants and church leaders. Church leadership pressured her to maintain her responsibilities within the church, knowing that she was struggling to provide for herself and her two children. This toxic environment led Li to sever ties with that church.

Up to this point, Li had some of her most important interpersonal guanxi ties severed (with her ex-husband and his family, with her former church). Suffice it to say that for an immigrant with no immediate adult family members, this was a terrible situation for her. What interested me is that Li interpreted these circumstances as rooted in a problem in her guanxi with God. She had expected that her diligent service in the church would ensure divine protection over her relationships. In other words, she focused on the instrumental value of guanxi with God in which she expected returned favors for her services. In her mind, these exchanges with God were problematically "cold and indifferent" (*lengdan*).

Again, briefly to recap: one evening Li was able to overcome her challenges (theological and personal praying habits) and pray in tongues. At that moment, Li said that her

connection with God became more than a “God that existed only in the head” (*tounaoli de shen*). By saying this, she implied that her *guanxi* with God lacked an emotional component and had nothing to do with the heart (*xin*). For the first time she experienced an “intimate *guanxi* with God” (*gen shen qinmi de guanxi*). She describes this newfound *guanxi* with God using language such as “sweet and happy” (*tianmi*), peace and joy (*ping’an xile*), as having a partner who understands her and whom she can speak to as to de-stress. These terms suggest that God has a stand-in partner to some degree and may have contributed to why Li has not remarried since her divorce. This phenomenon is not unique to ling’en Christianity. For example, in their study of Pentecostal women in Brazil, Mariz and Machado (2018, 44-46) found that conversion experience leads God became the most important figure in their lives. For ling’en migrants with less *guanxi* ties than their mainland rural or urban counterparts, to experience a persistent and intense emotional connection in their *guanxi* with God is perceived as an important gift.

Recall that *tong* is the critical component of making a connection in interpersonal *guanxi* ties (Bian 2019, 21; Barbalet 2021, 118). For ling’en Christians, there are at least three *tong* connections. First, the explicit recognition that the (ling’en) Christian is a son or daughter of God (*shende ernü*). This is a kin *tong* tie. For ling’en, this recognition comes through “ling’en experience” supported by various biblical texts. It is important to note that for the ling’en, the text itself is not enough evidence for the reality of a kinship tie. An emotional experience is required for the recognition of this kinship tie. Second, the recognition that Jesus was a human being who shared the “pains” (*tongku*) of life. This is a recognition of a (non-kin) *tong* of humanity, a *tongren*. Third, although much rarer in my interviews, is the recognition that Jesus Christ is a brother, a kin *tong*. Participants find these three *tong* ties essential in their making an intimate (i.e., good) connection with God. As such, for ling’en, relational practices which cause the improvement of hG *guanxi* ties (including meditation, prayer, private worship singing, and tongue prayer) are a first step to understanding ling’en sociality with God and other individuals. At the most basic level, ling’en hG *guanxi* is an extension to *guanxi* by considering religious traditions in which human beings can develop social connections with supernatural entities.

### *hG Guanxi: Sustaining a Connection*

Following Li making an hG guanxi tie, she (and other participants) informed me the importance of sustaining the connection through various practices such as highly emotional (both personal and communal) worship singing and dancing. When properly engaged, the effectiveness of these activities is confirmed through various physical sensations. For example, Li reported physical responses, primarily that of “goosebumps all over her body” (*hunshenqi jipi geda*). Other participants also reported physical sensations when experiencing the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. These sensations include trembling (*fadou*), feeling numb and tingling throughout the body (*quanshenma*), a flowing electric current (*dianliu, fadian*), tension in the abdomen, and a powerful “force” (*liliang*) that compels the individual toward some action, such as prayer. These are indeed instances of EE gandong (from chapter two) and point to the close relationship between cultivating gandong and hG relational practices.

This is consistent with Luhrmann and Madsen’s ethnographic study of an evangelical church in Southern California in which they found that congregants employed learned techniques to experience an intimate presence of God. They call the process “metakinesis”, drawing from a term coined by dance critic John Martin to describe a sensorimotor perceptual capacity central to kinaesthetic understanding and appreciation of dance. Like the dancer conveying emotions to the observer, religious practitioners learn to identify bodily and emotional states as signs of God’s presence (Luhrmann 2004, 519). Luhrmann’s finding – namely that these emotional states are interpreted as signs of God’s presence – is important in ling’en because I found that many ling’en practice seek to produce changes in body and emotions through gandong.

Whereas physical sensations are considered evidence of God’s presence in hG guanxi, sustaining the connection involves another important component: ling’en gifts or *enci*. By ling’en gifts, participants mean the gifts of speaking in tongues, prophetic dreams, visions, healing and deliverance, and other ling’en practices. It follows that ling’en activities are those in which individuals call upon God to dispense gifts. Here, ling’en gifts operate differently than interpersonal guanxi gifts – to avoid confusion between the

two, I will tag ling'en gifts with *enci* where necessary. Whereas in interpersonal connections, the repeated exchange of gifts and favors underpin guanxi, in hG guanxi, gift giving only occurs unidirectionally (from God to individual). We see that reciprocity in hG guanxi functions entirely differently compared to interpersonal guanxi where there is a *laiwang* (back and forth) of gift and favor exchanges. Contrary to this, ling'en hG guanxi is less *laiwang* and more about receiving gifts and experiencing God's presence. While these hG gifts are received with a deep sense of appreciation, there is no way for the person to return a gift of the same kind back to God. With interpersonal guanxi, the concept of delaying repayment, leading to "debt" (*zhai*) and therefore avoiding termination of future exchanges has been found to be important in the enduring of guanxi (Barbalet 2021, 28).

Ling'en hG guanxi does not seem to operate in the same sense of delay because return gifts and favors are not vital in the sustaining of hG guanxi. Although return gifts and favors are not required, the sustaining of hG guanxi follows what Bian calls the fourth internal logic of guanxi: the status-inconsistency logic. This encapsulates the nature of guanxi ties and networks that connect actors of unequal status, power, and resources (Bian 2019, 142). According to anthropologist Yan Yunxiang (2006, 207), the unequal nature of guanxi ties and networks is largely an inheritance from Confucian ethics of five cardinal relations in which each dyadic relationship follows the superior-subordinate model. As an example of interpersonal guanxi between a subordinate and her superior, the superior may grant favors to the subordinate and in return, the subordinate is expected to return personal loyalty or provide services. The ling'en hG guanxi tie is clearly one of unequal status and power (Chau 2014). For example, God has the agency to "call" (*huzhao*) the ling'en Christian to do something she may have little desire to do. It seems that the role of the ling'en individual is not framed as one who is responsible for returning a gift back to God but instead viewed as an agent with choice of obedience or disobedience. Therefore, for ling'en hG guanxi the primary issue is not the issue of returning gifts, but rather the issue of obedience, disobedience, and delayed obedience as evidenced by Li waiting for more than a decade before calling and attending seminary.

In place of the more traditional material gifts, I observed that ling'en participants can return in two ways with favors. The first is to respond with obedience to gandong that require action on the part of the hearer. For example, Li noted that her return to God's gifts to her is obedience to study in seminary – although it took more than a decade to finally accept. In return for this obedience, she expects God to continue to fulfil his superior role in providing earthly needs for her and her children. At the time of our interview, Li was finishing her Masters in Christian Studies at a Chinese language evangelical seminary in SGV. The second form of returning favor is by doing good works such as offering help to other Christians and volunteering at the church (such as Wan). In other words, in hG guanxi reciprocity is primarily in the form of return favor, and this will have significant implications on hh guanxi. Thus, we see that ling'en perceive returning favor (as opposed to gifts) in its various forms as a critical component within relational practice in the sustaining of hG guanxi.

Next, we consider the emotional aspect of sustaining hG guanxi. For ling'en, the sustaining of hG guanxi lies primarily in experiencing religious *qingqing* (family affective connection feeling) and to a greater degree, *ganqing* (feelings of genuine sentiment that arise from exchanges between non-kin) (Barbalet 2021, 63). We have already established that in making an hG guanxi, ling'en recognize kinship relationship with God through becoming the sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ. However, since this kinship relationship is only one part of their connection with God, hG guanxi cannot be sufficiently explained through *qingqing*. For example, in their guanxi with God as master-servant, healer-patient, or savior-sinner, *qingqing* is entirely irrelevant. *Ganqing*, on the other hand, can be used to explain the sustaining of hG guanxi when God takes on other non-kinship roles. For example, when a ling'en experiences healing, they feel a strong affective bond as receiving healing in the experience with God. Similarly, many participants express a deep sense of bond when intensely experiencing themselves as sinners receiving salvation from God. Therefore, to a lesser degree *qingqing*, and greater degree *ganqing*, along with God's ling'en gifts (*enci*), and a person's obedience operate together to sustain hG guanxi. The key difference between hG ties and traditional guanxi ties is that reciprocity is less important

in the former. In many cases, reciprocity is entirely irrelevant in hG guanxi; for example, a person cannot return a gift to God. As I will show later, this reduction in the core concept of reciprocity will have significant implications in hh guanxi.

### **Ling'en hh Guanxi: Making and Sustaining a Connection**

In making an interpersonal guanxi tie, my observation is that ling'en Christians rely on a number of relational practices. These include inviting friends, neighbours, and coworkers (note the pre-existing *tong*) to Sunday church service, various weekday and Saturday church activities, and weekday fellowship groups. In this section, I draw upon fieldwork observations during attendance of a VOH fellowship (*tuangji*) that met online weekly and led by two husband-wife pairs. The fellowship was affectionately called “the little family” (*xiao jiating*). Within the fellowship, one pair of husband-wife did most of the leading and facilitating while the other pair of husband-wife responded to questions that attendees asked. These two pairs held the formal position of “fellowship mentors” (*tuangji fudao*) while informally and more intimately referred to as “parents” (*jiazhang*)<sup>59</sup> of the “little family”.<sup>60</sup> During my first visit I recognized that this gathering operates quite differently from fellowship gatherings that I had experienced in mainstream evangelicalism. The gathering started with quiet instrumental music (of popular Chinese language worship songs) as people gradually entered the Zoom space and “prepared their hearts” (*yubeixin*). The gathering then continued with the singing of three to four worship songs led by the “parents”. Following the “parents” go through a prepared lesson on a chosen topic. During this presentation they discuss relevant Bible verses (but only in brief, lasting no more than ten minutes) followed by a much longer (twenty to thirty minutes) discussion on the real-life application of the Bible verses. There were no discussion questions about the Bible verses that is typical of evangelical fellowship gatherings. When I asked about this, a “parent” told me that their gatherings

---

<sup>59</sup> In a comment on 29 June 2023, Alexander Chow referred to an email by historian of Christianity in Asia Daryl Ireland suggesting that *jiazhang* should be translated as “patriarch”. While this translation may be appropriate in some historical contexts within Chinese Christianity, the translation “parent” is more fitting given the context of a Chinese American Christian church where familial terms (e.g., brothers and sisters, parents, *shushu ayi* [uncles and aunties]) are more prevalent.

<sup>60</sup> I use parents in quotation marks to indicate fellowship parents, not kin parents.

intentionally focus on activities that nurture *guanxi* between members and find that discussions about the Bible do not promote this goal. As such, the gatherings are focused on intentional practices of relationship building, more so than evangelical Bible study groups (*chajingban*) (Chen 2008, 50).

Of the thirty or so attendees, about half were husband-wife pairs (with or without children). A small handful of husband-wife pairs had younger children with them, and their children would cram together with their parents in front of the cameras. The remainder were solo participants (including myself). A significant portion of these solo attendees were recent immigrants from mainland China. I later learned that their spouses were either back in their home country and/or did not share the Christian faith and therefore did not attend fellowship gatherings.

During my first visit, one “parent” introduced me, my research into ling’en Christianity, and that I was a fellow believer (and seminary graduate). Following the introduction of myself as a Christian, I noticed that the *tong* we shared as believers helped to ease any discomfort that my sudden presence may have caused. Shared faith functions similar to other *tong* and is important in the making of *hh guanxi* ties. Beyond religious *tong*, participants also shared workplace/industry, and perhaps one of the strongest ties: the village/town/city *tong* denoted by the term *laoxiang*<sup>61</sup>. I observed this happen once and their excitement was palpable. However, due to the diversity of backgrounds in my fieldsites (e.g., lay leaders migrating from Taiwan over 30 years ago while new members have migrated from mainland China), relatively smaller size, and the inclusionary nature of these organizations in welcoming immigrants of all backgrounds, *tong* ties between ling’en would coalesce in the religious realm.

Amongst that ling’en gathering, I observed two unique *tong* in making a *guanxi* tie. First, individuals who practice the same ling’en gifts (*enci*). The most common denominator was speaking in tongues. Second, individuals who have attended the same ling’en church. For example, when a new person joins and mentions that they have ling’en gifts

---

<sup>61</sup> *Laoxiang* is equivalent to *tongxiang*, individuals from the same town or village.

or were once a member of ARC, some existing members with shared experiences will respond quite positively. Some ling'en gifts such as speaking in tongues are considered private practices in the fellowship I attended, so very little focus was placed on it. Before the fellowship ends, members will simultaneously pray with their microphones turned on. I noticed that some members pray in tongues, and even when new members pray in tongues, not much attention is given to them for this ling'en *tong*. While I observed that this *tong* is not as important as the other *tong* mentioned earlier (in part due to caution towards new visitors and claims of ling'en gifts), it plays a limited but distinctive role in making ling'en hh guanxi ties.

With non-Christian seekers (*mudaoyou*) there are still many *tong* that people will look for. For example, when Christian younger mother makes the acquaintance of a non-Christian younger mother, they will share the *tong* of being young mothers. We can imagine a plethora of possible *tong* that Christians and non-Christians can share apart from the faith *tong*. While ling'en are eager to establish guanxi ties with the pre-existing non-faith *tong*, they are also deeply invested in the potentiality of a future faith *tong*. In other words, members and especially "parents" of the fellowship would like to see at some point in the future that non-Christian participants are baptized. Following baptism, they then share the faith *tong*. This was confirmed when I attended a baptism during which "parents" and members of the small family enthusiastically awaited to congratulate baptized members as new family members (*xinde jiaoren*) – a process in which a new *tong* is acquired and strengthens the guanxi tie. In this sense, while non-believing members can participate in the small family, they are not recognized as full members until and unless they share the faith *tong*.

Indeed, many of the activities of the fellowship are relational in nature interested in making and sustaining guanxi ties. In one moment, new members may be introduced, and any *tong* will be made explicit. And in the same fellowship meeting, participants (both Christians and non-Christians) will talk about, request prayers, and pray together (even non-believers participated) for family members back home – usually mainland China (Kang 1999, 187-188). To the visitor and seeker, receiving prayers helps promote

guanxi ties because prayers are usually very specific and center on the needs of the recipient. This makes them feel welcomed, attended to, and cared for – all contributing to *ganqing* ties. This blending of activities that make and sustain guanxi ties is no accident as I mentioned above: ling'en fellowship gatherings are primarily a relational practice, focusing on guanxi formation and maintenance.

Feelings of intimacy play an important role in sustaining guanxi. Near the end of fellowship meetings, people would be sent to different breakout rooms (a feature of the videoconferencing application Zoom). Each room had four to five individuals (husband and wife pairs were not separated) and, as I quickly found out, were to pray for each other. In one of the prayer sessions I attended, one husband-wife pair asked me to pray for their daughter who worked in another part of the state and was struggling to find a suitable church and partner. After my prayer, they looked very pleased and shared more about their daughter. I also shared some obstacles that I had encountered during fieldwork, and they prayed for me. These breakout rooms where private concerns are shared and prayed for are significant because guanxi relies on mutual trust and empathy. One of the simplest ways of building close personal bonds with another person is to confide in the other. Self-disclosure has been described as the operating principle of guanxi (Chen and Chen 2004, 316). These prayers not only require mutual self-disclosure but also demonstrate concern. Sometimes prayers can become quite emotional (usually manifest as a deep sense of sadness and shedding of tears), further reflecting the sincerity of concern for the issue and person being prayed for. There were also a few times when following disclosed information, the person asked for confidentiality. Therefore, small group breakout prayers are intensely intimate and as long as trust remains intact, they are a powerful tool in maintaining guanxi ties by generating *ganqing*.

Scholars have suggested that the maintenance of guanxi is particularly important at the church level. For example, Chen notes that eighteen of her fifty Taiwanese participants had no extended family living in the area, and those that did have extended family preferred not to seek out for their help too frequently in fear of “bothering” them. In the

absence of these safety nets, the church functioned as an extended family where people felt welcomed and various needs were met (Chen 2006, 45-48). While my findings do not contradict Chen, I contend that it is at the fellowship level (as opposed to the church level) where intense *guanxi* maintenance activities occur. In the short time I was welcomed as a visitor, I observed members of the fellowship regularly helping each other by praying, listening, and offering advice. For example, one member of the fellowship could not drive and was driven to and from church as well as grocery shopping every week by another member. In another case, a pair of female visitors said that they were in the United States temporarily to give birth so that their children might acquire the “more valuable” American citizenship in a practice known as “birth tourism” (Jamamillo et al. 2019; Folse 2023). Instead of being reprimanded for the frowned upon practice, fellowship members took special care to respond to their questions about living in the United States as temporary residents and prayed for their successful births. However, when “seekers” are treated with generosity, *ling’en* Christians will jokingly but deliberately suggest that seekers can return the favor (as per *guanxi* rule of reciprocity) by continuing to attend fellowship and exploring the Christian faith (Abel 2006, 172). Clearly, small group gatherings are critical for *hh guanxi* making and maintenance as well as for meeting the practical and social needs of new immigrants.

While observing how people gathered at church level gatherings (e.g., Sunday worship service), I noticed that individuals tended to meet with people from the same mid-week gatherings – one participant said something similar. As such, *ganqing* at the church level is significantly weaker than at the fellowship level, especially between members who do not attend the same fellowship gatherings. In another church setting (GCCl), *ganqing* primarily exists between members of the same cell group (*xibao xiaozu*); I did not observe people from different cell groups regularly speaking to each other. Clearly the smaller mid-week gatherings are essential for the making and maintaining of *hh guanxi* through *ganqing* production and management. However, this does not mean that the church level gatherings have no role in *ling’en* understanding of *guanxi*. It is often at these larger gatherings where *ling’en* are taught the importance of maintaining *guanxi*

and relational harmony. Viewed together, larger gatherings are where concepts are learned while smaller gatherings are where concepts are put into practice.

For example, at some church level gatherings, *qingqing* is highlighted through teachings that emphasize the church as a family and members as “brothers and sisters”. This finding adds some nuance to Chau’s (2014) contrasting of popular religion in China as primarily household-centered as opposed to the community-centered organization of Christianity. To be clear, the way ling’*en* Christians organize themselves could be viewed as both a community of believers (i.e. community centered) and a family of believers (i.e. household centered). The layer that I have added here is that within the community and family of believers, there are smaller groups that form around religious and non-religious *tong* and *ganqing*.

Technology has also played an indispensable role in the maintenance of *guanxi* during the COVID-19 lockdown in Los Angeles County. Zoom is an important tool that people can easily access and use, whether on their computers or mobile phones. Members who stayed for at least a few weeks were invited to join a WeChat (*weixin*) message group. WeChat is a Mainland Chinese phone application primarily used in the United States by the Chinese diasporic population for instant messaging, social media through its “moments” tab, and in some locations as mobile payment. Message groups provide several benefits to members. They allow for mass communication such as broadcasting fellowship wide events, and for socialization. For example, the function to share digital credit with an entire chat group through virtual “group red envelopes”, mirroring the Chinese tradition of older working adults typically passing red envelopes filled with cash (*hongbao*) to unmarried individuals (Montag et al. 2018). By joining the group, members also gain access to previously unavailable social support by being able to view member profiles and the ability to request to add members of the group chat to private chat. Such requests are much more likely to be accepted compared to unsolicited private chats, creating opportunities for migrants to build new *guanxi* (Shen and Gong 2019).

From online activities, members can form offline social support in the form of deeper friendships, shared resources, and persistent online communication, even after leaving the fellowship (Wang et al. 2019). Amongst ling'en Christians WeChat is so important that even older Taiwanese members use the application, despite some participants expressing hesitancy regarding privacy issues. During my time in the WeChat group, I observed several guanxi maintaining uses of the application. This included invitations to hike together, congratulations to new baptisms (including the use of red envelopes and WeChat's diverse emoticons *biaoqingbao*), and announcements of special gatherings in which fellowship members would eagerly encourage the group to go together. In this sense, the fellowship operates as a persistent micro-guanxi network (*guanxiwang*) in which members sustain guanxi with multiple other individuals and "parents" maintain guanxi with most, if not all, members through in-person and online encounters. Through digital tools such as WeChat, ling'en Christians in the United States can maintain guanxi and the guanxi network during their busy weekday lives. The finding that guanxi networks drive group sociality amongst ling'en Christians complicates and somewhat problematizes the scholarly view of Chinese Christian groups as family (Yang 1999, 3; Cao 2005; Wang 2022). This is because the term *guanxiwang* is specifically associated with support beyond the domestic family (Bell 2000).

In this section on hh guanxi I have primarily focused on guanxi ties that are present within the church: between believers themselves and between believers and visitors/seekers. These guanxi ties are primarily managed through ling'en relational practices. In other contexts – such as the unregistered church in Beijing that I attended between 2012 and 2014 and Wenzhou churches – Chinese Christians, particularly pastoral and lay leaders, have to maintain a good guanxi with the local police station (*paichusuo*) in the case of the church in Beijing or seek to nurture guanxi with the head of local Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) and local entrepreneurs in the case of Wenzhou Christians (Cao 2011, 27; see also McLeister 2012; Rychetská 2022). Compared with mainland Chinese Christians, SGV ling'en Christians are far more insulated and seem

to have less need to maintain guanxi with nonbelieving and non-family outsiders<sup>62</sup>. This contributes to why Chau's relational modality, which in part is centered on relationships between religious associations, appears to be limited in this analysis. With that said, the most apparent non-family outsider guanxi that ling'en talk about are opportunities "to share the gospel" such as office coworkers, neighbors, and rarely, believers from other churches<sup>63</sup>. Outside of their own churches, ling'en are far more likely to maintain guanxi with other churches (particularly those who hold a positive view toward ling'en) through shared activities such as special gatherings and guanxi ties between pastors. In the next section I will discuss two aspects of altering hh guanxi ties. The first is ling'en reframing of guanxi from dyadic to triadic, leading to positive changes in hh guanxi ties. The second is when ling'en hG guanxi ties have negative effects on hh guanxi.

### **Ling'en hG Influence on hh**

#### *hG Guanxi: Positively Altering a Connection*

Recall that the definition that Bian formulated for guanxi is "a dyadic, particular, and sentimental tie that has the potential for facilitating the exchange of favors between the two parties connected by the tie." In the remaining discussion of hh guanxi, I argue that ling'en hh guanxi is altered by hG guanxi such that it is no longer dyadic but becomes triadic. By triadic I mean that for the ling'en, interpersonal guanxi is no longer between two parties but between three parties: two individuals and God.

To demonstrate this, I refer to the interview with Tian (male, 50s) – one of the "parents" of the fellowship group from the previous section. Prior to establishing an hG guanxi, Tian told me that he had poor guanxi with his Christian children (*gen haizi de guanxi buhao*), poor guanxi with his non-believing (who later converted to Christianity in Taiwan

---

<sup>62</sup> Family members who are non-believers occupy a unique space in ling'en guanxi. On the one hand they are non-believers and ling'en Christians are especially concerned with their salvation (*dejiu*). Yet on the other hand they are family and therefore have familial affective ties (*qinqing*). From my perspective as an ethnographer, the most apparent effect of *qinqing* on non-believing members is that of tension generated through the persistence of ling'en Christians to push non-believing members towards faith, and resistance offered by non-believing family members.

<sup>63</sup> In the context of mainland China, this act is commonly referred to as "stealing sheep" (*touyang*) or "snatching sheep" (*qiangyang*). I did not hear such phrases being used amongst SGV ling'en Christians.

under the pressure of Tian) parents (*gen fumu de guanxi buhao*) and poor guanxi with his Christian wife (*gen qizi de guanxi buhao*). For each poor guanxi tie, he referred to a characteristic unique to that tie. With his children, he said that he regularly got upset and verbally abused them. With his parents who lived in Taiwan, he contacted them infrequently because they would often get into arguments over discussions of religious practice (his parents previously practiced *baibai*, a term commonly used in Taiwan to denote activities associated with popular religion). With his wife, he did not spend much time with her and would easily get upset. At a minimum we can conclude that these three sets of guanxi were lacking in *qinqing* affection. It is important to note that reciprocity of favors and gifts is not required in family guanxi (Fan 2002). Therefore, we cannot comment on reciprocity between Tian and his family members. Scholars have found that migrant conversion to Christianity may cause guanxi problems between converts and their non-Christian kin back home. Chen (2008, 38-39) documented this amongst Taiwanese migrants who following conversion were criticized by their parents as no longer able to fulfil the filial duties of offering food, incense, and paper money for their ancestors. Contrary to these findings, Tian did not associate his guanxi problems with his parents to his Christian faith. In fact, he claimed that it was his failure to live out the Christian faith that caused his guanxi problems.

Following Tian's conversion to ling'en, he described significant change in his family guanxi: "guanxi was being restored" (*guanxi dedaole huifu*). When I asked him what contributed to this shift in guanxi, he noted that he had felt significantly less stressful at work and as a result, had less outbursts of anger towards his family. He reported that the relationships with his wife and two daughters improved significantly. Furthermore, his relationships with his parents also improved, but this was only following their agreement to become Christians. The fact that they had tension between them up until the point of the parents converting to Christianity supports Chen's (2008, 39) finding that conversion to Christianity is a source familial tension with family members back in home countries. According to Tian, the reason for these changes is because God had "worked", by causing the conversion of his parents and by inserting himself (God) into his guanxi ties. In this way, his family guanxi ties transformed from dyadic (father-

daughter, husband-wife, son-parents) to triadic guanxi (father-daughter-God; husband-wife-God, son-parents-God). In each of these guanxi, he explained that God was there to promote good behavior which maintains family guanxi. According to ling'en participants, this is a central element of ling'en – something that was not experienced while they were in mainstream evangelicalism.<sup>64</sup>

Following our interview, I was interested if this triadic guanxi model influenced his other hh guanxi. So, going beyond his own description of family guanxi changes, I observed his style of leadership during fellowship meetings. During fellowship gatherings, Tian took on the role of spiritual mentor and when questions about the Christian faith arose, he would patiently respond. He demonstrated self-sacrifice by logging nearly half an hour earlier into the Zoom channel to help with setup and as far as I could tell, was always one of the last to leave. Tian played an important role in strengthening the bond between members of the fellowship. As a “parent” in the fellowship, Tian was kind and warm when he spoke to other members and when welcoming visitors. During gatherings, Tian on numerous occasions would explicitly note that “if you need prayers, please privately message me”. Tian exemplifies many of the relationships I observed between members and leaders. While some scholars have observed “Confucian” characteristics in church governance within Chinese Christianity, others have seen a deterioration of normative Confucian-like values, impacting the moral governance within churches (Kang 2016, 150; Yang 1999, 119-120; Chen 2008, 148). Tian’s style of parenting the group approaches the latter – although he is a man in charge of the group, his leadership style is not top-down but instead, as he would say, reflects that of a “servant” (*puren*) as he understands from Matthew 23:11.

I do not claim that Tian’s behavioral change is solely dependent on his hG guanxi since it would be highly inappropriate, for example, to verbally abuse fellowship members whether his hG guanxi was intact or not. However, the combination of changes in family

---

<sup>64</sup> This claim is contrary to my experience in mainstream evangelicalism, which I find which devotes substantial resources to promoting good family guanxi. The explanation for this difference lies in the heightened role of gandong in the sustaining of an intimate hG relationship (see chapter three) resulting in larger changes in personality; this is something that ling'en participants claim is lacking in evangelicalism.

guanxi and the generally warm hh guanxi (observed through fellowship gatherings) accompanied with his narrative of a transformed hG guanxi suggests that hG guanxi has a noticeable impact on hh guanxi. For further support this argument, several ling'en participants made similar remarks regarding their interpersonal guanxi (*renji guanxi*). Namely, that following their conversion to ling'en, their hG guanxi became so important that it forcibly injected itself into hh guanxi – transforming once dyadic connections to triadic relationships.

Within a dyadic relationship, each party is responsible for returning favor/gift, for maintaining trust, and for authentic self-disclosure. But when the relationship becomes triadic, these concepts become less straight forward.<sup>65</sup> Take for example, *renqing* obligations in guanxi. In a dyadic relationship, *renqing* partners hold mutual obligation to reciprocation in favor or gift exchange. However, in a triadic relationship party A may receive favor from party B, and then give favor to party C. Because party A received favor from party B, they may not hold party C responsible to return the favor. In a triadic relationship with God, God is generally viewed as the party that gives, and the recipient human is not held responsible to return the gift. In such a scenario, person A receives from God then person A gives favor to person B. Person A is less likely to expect return favor from person B because they have already received something from God. According to ling'en participants, this is where ling'en experiences amplify the hG guanxi – because as they claim, they receive more gifts (in the form of ling'en gifts and spiritual experiences) than when they were previously mainstream evangelicals. This is not to say that mainstream evangelicals cannot have strong hG guanxi ties but rather that for most ling'en participants of this study, ling'en conversion fundamentally changes their understanding of hG guanxi. Consequently, they now operate in what could be called a “strong triadic” relationship. Seen this way, the triadic nature of hh guanxi results in the loss of agency and responsibility on the human parties in the sustaining of guanxi. On the one hand this triadic guanxi model partially explains why “parents” like

---

<sup>65</sup> Barbalet (2021, 134; 2017) writes of a necessary triadic structure when trustworthiness needs to be regulated by a third non-involving, observational party. This is different from ling'en triadic guanxi because God is viewed as an actively involved party within the relationship.

Tian act self-sacrificially. To be clear, Tian informed me that it is because he has received an abundance of gifts and favors from God, he can, at times, dispense favors without seeking return from the other person. As such, because reciprocity is no longer required in the sustaining of hh guanxi, hG guanxi becomes significantly more important for hh guanxi maintenance.

The effect of this reduced need to return favor is that *renqing*, both the reciprocity and emotional element, are significantly minimized. I do not mean that reciprocity and *renqing* are entirely absent in hh guanxi between believers. Return favors are prevalent amongst ling'en Christians. As examples: when one party invites another to a group dinner, the favor is normally returned later; or when one party attends the baptism of another (and perhaps offers a gift of flowers or congratulation card), the other party is likely to return a gift or favor; when a "parent" helps out a member and then invites them to serve as a coworker, that member is somewhat obligated by *renqing* to accept. However, ling'en reciprocity is drastically different from the elaborate act which Yan (1996) calls the "flow of gifts" that are more common in Chinese contexts involving banquet going/hosting, paying for a shared meal (by grabbing the bill first), giving Chinese New Year red envelopes<sup>66</sup>, luxury goods as a form of payment for a favor, gifts for various holidays such as funerals and weddings. It is not only that ling'en Christians reject the gifts themselves for being too worldly (*taishijie*). More importantly, data suggests that they want to avoid complicating hh guanxi through openly adopting practice worldly gift giving strategies such as "going through the backdoor" (*zou houmen*), directly incorporating personal benefit or profit (*liyi*) into church guanxi ties, and employing worldly terms such as the deliberate making of particular guanxi (*la guanxi*), using guanxi to pull strings (*zhao guanxi*), and to intentionally build guanxi (*gao guanxi*) (Yan 1996, 69-70; Strickland 2010; Ruan 2017, 40).

However, there is one interesting aspect of guanxi ties that can be observed within ling'en guanxi ties. In Yan's (1996, 174) fieldsite he found that his informants did not bother to keep track of what gifts they gave out and instead focused on the prestige

---

<sup>66</sup> I did not observe gifting red packets to children (typically called *yasuiqian*) in my fieldsites.

associated with gift receiving. He concludes that “they give because they want to receive.” Although ling’en seek a simplified and reduced version of this flow of gifts, it could be said that they nevertheless “give in order to receive”. That is, they give favors (such as helping new members) with the expectation and on the “faith” of receiving repayment from God. As such amongst ling’en it is not uncommon to hear phrases such as “God will repay me” (*shen hui baoda wo*) and “I have earned my reward in the kingdom of Heaven” (*wozai tianguo dedao jiangshang*) to indicate that reciprocity from the other individual is not necessary. Here the use of *baoda* is central to ling’en understanding of reciprocity. In the context of a triadic relationship, ling’en expectation of *baoda* turns toward God and away from other humans.

What we see is that the triadic nature of hh guanxi fundamentally alters the nature of the hh guanxi such that the reduced role of reciprocity and gift giving makes way for emotional bonds that underly *ganqing* and *qinqing* to take on a larger role in the sustaining of hh guanxi. As I noted earlier, while *qinqing* is often highlighted in both the fellowship or “small family” and the main church gathering or “large family” (*dajiating*) (the very fact that these are called families are to motivate belief and behavior of kinship relationship), *ganqing* plays the dominant role in hh guanxi. As such the observation that people with more positive *laiwang* have deeper guanxi is expected. In a way, *qinqing* and *ganqing* within hh guanxi follow the Chinese saying, “faraway kin cannot compare with close neighbours” (*yuanqin buru jinlin*). This means that although members call and consider on different levels themselves kin (“brothers and sisters”), the more significant test of guanxi is *ganqing*, the emotional connections that arise between two non-kin people (Ruan 2017, 43). When *ganqing* between two parties becomes strong, reciprocity and *renqing* subsequently increases as each party behaves to sustain the guanxi tie. At the same time, SGV ling’en hh guanxi which relies extensively on *ganqing* make for far weaker guanxi ties than, for example, Zhejiang immigrant Christians in Europe who enjoy stronger kinship cultural ties – from which they can build *ganqing* ties (Cao and Lin 2024). This underlying weakness may contribute to ling’en emphasis on hG guanxi and enjoy the hh guanxi ties that it brings about. However, as the next section shows, not all hG guanxi leads to improved hh guanxi.

### *Negotiating Ling'en Gifts (enci) and Guanxi*

Earlier I noted that ling'en gifts (*enci*) play an integral role in the sustaining of hG guanxi. However, one participant interview cautioned me to add nuance to the relationship between ling'en gifts and hG guanxi. For the Wangs, ling'en gifts and activities would become a threat to both hG and family guanxi. The Wangs emigrated from Northeastern China to the SGV in the early 2000s, and together as a family (at the time, husband and wife), were baptized into the Christian faith. The Wangs attended the "Encounter God Retreat" (*yujianshen yinghui*) hosted by Great Commission Church International and through it, they encountered ling'en practices. In the following years, they would frequently travel to other churches and organizations to learn more about ling'en practices. As Wang (male, 40s) became increasingly captivated by ling'en practices, the time that he committed towards religious activities increased, to the point that it caused family problems. Wang's recounting of his past experiences of ling'en were almost entirely described in relationship to God and the church community:

At that time, I was serving tirelessly in the church. Do you know, sometimes I thought the primary reason for serving so tirelessly was my love for God. [But] I found that there were many impurities in my enthusiasm. Later, under the continuous revelations of the Holy Spirit, I realized that I actually enjoyed the applause of others.

We see that Wang struggled over what he perceived of as a good motive (love for God) and bad motive (to receive the applause of others) in serving the church and employing ling'en practices. The applause that he desired was about his ability to use ling'en gifts (*enci*) to make himself look good. Wang mentioned several times about his "pride" (*jiaobao*), for example "the greater my gifts (*enci*), the more pride I had inside me," "when I was at home or when no one was around, there was a formless pride controlling me," "when I speak in tongues or have visions... there is a pride inside me that I cannot control." These expressions reflect Wang's increasing pride because of ling'en gifts.

Wang's enjoyment of "pride" at church resulted in him spending more and more time at church to the point of becoming a problem for home life:

I remember one August, my wife pointed to a hanging calendar for the month, and said, "you are home for only 6 days, and the rest of the time you are at the church. After work, you go to church, it's even hard for you to spend time with our children." At that time, I was thinking, "Why don't you support my serving the church? ... I feel like you are holding me back."

Now struggling with poor family *guanxi*, Wang gradually came to the realization that focusing on *ling'en* gifts was not sustainable; in his words "this road leads to a dead end" (*zhelu zoubutong*). With no way forward and facing family disharmony, Wang decided to abandon his pride-seeking approach towards *ling'en* gifts. In this process, Wang continued to rely on the Holy Spirit: "after I was *fanzhuan*<sup>67</sup> by the Holy Spirit, I realized my motive for service was not pure. I often used the church as an excuse and forgot my responsibility as a husband and as a father." This is important because it shows a distinction between *ling'en* gifts (*enci*) and *ling'en* – a difference that *ling'en* participants repeatedly emphasized. *Ling'en* gifts are just that – gifts from the Holy Spirit. As mentioned earlier, they are an important gift in hG *guanxi*. For Wang, the dilemma is when gifts and pride (leading to poor *guanxi*) are both present and correlate in such a way that increased gifts led to increased pride and poorer hh *guanxi*. Ultimately, Wang made the decision to reduce his practice of gifts and expected that this reduction would lead to less pride. To do so, he severed his hh *guanxi* ties with many *ling'en* Christians. He also stopped most *ling'en* practices such as attending activities at ARC. He continues to pray in tongues privately and publicly.

Wang also began to focus more on his family *guanxi*, which gradually improved. On the surface, his story seems to contradict the experience of many *ling'en* participants including Tian. That is, *ling'en* concern with hG *guanxi* tends to have a positive effect on

---

<sup>67</sup> As explained in chapter three, when used this verb indicates a sweeping, radical change in component beliefs and practices within Christianity. Note that while most *ling'en* participants use *fanzhuan* to denote a change from evangelicalism to *ling'en*, Wang has used the term to become "less *ling'en*".

hh guanxi. Yet Wang's story reveals the understanding that ling'en is more than *enci* such as speaking in tongues and speaking prophecy. While earlier I noted that ling'en gifts are essential to hG guanxi, here we can add the emic perception that ling'en gifts *ought* to result in improved hG guanxi and hh guanxi. This is because hG guanxi puts each party into a *laiwang* relationship in which God provide ling'en gifts and the person responds in obedience and desire for ling'en gifts. With this said, it did not surprise me to see Wang some months after our interview. He was the speaker at a church I visited for a Sunday worship gathering. Wang – a tall man from Northeastern China with a baritone voice – spoke with passion about the importance of the Holy Spirit in believer's lives. Following the message he ended with a short prayer, some of which was spoken in tongues. Though he had abandoned the path to ever increasing, ever powerful ling'en gifts, he still found value in ling'en gifts (*enci*) that promoted hG and hh guanxi.

In the final discussion of hG guanxi having negative alteration on hh guanxi, I return to the story at the outset of the chapter. We saw that Wan had cut off some guanxi ties over a disagreement of what constitutes as the presence of God. In our interview she told me that God had instructed her to leave – this communication is made possible because as she puts it, she had a “beautiful guanxi” (*meihaode* guanxi) with God. But in her choosing to leave and as of the interview, she said she has not returned, Wan sacrificed several hh guanxi. This choice highlights the ling'en priority given to hG guanxi. Would she have sacrificed her hG guanxi to maintain her hh guanxi? I do not believe so. As such, for the ling'en Christian hG guanxi is at the center of all other relationships. Combined with earlier discussions on triadic relationships, we see that ling'en guanxi can be both constructive when improving hh guanxi, but also destructive when the response to a threat to hG guanxi is cutting hh guanxi ties.

In cases where ling'en participants cut hh guanxi, they may leave a church for another. Fortunately for them, SGV has one of the largest markets for immigrant Chinese churches including those of the ling'en variants. A handful of my participants such as Wan and Wang demonstrate the movement between ling'en and non-ling'en churches. Shortly after I left the field, I heard news of a fieldsite (GCCl) experiencing an internal

conflict with the retirement of the last senior pastor. I later interviewed the senior pastor and learned that due to a breakdown in hh guanxi network, several members decided it would be better to start their own church with the retiring senior pastor going to the new church as a key staff member. The senior pastor was an important figure in introducing ling'en practices to GCCI and he considered his hG guanxi to be quite healthy. He said that God had given the church had a "new direction" (*xinde fangxiang*) in the form of communicational experience gandong resulting from tongue prayers and meditation. In the months surrounding the church split (or the "splitting apart of a church" *jjiaohui fenlie*), I had heard of some members of the church criticizing the original senior pastor for wanting to hold onto power. Thus, in the ling'en understanding, internal divisions leading to church splits can much more easily be interpreted as direct instructions of the Holy Spirit, shifting the focus from human struggles to the power and authority to God (cf. Kang 2016, 72; Yang 1999, 64; Tseng 2006, 142).

The cases of Wang, Wan, and the church split illustrate that ling'en Christians are constantly having to negotiate between various guanxi ties. All three cases suggest that ling'en Christians place the highest value in maintaining an intimate hG guanxi tie, usually through and manifested as using ling'en gifts (*enci*). This is a key feature of ling'en guanxi logic that I have observed and heard throughout interviews. Many, if not most ling'en Christians (such as Wang), expect good hG guanxi to naturally result in good hh guanxi, particularly for those relationships that are more important such as kin and Christian family (Kang 2016, 236). Scholars have traditionally called this the Chinese cultural tendency toward relational harmony (*hexie*)<sup>68</sup> (Yang 2016). However, Wan and the church split suggest something more complicated is happening. Namely that ling'en Christians are constantly negotiating between the various guanxi ties (particularly those guanxi ties between kin then fellow believers) alongside the individual and communal pursuit of ling'en gifts (*enci*).

---

<sup>68</sup> In the mainland context, harmony is often used in the political context and refers to "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*) (Cao 2010).

## Conclusion

In this chapter we have seen how ling'en Christians shape and are shaped by guanxi and its key components of *tong* (sameness), reciprocity (*renqing* and *laiwang*), and affective ties (familial *qingqing* and non-familial *ganqing*) in the making and sustaining of guanxi with God, with fellow believers, and with non-Christians. From an insider's perspective, the central idea of ling'en guanxi is that the (1) prioritization of hG guanxi will result in (2) better (*genghao de*) hh guanxi. A close examination reveals several key characteristics of ling'en guanxi including the increased importance of *ganqing*, decreased role of *laiwang*, and the willingness to rupture hh guanxi in favor of hG guanxi. These findings add nuance to the scholarship on Chinese immigrant religious community in the United States. I am confident that by examining other Chinese immigrant communities through the lens of guanxi, scholars can learn more about the impact of immigration on manifestations of guanxi.

While Chau's formulation of the relational modality based on Chinese religiosity in Greater China (discounting internal migration) generally overlooks the factor of ethnic diversity between religious adherents, this chapter reveals a deep concern amongst immigrants to engage in religious practices that provide opportunities for guanxi ties. This is largely why many ling'en fellowship gatherings focus on activities that promote guanxi ties, enabling other relational practices such as Sunday gatherings and potluck meals to be effective in cultural preservation, promoting a sense of ethnic communal belonging, and materially benefiting the immigrant community through its teachings. This chapter has emphasized ling'en sociality primarily through the lens of relational practices within smaller groups like fellowship gatherings, highlighting intimacy and guanxi ties between individuals and God and believers. Contrast this Chau's (2011b, 80) understanding of the relational modality in which sociality is centered around bringing significant numbers of people together through ritual events and festivals and the concept of *renao* (social vibrancy). While it is true that intimacy is critical amongst ling'en, social vibrancy is also important as it is generated during holiday gatherings, the animated worship sessions of Sunday main gatherings, healing and deliverance of special gatherings, as well as a balance between vibrancy and control during tongue

prayer in unison (*tongsheng fangyan daogao*). Finally, the relational modality when viewed through Chinese popular religion emphasizes *laiwang* – a back and forth of favors and gifts. However, ling'en *laiwang* radically alter the understanding towards one is characterized as “world rejecting” and places higher significance on hG guanxi ties within triadic (two individuals and God) relationships.

Put together, we see that this analysis of ling'en relational practices elaborates the relational modality. It reveals that the presumptions within Chau's formulation of the relational modality – namely a dependence on *laiwang*, social vibrancy, relationship between associations, pre-existing guanxi (primarily in the form of *qingqing*) – have limited application to understanding guanxi within SGV ling'en. In the other direction, ling'en guanxi presumptions – valuing hG guanxi, seeking out *tong* and sociality in a foreign land as migrants, a balance of vibrancy and control – can be said to add to an understanding of the relational modality in Chinese religiosity. This is especially relevant for those religious traditions that emphasize personal relationship with deities as well as immigrants seeking to find a sense of community through religious adherence. In a word, the relational modality is further bolstered by an immigrant Christian case study in that we see how ling'en employ relational practices to do religion as immigrant Chinese in the United States.

With that said, there are some other qualities of guanxi within ling'en that I have not examined and deserve attention such as the roles of gender and seniority in hh guanxi, concepts of loyalty and righteousness (*yiqi*) and how that might correspond with the Christian concept of faith (*xinxin*), and the issue of “face” (*mianzi*) including face-giving and face-saving strategies in the management of guanxi within the church (Yih 2004; Liu 2017a). In the next chapter we examine how ling'en Christians view the Bible and how they use discursive/scriptural practices to differentiate themselves from evangelicals.

## **Chapter Five: Encountering the Holy Spirit through Ling'en Biblical Practices**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter we turn our attention to the discursive/scriptural modality. The chapter first draws from digital Bible study material and interview data to examine the ways in which ling'en engage in the practice of interpreting the Bible, a discursive/scriptural practice. Beyond this I also add contours to ling'en view of the biblical texts and compare it with the hermeneutic strategies within Chinese religiosity to analyze points of contact related to discursive/scriptural practices between the layers of ling'en Christianity and Chinese religiosity. I then use ethnographic data to argue that ling'en primarily use discursive/scriptural practices to legitimize and teach ling'en religious practices – particularly those that are largely absent in mainstream evangelicalism. The second part focuses on the point of contact – namely the use of the Bible – between the layers of ling'en Christianity and evangelicalism. This chapter argues that based on its unique view of Christian scripture, ling'en engage in several discursive/scriptural practices for the purpose of distinguishing themselves from mainstream evangelicals by reducing emphasis on head knowledge and putting more weight on experiential knowledge. We begin first with an overview of the discursive/scriptural modality.

### **Discursive/Scriptural Modality in Chinese religiosity and Chinese Christianity**

According to Chau's modalities framework, within Chinese religiosity, people are attracted to the discursive/scriptural modality because of the appeal of the classics, sutras, and "great texts" from various religious traditions such as The Five Classics and Four Books (*sishu wujing*) of Confucianism, the Buddhist canons (*dazangjing*), and the Daoist "repository of the Way" (*dao Zhang*). Key discursive/scriptural practices include composing, compiling and editing scriptures, reading, preaching and teaching, thinking about (and studying), discussing, debating, discoursing about the Way, translating, and commenting on religious texts (Chau 2011b). Within Chinese religiosity, the practices of this modality have often led to the creation of new texts, ranging from single tracts to whole sets of scriptures.

Chau (2006, 75-76) contends that the modality often requires individuals with certain characteristics such as high literacy and affinity towards theological/philosophical thinking and available resources such as leisure time, imperial mandate, and discourse partners. He proposed that illiteracy and lack of leisure would largely preclude the poor and illiterate from this modality, and that those who practiced this modality were largely comprised of the educated elite. While a significant portion of religious texts required resources beyond the common folk, Chau notes that the discursive/scriptural modality is not restricted to the elite class. In one publication, Chau (2011b, 69) cites the “Tractate of the Most High One on Actions and Consequences” (*taishang ganying pian*) as an example of writings that people read, chanted, printed and distributed freely. This work belonged to a group of writing called the “morality books” or “good books” (*shanshu*), which first became popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and saturated Late Imperial China (Johnson et al. 2023). Though varied in their writings, *shanshu* used colloquial language intended to encourage the reader toward morally constructive behavior while avoiding deeds that lead to punishment. These writings were also used in merit ledgers, allowing poor peasants and scholars to earn merit (Brokaw 1991, 172). Morality books were often used by social elites or state-sanctioned religious institutions to legitimize their interests. One source, a journal in Jiangsu called “Social News” (*sheshuo*) published in 1903 made the claim that morality books were ubiquitous and were “in all counties and provinces, filling up every street corner” (Chen 1999, 142-143). The popularity of *shanshu* was driven in part by a belief that it was a meritorious act to reproduce, distribute, and teach its contents to the wider population, including the illiterate, who in turn can employ various methods to realize moralistic teachings into their lives (Fisher 2011, 56; see also Li 2023).

This tradition of producing morality books can also be seen in early Chinese Protestant evangelists and western missionaries who recognized a congruence between *shanshu* and Christian writings: that both categories of writings dictated morality that was accepted as normative by certain people. One such Chinese evangelist, Liang Fa (1789-1855) published “Good Words to Admonish the Age” (*quanshi liangyan*) in 1832. In Sun Zexi’s (2018) analysis of the tract, he found that Liang adopted the vocabulary

and format of *shanshu* to communicate the gospel message to the common people. In this way, Liang transcended the moral discourse of *shanshu* and shared his belief of worldly morality considering Christian soteriology.

Within migrant Chinese Christian communities, all people – from seminary trained pastors to long time church members to recently immigrant converts – participate in discursive/scriptural practices. As examples, pastors read and study (e.g., by reading commentaries as we will see below) the Bible, write and preach sermons, and teach in Bible study groups and adult Sunday school. Church congregants, seekers, and visitors read the Bible individually and communally, listen to sermons (both in person and online), and discuss biblical passages in small groups. In addition, all three sites of this study operate some version of a Bible study group. I will discuss this in greater detail in the second half of this chapter.

In immigrant Chinese Christianity, the Bible or *shengjing* (lit. “holy scripture”<sup>69</sup>) refers to the Protestant Bible, which is comprised of the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament. The Bible is the foundational text of beliefs and practices. However, since the Bible is a closed canon<sup>70</sup>, no new texts can be created to sit alongside or above it. Ling’en Christians hold a high view of the Christian scriptures and read it as the literal “Word of God” (*shende huayu*) – that is the words that have been given to humanity by the Christian God and recorded in the Bible. They also hold the evangelical belief that the Bible in its entirety is “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore, it is essential to begin with a basic assumption of the discursive/scriptural modality amongst immigrant Chinese Christians: *they take the biblical texts seriously*. This underlying perception

---

<sup>69</sup> The term *shengjing* was first used by Father Emmanuel Diaz Junior, a Portuguese Jesuit missionary in 1636. See Liang 2021, 130-131.

<sup>70</sup> “Canon” in the sense that it is clearly defined, and authoritative list of writings considered to be scripture. The Christian canon was largely closed by the late 4<sup>th</sup> century with Athanasius’s *Festal Letter* (367 CE). The list of twenty-seven books was later ratified by the Council of Carthage in 397 CE. See Holmes 2008, 420.

greatly shapes how they read them, think about them, talk about them, teach them to others, and learn from others about them.

### **Ling'en View and Interpretation of Christian Scripture**

In this section I focus on the discursive/scriptural practice of interpreting biblical texts. I want to demonstrate that ling'en view of the Bible is primarily "evangelical" in understanding. I do so by outlining mainstream immigrant Chinese evangelicalism views and interpretation of the Bible. The key characteristics of their interpretive method are literalism, religious conservatism, rejection of higher criticism, and emphasis on personal piety and moral purity. I then draw from participant interview data to highlight the way ling'en reading of the Bible differs from evangelicals – namely by taking the position of continuationism. This difference has caused a drastic divergence in how these two groups interpret the Bible and their corresponding religious practices. It is important to keep in mind that most ling'en Christians of this study, including pastors and other church leaders, were once mainstream evangelicals. Interview data suggests that their conversion to ling'en was in part inspired (or at least supported) by a change in interpretation strategies.

Given that ling'en Christians view the Bible as central to their spirituality, it is necessary to analyze how they interpret its texts and use the Bible – the latter is discussed later. Amongst ling'en participants, the Chinese phrases *jiejing* and *shijing* refer to the process of interpreting the Bible. The two characters – *jie* includes the translation explain or understand and *shi* translates as explain – form the compound *jieshi*, meaning "to explain, to expound, to interpret". To find out how ling'en ministers interpret the Bible, I inquired Ch'uan (male, 50s) – a ling'en pastor with decades of experience in preaching and formerly, an evangelical pastor. He provided me with two websites that he uses in preparation for sermons. During my fieldwork I did not uncover any biblical resources that are uniquely for the ling'en Christian and minister. This suggests that even if ling'en interpretation were to exist, such writings remain unorganized for use amongst the wider ling'en community.

The titles of the websites are “Bible study resource website for Chinese Christians” (*huaren jidutu chajing ziliao wangzhan*) and “Faith Hope Love” (*xin wang ai*) (Ccbiblestudy n.d.; Fhl n.d.). Since their content overlaps significantly, it will be sufficient for our purposes to analyse one of the two sources. Thus, in the remainder of this section we turn our attention to the former “Bible study resource” website, which has three major groupings. These include: “Old Testament Bible study” (*jiuyue chajing*), “New Testament Bible study” (*xinyue chajing*), and “Topical Bible study” (*zhuti chajing*).

The Old and New Testament sections are structured by book and chapter. Each chapter has a commentary (*zhujie*), a collection of historical-grammatical issues in the text called *shesui* (lit. gleaning barley), sermon illustrations (*lizheng*), sermons (*xinxi*), outline (*gangmu*), and a handful of other Chinese translation (*yiwen*). The Chinese commentaries are extracted from one source: Huang Jiale (Caleb K. Huang), a mainstream evangelical pastor and teacher at United Chinese Christian Church of Irvine, and his publication, “Christian Digest Bible Commentary” (*jidutu wenzhai jiejing xilie*) (Huang n.d.).

A review of the “Topical Bible study” section reveals that it includes writings from an eclectic mix of broadly evangelical scholars and pastors. Some of the higher frequency authors include Stephen Kaung (Jiang Shoudao, 1915-2022), son of a Methodist preacher, immigrated to the United States in 1952, and helped to translate Ni Tuosheng’s writings; Kwok-Hing Wong (Wang Guoxian, 1927-2020), worked with Samuel Lamb, jailed for rejecting TSPM church, and in 1957 immigrated to the United States; and Charlie Yang (Yang Zhenyu) – author of “Our Daily Bread” (*meiri lingliang*) publication and member of the Church in Marlboro, a Local Church in Marlboro, New Jersey. As a member of Ni’s Local Church in the United States, Yang extracts principles from biblical characters and stories for the contemporary Christian.

Put together, this website largely draws from three distinct sources for biblical education. The first is contemporary evangelical scholarship. These include publications (written, audio, and video) by academics trained under the Western theological

perspective such as Kyungrae Kim, a Korean pastor who teaches Hebrew and Old Testament in Mandarin and Taiwanese pastor Kang Laichang, obtaining their PhDs from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Vanderbilt University respectively. Kim recounts the personal struggles he experienced during his PhD studies in textual criticism and from his studies concludes that despite the many flaws and mysteries in the transmission of texts, he remains thoroughly evangelical in his dedication to the authority of the Bible. This first category also includes Chinese language commentaries that reference Western academic evangelical scholarship.

The second source of biblical education primarily comes from authors who were born in mainland China, some of whom went on to immigrate to the United States. Of these, the most frequent appearance is the writings of Ni Tuosheng (1903-1972; as author of and appearing in the text of eighty-two webpages). The commentaries of other mid-twentieth century Chinese church leaders such as Wang Mingdao and Jia Yuming are also mentioned a few times. As Ni appears with the highest frequency, I briefly analyse his pattern of Bible reading to compare with ling'en Bible reading. Ni's writings are scattered throughout the "sermons" (*xinxi*) and in topic pages such as "Holy Spirit." Ni, alongside Wang Mingdao and Song Shangjie, are what Chow (2013a, 60) has classified as "law-oriented" Chinese fundamentalists who hold antithetical perspectives against their contexts and exegete a gospel that subverts the broader culture. In the book, *How to Study the Bible*, Ni outlines his hermeneutic framework for the training of his coworkers. For Ni, a fundamental requirement for proper interpretation is not in the method of interpretation but in the person who is studying the Bible. Ni outlines the prerequisites of such a person: (1) he must have a regenerated spirit and live under the control of the spirit; (2) he must be "consecrated", that is in the light of God, is open to God, singularly focused on God, and obedient; and (3) he must become "experienced", that is by avoiding "subjectivity", carelessness, and curiosity (Nee 1999, 9-33). Ni's hermeneutical approach to the Bible is "spiritual exegesis" (*lingyi jiejing* lit. "interpreting Scripture by following the Spirit") and has been widely documented in a rural Chinese Christian

context.<sup>71</sup> Kang (2016, 124) describes this approach as “explaining the Bible’s spiritual meaning through one’s own interpretation or imagination and through allegory.” The ling’en Christian approach to the Bible is more varied than the image that Kang paints of her fieldwork in rural Linyi. Whereas some speakers – especially lay leaders – tend to employ “spiritual exegesis” due in part to lack of theological training, other speakers – particularly trained pastors – employ this approach far less frequently. Thus, it seems to me that a key factor is the level and type of theological education one receives. With that said, the vast majority of ling’en church ministers in my fieldsites have received theological education with at least two-year Master’s degree.

Ni also viewed biblical commentaries based on critical scholarship as unnecessary and even harmful. He believed that the Bible is self-sufficient for the church and seminaries (Kwok 2020). Furthermore, Ni considered any deviation from his outlined interpretive mode as dangerous – an idea that mirrors the opinion of American fundamentalists who believed that interpretation could be driven by sins of desire, self-interest, depraved imagination, power, and egocentric cognition (Crapanzano 2000, 341-342). In summary, his views towards the Bible and commentaries that is broadly based in biblical literalism, perspicuity of the Bible, and anti-critical scholarship are defining features that I have observed amongst ling’en Christians. Given that ling’en pastoral leaders have undergone theological training during which they have most likely become aware of issues such as hermeneutics and the original languages of the Old and New Testaments, it is somewhat curious why Ni’s writings remain a staple commentary amongst ling’en Christians. A likely explanation – as evidenced by the fact that Ch’uan as well as a handful of other participants who were pastors at the time of interview – explicitly said that Chinese language Bible interpretation material is severely lacking. On the other hand, Ni’s writings have been translated into English and appeal to charismatics, which may contribute to his popularity amongst Chinese American Christians. Ch’uan recognized that these digital sources (including Ni’s commentaries)

---

<sup>71</sup> Several scholars have given negative appraisals of Ni’s approach to the Bible, including primitive, irrational, and anti-intellectual, as blurring the line between illuminations and personal ideas, and as extreme literalism. See Wim 2022, 111 for this discussion.

are out of date and thus it was also his responsibility to filter through the readings and determine what should go into his sermon material.

The final source of biblical education comes from an amalgam of “classical writings” listed on the website. The list draws from various non-Chinese Christian theologians, pastors, and missionaries, among others. A sample of these include writings from the medieval Catholic monk, Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), French Quietist, Jeanne Guyon (1648-1717), Keswick speaker, Andrew Murray (1828-1917), Baptist preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), founder of the denomination Christian and Missionary Alliance (C&MA), Albert B. Simpson (1843-1919), and C&MA pastor, Aiden W. Tozer (1897-1963). Many of the publications that have been translated into Chinese by Ni, who saw them as important spiritual figures, and widely read and cited amongst Chinese American Christians are those related to spirituality, for example Guyon’s *A Short and Easy Method of Prayer* (*jjanyi qidaofa*) and Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ* (*xiaofa jidu*). A quick glance and one will see that the common thread of the pursuit of personal piety and holiness. For example, Murray’s “Inner Life” or “Higher Life” draws from the writings of Thomas à Kempis and Jeanne Guyon (Bundy 2012, 12). Murray’s theology of faith healing (cf. *Divine Healing*, first published in 1900) and belief in continuation of apostolic gifts were critical in the development of Pentecostal-charismatic movements. Simpson and Tozer are also connected to this spirituality through the C&MA, a movement that has been characterized as Keswickian in theology (Menzies 2011).

Although these websites are not distinctly ling’en (i.e., there is no indication that they are for ling’en, nor do they promote ling’en practices), they provide a glimpse into the hermeneutic traditions that influence ling’en biblical interpretation. To summarize, these sources are (1) conservative in application of evangelical historical-grammatical methods; (2) influenced by so-called fundamentalism of mainland Chinese Christians of the mid-twentieth century; and (3) driven by holiness and pietistic writings of the previous centuries. It is my estimation that these are important sources of religious

conservatism, emphasis on personal piety, and moral purity within the Chinese American ling'en Christianity.

Furthermore, immigrant Chinese Christian biblical interpretation is deeply influenced by Western evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. In sociologist Antony Alumkal's (2002) ethnographic study of two Asian American churches, of which one was Chinese American, he found that its members were unaware of the Anglo-American roots of evangelical theology and accepted it as orthodoxy. The participants of Alumkal's study were mostly university students or graduates who had studied fields relating to science and technology and had little to no training in biblical studies and theology which contributed in part to their acceptance of evangelical beliefs such as the divine authorship of the Bible (and therefore, complete inerrancy), literalism, creationism (and rejection of the theory of evolution), and conservative evangelical positions in political and social issues. He closes the paper in hopes that second-generation Asian Americans would become more interested in developing their own contributions to Christian theology, instead of remaining "blindly loyal to Western theology" (Alumkal 2002, 249). Ling'en Christians face a similar challenge. On the one hand, they have attempt to include some historical-grammatical methods of interpretation that is more prevalent in Chinese American evangelicalism, but as participants explained to me, ling'en use of historical-grammatical methods is significantly less experienced than their mainstream evangelical counterpart, and some participants – both ling'en and non-ling'en – consider this a weakness, reflecting an interest in historical-grammatical hermeneutic methods amongst ling'en pastoral leaders. Indeed, this path seems to resonate within SGV as many ling'en pastors within my fieldsites receive at least some training in the historical-grammatical methods typically associated with Chinese American and American evangelicalism.

In this section we have analysed a Bible interpretation resource that is in use by two participants who are employed as pastors. Through this discussion we gain a better understanding of how ling'en interpret the Bible. This analysis has uncovered a critical discursive/scriptural goal within ling'en: the desire to understand the Bible. I found that

amongst lay believers, this desire primarily manifested as listening to Sunday sermons (sometimes taking careful notes, evidence of their desire to understand the Bible), attending special conferences in which ling'en speakers will teach their interpretation of the Bible, and read books that help explain the Bible. Amongst ling'en pastors, the desire to understand the Bible is further strengthened by their pastoral role to teach the Bible. This may contribute to their use of more materials than the average lay person. Thus, the discursive/scriptural modality primarily reveals itself amongst ling'en Christians as individuals and communities get together to read and interpret the Bible, oftentimes with a scattering of interpretation resources.

### **“We do what the Bible says”**

Based on my interview data, the key difference between immigrant Chinese mainstream evangelicals and ling'en Christians is their view of the Bible. By “view” I mean how they understand the words of the Bible. In this section, I draw from one interview to highlight the ling'en perspective: a belief in the historic and continued experiences of supernatural events as described in the Bible (i.e., continuationism). While several of them expressed similar ideas, I refer to Taiwan-born Su (male, 60s) who makes an argument for the ling'en reading of the Bible.

Su first introduces two groups of Christians: mainstream evangelicals or what he calls “traditional Christians” (*chuantong jidutu*) and ling'en Christians.

These traditional (*chuantong*) [Christians] have a problem. That is, they condemn [ling'en] on the one hand, but they do not believe in miracles. How can there be this group of self-contradictory beliefs?

He argues that the traditional Christian does not believe in miracles and that this is a contradictory position if one were to “believe in the Bible”. This is because Su holds the position that a Christian must view the Bible as documenting literal historical events. These events include mundane details (such as Jesus's travels in the Gospels) but also the “miraculous” events such as Jesus's healing of various people. Su is pointing not

only to the belief that these events (both mundane and miraculous) occurred in history but also that the miraculous events happened and continue to happen today – not through Jesus but through the Holy Spirit. In Su’s understanding, a Christian who does not hold the belief that such miraculous events can continue to occur is in a state of contradiction. By this he presupposes that Christians, by definition, (1) must believe the events of the Gospels as literal historical events and (2) that the supernatural events continue to happen today. In defense of point two, he draws upon his personal experience of when he first encountered the Holy Spirit – an experience that drastically and radically reshaped (*fanzhuan*) his perception of Christianity and ling’en. He argues that if he (being one of the most stubborn and rational people he knew) could have such a powerful experience akin to a miracle, then it must be true that miraculous events can occur in the world beyond the New Testament narrative.

Su then presents a hypothetical non-Christian who has heard about miracles the New Testament text and goes to visit a non-ling’en church.

They will think that what you offer is really interesting. They will want to come to the church and take a look. After hearing the stories in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, they will think the gathering is amazing. There, [traditional Christians] will tell him that these were all in the past. ‘God doesn’t do this now.’ Then he will ask ‘what does God do?’ ‘God just wants you to read the Bible carefully and be a good Christian.’

Su presupposes that this individual will hear the Gospel stories and believe them as events in history. From this he argues that cessationism of the evangelicals is not only contradictory but also anti-Bible (*fandui shengjing*). Note here that he considers all evangelicals as holding the position of cessationism, which I did not find to be true in my fieldwork and experience amongst evangelicals. For example, evangelicals pray for miraculous healing and divine blessings. Su introduces the evangelical Christian into as a vocal opponent to ling’en, encouraging the non-Christian to receive the Gospel but to ignore the miracles. From this, Su argues that this evangelical character is anti-Bible.

Su's hypothetical evangelical character is not entirely a false characterization of evangelicals. During my fieldwork and experience with mainstream evangelicals and their perception toward ling'en Christianity, I did indeed find such views to be present. With that said, these views represent the more extreme position which is typically known as anti-ling'en (*fandui ling'en*) in the field.

Finally, Su presents a second hypothetical situation in which someone's (presumably an evangelical) daughter is sick.

But if a person's daughter is sick, do you want her to get better or not? They say, "you can't pray like this. May the Lord's will be done.' On the one hand, [chuantong Christians] want people to believe in the Bible, and on the other hand, [they] want people not to believe in the Bible. Or at least believe that some of the things in the Bible no longer exist. How can you expect people to have faith?

Su questions if such a person would hold the belief that God can miraculously heal their child. Broadly speaking, ling'en would respond to sickness by employing immediate-practical and liturgical practices. Such response is generally viewed positively as "having faith in God" (*duishen you xinxin*). However, some ling'en participants also insisted that using modern medicine and the health system is not a show of weak faith. For such participants, they recognize that modern medicine is a "gift from God" and that it should be used when necessary. While Su tends to hold the position of the former group, he also suggests the denigration of those who seek modern medicine. The ling'en position that Su advocates for is that belief in miraculous healings *should* be a staple belief for all Christians; that it is contradictory to believe in God while denying belief in the continuation of supernatural experiences. He concludes his argument by suggesting that those who claim to have the Christian faith must also hold belief in supernatural events, and if not, then it is unfair to expect non-Christians to adopt the Christian faith.

In summary, Su has intimately connected his view of the Bible (as historically accurate in all details; as supporting continuationalism), his interpretive method (literalism and perspicuity) closely with his view on normative Christian doctrine and practices including the discursive/scriptural practice of interpreting the Bible. However, if we are to consider the conclusions that we drew in the earlier section, namely that mainstream evangelicals embrace literalism, then despite what Su claims here, ling'en Christians share far more similarities with mainstream evangelicals in the point of contact with regards to understanding of the Bible between the ling'en and evangelical layers. However, it seems that at this point of contact, their key difference is that ling'en Christians are far more expansive in their understanding of what constitutes as a supernatural event are and the frequency which contemporary Christians should expect (or pray for) them to occur. For example, a Chinese American evangelical would consider a non-Christian to be moved (gandong) by the Holy Spirit to be a supernatural event. Ling'en Christian essentially add more content into the bucket of supernatural events. In this sense, they more uniformly apply the principle of literalism across biblical texts. Therefore, ling'en push forward the discursive/scriptural modality within Chinese American Christianity to become more than simply interested in understanding the text. They also want the supernatural elements of the text to translate into their lived experiences.

### **Views on Scripture in Layered Thinking**

In this section, I consider the point of contact of views of scripture between the layers of ling'en Christianity and Chinese religiosity. This assessment is relevant because the discursive/scriptural modality centers on texts. The three themes which I will highlight in this section are issues over orthodoxy and heterodoxy over scripture between Confucianism and ling'en, magical elements of scripture between Daoism and ling'en, and canonicity of scripture between Chinese religiosity and ling'en.

Confucianism became official orthodoxy during the early Han (from Emperor Wu 141-87 BCE onward), which greatly shaped how its texts were viewed. Historians Kai-wing Chow, On Cho Ng, and John B. Henderson (1999, 3) note the characteristics of

Confucianism and its texts: the fluidity of the Confucian canon; the constant need to negotiate the boundaries of Confucianism in relation to other intellectual traditions; the dialogical relations between text and discourse in establishing boundaries for the Confucian tradition; specific textual and discursive strategies employed in the imagining of boundaries; and the range of expansive and contractive strategies used to enlarge or restrict the Confucian traditions' intellectual space vis-à-vis other traditions. Of relevance to our earlier discussion is Confucianism's discursive strategies to erect boundaries between it and other traditions. John Henderson (1998, 120-134) examination of Neo-Confucian efforts to identify heresies (*yiduan*): reducing heresies to terms of orthodoxy, presenting heresy in a partial or one-sided way against orthodoxy, speaking of heresies in disparaging ways, pairing two heresies as opposites in which at the center sits orthodoxy, and reducing a set of heresies down to a common denominator. Interestingly, Henderson notes that these strategies were applied in early Christianity as well as in neo-Confucianism. In the previous section, we saw that in Su's understanding of proper Bible interpretation, he is clearly marking a boundary line between that which ought to be Christian by speaking of evangelicalism in disparaging ways and pointing out the flaw of cessationism. While ling'en did not employ the language of *yiduan* (heresy) in reference to evangelicals, the opposite direction is true. That is, I have heard evangelicals call "extreme ling'en (*jiduan ling'en*) as a *yiduan* (heresy) of the Christian faith. Clearly, both camps are engaged in the process of boundary making in what is normative Christian practices and beliefs. Interestingly, I have heard few evangelicals engage in the specific issue of ling'en interpretation of biblical texts through which a literalist reading would indeed support ling'en practices.

As the Han declined, intellectuals turned to Daoist ideas from the Hundred School of Thoughts (*zhuzi baijia*) including Laozi and Zhuangzi for fresh inspiration. "Daoism" covers a wide range of texts, including the early texts of Zhuangzi, Laozi, Daode Jing, and Liezi among others. According to scholar of medieval Chinese Daoism Stephen Bokenkamp (1997, 10), Daoism also refers to vaguely defined attitudes including the love of nature, the pursuit of personal freedom, and antipathy towards the Confucian inspired social order. In this way, some have viewed Daoism and Confucianism as *yin*

and *yang* of Chinese thought. However, Daoist conceptions of scripture (*jing*) vary greatly from Confucianism. It is based on the idea that the cosmic ordering of the Dao can be recovered through discernable patterns presented in scripture. Individual scriptures are part of the whole truth where texts contain one or more series of “celestial scripts”, or “celestial writs” (*tianzhang*) were thought to be the language of the heavens and have magical powers such as protecting individuals or enacting righteousness on earth (Bokenkamp 1997, 20-21; Meulenbeld 2019). The magical powers of texts can also be seen in some Jewish liturgies that employ biblical verses as protection against perils (Angel 2009). Amongst ling’*en* Christians, I have seen a small number of cases where the Jewish script is presented as a “heavenly language”, usually employing some form of Jewish numerology, gematria, and pictographic “codes”.<sup>72</sup> While the magical power of texts is an interesting aspect of the point of contact between Daoism and Ling’*en* (though some Jewish understanding), I would not posit that ling’*en* Christians are employing the magical aspect of texts with awareness of Daoist understanding.

The final issue in the point of contact with regards to scripture between ling’*en* and Chinese religions is the issue of canonicity. Canonicity is a key feature in the development of scriptures of Chinese religions in history as well as a key premise in Chau’s discursive/scriptural modality. Recall that key practices in this modality such as discoursing about and composing texts presuppose the status of religious canons as “open”. However, some scholars of Chinese religions question the “myth of an open canon”. For example, in Chinese Buddhism, scholar of Chinese Buddhism Jiang Wu observed that in the history of the canon formation process in East Asia, after the initial “open” phases of a few centuries, the Chinese canons have appeared to have reached a point of closure in the mid-eighth century with attempts to create a standardized “Register of Canonical Texts”. This has resulted in a “core” canon, comprising of 5,048 fascicles and 480 cases (Wu 2015, 34-36).<sup>73</sup> The issue of “open” and “closed” canon is

---

<sup>72</sup> According to a ling’*en* instructor, one such code can be found in Genesis 1:1 where the Hebrew letters of the first word “in the beginning” is a code for the sentence “son of God is destroyed by his own hand willingly on the cross”, which is interpreted as Jesus’s death on the cross. Ling’*en* teachers have also cited Chinese pictographs which can be found in Ethel Nelson and Richard Broadberry’s book, *God’s Promise to the Chinese*. In these endeavors, ling’*en* Christians seek to find “secret parallels and messages” through written language in history.

<sup>73</sup> For a list of “closed” Chinese Buddhist canons, see Fuhua and Mei 2015.

similarly debated in Daoism. Under the Ming dynasty, a collection called the “Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign Period” (*zhengtong daoze*), published in 1445, is also viewed as a core canon and the basis for future development. For example, in 2003, a reorganized and punctuated edition of the Ming canon was published in the 49-volume “Taoist Canon of China” (*zhonghua daoze*) (Boltz 2008).

Historian of Chinese religions Timothy Barrett (2008) provides an important insight into the Chinese tendency towards canonization, namely that the role of the state was important in the creation of “closed” canons as a well-defined canon helped protect against subversive ideas and the corruption of clergy. The development of early Christian canon was closely tied to views of orthodoxy against “heterodox” groups such as the Christian Gnostics (Metzger 1997). Therefore, on the issue of canonicity we see that Christianity (including ling’*en*) and Chinese religions encountered similar issues in history and in many cases responded in similar ways. As such, the discursive/scriptural modality based on Chinese religions is far more applicable to “closed canon” religions including Christianity than one might presume when reviewing the religious practices of this modality.

The above are three issues in the point of contact of scripture between the layers of ling’*en* Christianity and Chinese religiosity. Overall, we see that there are some significant overlaps in their views on heresy and process of creating orthodoxy texts, in the belief of the magical power of texts, and in the process of canonicity. These similarities suggest that ling’*en* views of Christian scripture is not as distanced from Chinese religiosity, strengthening the idea that ling’*en* discursive/scriptural practices are safely situated within Chau’s modality.

Now that we have discussed the ling’*en* view of Christian scripture and covered some of the overlapping issues with interpretation of texts in Chinese religions, the next section makes the second key argument of this chapter. Namely, that several key ling’*en* discursive/scriptural practices function to demonstrate the uniqueness of ling’*en* Christianity vis-à-vis mainstream evangelical practices. In this sense, these

discursive/scriptural practices form the biblical foundation of many of the other practices in this study – particularly those of the immediate-practical and liturgical modalities.

## **Ling'en Discursive/Scriptural Practices with the Bible**

### *Private Engagements with the Bible*

While ling'en personal reading and studying of the Bible fits under the personal-cultivational modality, there is room for discussion of reading/studying the Bible as a discursive/scriptural practice amongst ling'en. As such this section argues that ling'en Christians read and study the Bible to gain two types of understanding: so-called “head knowledge” and “spiritual knowledge”. This group of practices primarily centers on reading, listening to, thinking about, understanding, and praying on the text. They usually occur in the home but may also happen at church, on the bus, at the workplace, and many other locations. Participants who have memorized biblical passages pray privately in response to external circumstances such as threats and opportunities. Sometimes participants will pray out loud as an act of power, believing that speaking/praying the words out loud gives the words special authority over circumstances.<sup>74</sup>

Besides praying, participants read biblical texts either silently (*du shengjing*), vocally (*nian shengjing*), or use digital media such as YouTube and WeChat to listen to readings of the Bible.<sup>75</sup> There are numerous purposes to silent reading that align with the discursive/scriptural modality: to gain understanding of the text in such a way that it can materially impact their lives, for therapeutic purposes<sup>76</sup>, to gain understanding into the “spiritual world” (*lingjie*) and “spiritual gifts” (*enci*), and to gain understanding

---

<sup>74</sup> McLeister (2019, 136) reported these findings during his fieldwork in China.

<sup>75</sup> Contrast to McLeister's (2024) finding that Chinese Christians employed the use of “audio Bible players” (*shengjing bofangqi*), MP3 devices loaded with audio Bible, sermons, worship songs, and other audio material. As McLeister notes in the article, such audio Bible players were popular in 2011 but by 2019 due to changes in legislation regarding religions in China and the rise of smartphones, audio Bible players became increasingly difficult to find. During my fieldwork in 2020-2021, I did not see anyone using such MP3 audio players although smartphones replaced them and offered more resources including commentaries, images, videos, etc.

<sup>76</sup> Here I find similarity with Silliman's (2017) finding that amongst twenty-first century American evangelical literature the Bible is portrayed as lending itself especially to therapeutic life-applications.

regarding theological concepts, including the topics that mainstream evangelicals typically discuss (e.g. God the Father, Jesus, sin, salvation, evangelism and mission). Ling'en participants place special emphasis on the theological topics of the Holy Spirit, Satan and his spiritual realm<sup>77</sup> and spiritual warfare<sup>78</sup> (*shuling zhengzhan*), and eschatology. These last three items greatly shape their immediate-practical and world management practices. On occasion, participants read the Bible vocally in a heightened affective state – for example after being “filled with the Holy Spirit”, and in response to hearing the voice of God, they may vocally read/recite texts as a response of appreciation or reciprocating love. The key difference between vocal and silent reading is that the former is reported as the archetypal mode for the cognitive studying of the Bible.

Personal reading can be a self-imposed and self-guided activity. However, it is not described as a routine but as a spontaneous and regular activity. Participants speak negatively about reading the Bible as something they must do. Their rejection is not only that of the routine, but also a rejection of the meaninglessness that comes with perceived forms of routine such as having to read the Bible. I have observed that the tension between (meaningless) routine and meaning during Sunday worship gatherings is intensely evident. To confront this issue, ling'en church pastors and worship teams regularly avoid routine (e.g., by repeating the chorus of a worship song an unanticipated number of times, mixing prayer and worship singing) that is typical of mainstream evangelical churches. However, I have not observed attempts by ling'en churches to discard the wider church worship order (hymn singing and sermon, mixed with prayer, ending with a benediction) for example by beginning sermons without prayer, or placing worship singing in the second half of a gathering service.

---

<sup>77</sup> Ephesians 2:2 was most frequently cited for this theological idea.

<sup>78</sup> Ephesians 6:10-17 was provided as the necessary Christian response to “Satan’s spiritual realm”.

Fang (female, 40s) – who had experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit (through speaking in tongues) one day while she was a fresh university student and unemployed recounted:

The moment after I gained tongues, my prayers for other people became different... because I did not have a job, I could pray and read the Bible for eight hours a day nonstop. And I loved reading the Bible... I still remember those days today, I was soaking in God's presence and enjoyed it greatly. So, I feel that my understanding of God is based on a real experience and that the Bible, especially the Psalms, is so real to me.

Fang's experience reveals a fundamental ling'en goal of reading the Bible: to gain cognitive understanding of theological concepts and biblical knowledge which, under ideal circumstances, reflect their lived experiences.

On the other hand, there were several participants who experienced a crisis (sometimes for many years) of when Bible reading was meaningless. For them, reading the Bible in a meaningless way means while they can continue to gain cognitive understanding, the reading fails to help them experientially connect with the text, and with God through the Holy Spirit. As such there were frequent citations for the need to "reconnect with God" through the practice of reading the Bible. Reading (and listening) the Bible was viewed as a way to "meet with God" (*yushen xiangyu*) or as some describe it, a "appointment with God" (*yushen yuehui*) or as two female participants used the phrase to mean "a date with God" as in non-sexual but intimate one-on-one meeting. This language contributes to the ling'en notion that intimacy with God is an irreplaceable – even the most important – element to understanding the biblical text in private reading. In this sense, the literal interpretation that is common to Chinese American evangelicals and the basis for ling'en reading can be trumped by an interpretation inspired through an intimate relationship with God (cf. Alumkal 2000). For some participants, their personal spiritual interpretation of the text has clashed against the interpretation of their pastors so much that they were forced to leave the church.

Ling'en come to Bible reading with expectations of being moved (*gandong*), being spoken to by God, being led by the Holy Spirit, and experiencing various emotions to as confirmation (most frequently cited emotions were peace, joy, and love). For many, reading the Bible is not an isolated activity but instead is accompanied by watching or listening to sermons, hymn singing, praying in tongues, and sometimes, prophesying. To aid in developing scriptural reading practices, all three fieldsites offer various "reading plans" designed by the church and provided to members for personal reading. These reading plans might be sent through weekly emails with daily readings (book, chapter, verses), lists on the church website, and WeChat groups with daily readings and questions. In some cases, the reading plans also come with questions. A common tool to promote personal readings is "Daily Bread for Spiritual Lives" (*lingming riliang*), a publication that is used at all three fieldsites to varying degrees.<sup>79</sup>

A key feature of ling'en reading of the Bible is that they seek to go beyond cognitive understanding and into deeper truths to gain spiritual understanding. For this to happen, participants report that the ideal and most effective form of personal reading are those that are in response to being moved (*gandong*) by the Holy Spirit. In fact, this change was described by several participants who converted from non-ling'en to ling'en. Take for example Chu's (female, 60s) description of her difficulty in maintaining the practice of reading the Bible prior to her conversion:

Although the Bible says that "God is love", I never really understood what it means, and could never acquire it. And I did not have a close relationship (*qinmi de guanxi*) with God. In the past I did not read the Bible regularly, and so there was no way I could have a close relationship.

She describes an interesting conundrum. While she had learned that "God is love" (what she called "knowing God's love only in their intellect"), it was experientially foreign to her. As such, she did not develop the habit of reading the Bible, which further prevented her from experiencing God as love. Following her experience of being "filled

---

<sup>79</sup> This publication is also quite popular amongst non-ling'en Chinese American evangelicals.

with the Holy Spirit” through listening to the audio recordings of Jiang, Chu began to read the Bible while sensing God’s love for her. At the time of our interview, Chu had recently submitted a course paper discussing the issue of ling’en gifts. She wrote:

If spiritual practices (such as reading the Bible) is only about fulfilling a responsibility, it will be difficult to have a high-quality spiritual life. In the past, church retreat gatherings (*tuixiuhui*) invite well known speakers to preach, interpret the Bible. These are good, but they stop at rational thinking and only increase Bible knowledge. I suggest that churches teach believers to establish intimate relationship with God, to read God’s Word, to encounter God one on one, to truly open their hearts, and allow God to inspect what they are hiding in their hearts, and to listen to God’s voice.

As we can see, for Chu and many other participants, reading the Bible for “rational understanding<sup>80</sup>” and knowledge is not enough. They promote reading the Bible in such that it places less emphasis on cognitive understanding and “thinking about” and more on the encountering of God through “listening to God’s voice” as they read the biblical text. Another participant said:

After these [ling’en] experiences, I went to read the Bible, and it was different from before. And then I really gained a deeper level of understanding.

When asked what these deeper understandings were about, the participant provided two examples, “the relationship between Israel and herself, and the parables that Jesus spoke in the four Gospels.” Unfortunately, I did not think at the moment to ask for additional clarification. Based on my notes of the interview at the time, the participant was referring to some intimate relationship between her and God and out of this relationship flowed a deeper, secret knowledge.

---

<sup>80</sup> The Chinese term used here is *lixing* which translates to “rational”. However, it is not that ling’en thinking is not rational, but that it is not merely cognitive.

As we can see this ling'en goal of reading the Bible highlights the distinctiveness of this ling'en discursive/scriptural practice. Ling'en hold the view that within evangelicalism, discursive/scriptural practices tend to highlight cognitive knowledge of the Bible and that ling'en discursive/scriptural practices have a far broader set of goals, including experiencing the Holy Spirit and to learn ling'en gifts. The key characteristics of ling'en private scripture reading seems to be that it is meditative in nature, where the reader focuses on the supernatural elements of Christian scripture. In these, they are akin to Buddhist readings of scripture such as the discursive/scriptural practices describing the monk Crazy Ji's (*Daoji*): "at times he would build a thatched hut and sit in meditation on a remote mountain summit," while having all sorts of magical powers typical of itinerant monks (Shahar 1998, 34, 50). Also notice that there is a distinct lack of consideration for morality and wisdom<sup>81</sup>, regular themes in many Chinese religious texts. Some examples include the *shanshu* "Good Books" that was described earlier and the Book of Transformations (*huashu*) of the Zitong cult in early Chinese history (Kleeman 1994, 39).

### *Studying the Bible communally*

When ling'en Christians gather to study the Bible, they engage in the practices of reading the text out loud, studying the text (*cha*), teaching (*jiaodao*), learning knowledge (*xuexi zhishi*), gaining understanding (*huode lijie*), discussing (*taolun*) the text, sharing thoughts (*fenxiang*) about the text, and testifying to the veracity (*shuo jianzheng*) of the text. Apart from personal study, ling'en Christians gather to study the Bible at least once per week in either a "fellowship" (*tuangqi*) or "cell group" (*xibao xiaozu*), although many of my participants attended two or more gatherings per week. One pastor explained to me that the difference between fellowships and cell groups:

Cell groups have fewer people. The hope is that everyone can participate in serving one another, serving each other. We also hope that there will be a

---

<sup>81</sup> I observed that ling'en Christians care less for wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes etc.) than the texts on magical efficacy.

“parent” (*jiashang*) for the cell group who can serve with regard the Word, and these leaders are usually trained and more mature Christians.

Although I did not have the opportunity to attend the cell group in the church above, the pastor highlighted the importance of the “parent’s” role in serving regarding the Word (*huayu de fushi*) and its requirement of being “trained” and “more mature” (*chengshu*). “Trained” means that the individual had received formal or informal theological training. The type of training matters, and in order of preference based on conversations and interviews with ling’en church leaders: ATS accredited seminary with courses conducted in Mandarin Chinese or English, non-accredited seminary, degree or certificate from Bible college, and lastly, theological training provided by an immigrant Chinese church<sup>82</sup>. Missing from this list are the various certificates and degrees<sup>83</sup> offered at “Agape International Leadership Institute”. This is because in my interviews, past graduates of Agape’s programs reported nearly zero chance of pastoral employment and so-called “places to serve” (*fushi de difang*) outside of ling’en organizations. Several of them reported that they returned to ARC to serve or work for the school and church; others went to start their own organizations, such as a Bible study group that specializes in teaching ling’en gifts and conducting rituals (chapter six). “More mature” is a holistic requirement of the individual and generally means having been baptized for longer time, consistent and frequent attendance of gatherings, and behavior that reflects the Fruit of the Spirit, among others. Since these leaders are responsible for service in the Word, it is not an accident that nowhere is the requirement to be an experienced practitioner of ling’en gifts. In a sense, it is an irony that the communal studying of biblical texts regarding ling’en gifts requires the leader to be more experienced with teaching rather than the gifts themselves. My understanding is that these cell groups are not suitable for practicing ling’en gifts due to their time restraint, configuration of

---

<sup>82</sup> For example, the River of Life Pastoral Leadership Institute (*shengminghe muzhe lingxiu xueyuan*).

<sup>83</sup> In email correspondence with “Agape iSchool” as of 2024, they offer the following four programs: “leadership and ministry certificate” (60 credits), “Bachelor’s of practical ministry” (180 credits), “Master’s of practical ministry” (120 credits), and “Doctor of Ministry in practical ministry” (140 credits).

activities (e.g., ample time must be set apart for hymn singing)<sup>84</sup>, and their inherent purpose of welcoming visitors.

The second staple gathering is Sunday school (*zhurixue*). Typically, the more members that a church has, the more stratified and complex their Sunday school program will be. GCCI and VOH both offer adult Sunday school classes that congregants can sign up to study the Bible book by book or a particular topic from a biblical perspective. GCCI offers two categories of courses: “building up new believers” (*chuxin zaojiu*) and “fundamentals of discipleship” (*jichu mentu*). These and other adult Sunday school courses typically last around an hour and very rarely more than two hours. They usually take place before or following the main Sunday worship service but may also take place during the week following the transition of many church activities to online gatherings because of the COVID19 lockdowns. In person, adult Sunday School sessions are held classroom (*ketang*) style in which the teacher (*laoshi*) instructs students (*xuesheng*). These lessons are usually accompanied with PowerPoint slides, printed handouts, and limited interaction (e.g., teacher asking students questions, students gathering in small groups to discuss) In addition, all sites offer some variants of baptism preparation and new Christian courses. This style of learning is prevalent in Chinese Christianity of many contexts, for example in rural China and in America (Kang 2016, 142-144; Yang 1999, 2).

In my participant observation of a handful of these courses, there was nothing overtly ling'en (i.e., no practicing of ling'en gifts, no extraordinary mentions of the Holy Spirit). As such, the triangulation of participation observation and interview data points to the tentative conclusion that the group studying of the Bible amongst ling'en tend to focus on so called cognitive activities of reading, studying, and discussing the texts to learn biblical knowledge and information about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. No time was given for ling'en immediate-practical and liturgical practices. By cognitive, I refer to two characteristics: first, they do not emphasize continuationism within the bounded space

---

<sup>84</sup> During participation at a church, one member informed me that a group of Christians broke away from the church to gather in a building a few hundred meters down the road, where they gather to practice ling'en gifts. Unfortunately, they were not meeting because of COVID-19 lockdowns, and I did not have the chance to visit.

and time of Sunday school; and as such, they tend to prioritize the mental activities around interpreting the text. In my participation of a handful of adult Sunday school lessons, I could not help but feel that I was in a mainstream evangelical adult Sunday school setting; there were little to no hint of any ling'en Christianity. In this way, ling'en adult Sunday school's close resemblance of its counterpart in mainstream evangelicalism reflects a shared view across Chinese Protestantism: the importance of understanding the Bible.

This is an interesting finding because earlier we highlighted that ling'en not only seek to understand the Bible but also want the supernatural experiences in the Bible to translate to their lived experiences. There may be a few reasons why this second goal is distinctly absent in the Sunday school classroom. First, ling'en view the classroom setting as a place for didactic purposes; students sit in chairs, have handouts, have Bibles open, and face a teacher who instructs them. Second, Sunday school sessions are usually between 60 and 90 minutes and packed with information to learn, leaving little time for anything else (except group prayer, which was typically allocated fifteen minutes). Third, and perhaps most importantly, ling'en utilize a handful of other group gatherings for ling'en immediate-practical and liturgical practices. These include special gatherings (*tehui*) for healing and deliverance such as "Miracle Reappears". Due to the high frequency of such gatherings, it is reasonable to not expect many ling'en practices to appear in Sunday school. As such we may consider three types of gatherings amongst the ling'en for distinct purposes: (1) ling'en mid-week fellowship and cell group gatherings centering around relational practices, (2) adult Sunday school focusing on discursive/scriptural practices with a cognitive and cessationism bend, and (3) special gatherings for immediate-practical and liturgical practices.

### *Preaching the Bible*

A key feature within the discursive/scriptural modality is the teaching, discussing, and passing on knowledge from teachers and preachers to students and between each other within Chinese religiosity (Chau 2011b, 82). Ling'en also engage in this subset of discursive/scriptural practices but with a key difference – there is a far greater emphasis

on the flow of knowledge in the direction from pastors and teachers to lay people. In other words, as far as I could tell, there is very little emphasis on the flow of knowledge between pastors and teachers. Contrary to Chinese religiosity where the discursive/scriptural modality includes the philosophical and religious discussions that occur between religious teachers. This slight nuance highlights that the discursive/scriptural modality within ling'en is, above all, practical and concerned with its ability to shape ling'en lay believers (as opposed to developing ling'en theology or philosophy through interaction between pastors and leaders).

Within ling'en, the preaching of the Bible centers on reading the text out loud, teaching, interpreting, verbal commenting, persuading the audience, and demonstrating the text. In all three fieldsites, the "Lord's Day worship" (*zhuri jingbai*) occurred on Sunday between nine in the morning and the early afternoon. I draw from one representative sermon as an example to demonstrate the logic of this purpose and how the Bible is utilized to this end. This sermon was chosen for several reasons. First, it references nearly two dozen Bible verses (which is not an outlier in the number of biblical references from the pool of ling'en sermons that I have heard) and therefore makes a fitting example for demonstrating the use of Bible in communal worship. Second, it is entirely committed to the topic of the Holy Spirit, so while other sermons that mention or depend on the topic of the Holy Spirit could have been selected, this one has the advantage of being entirely about the Holy Spirit. Third, the sermon is relatively introductory and therefore a good way to understand the argument.

The sermon was given by the senior pastor of Great Commission Church International. The sermon was titled "Listening to God" (*lingting shen*). The argument begins with a Bible verse, John 10:27 ("My sheep hear my voice, and I recognize them, and they follow me").<sup>85</sup> Reading from the Bible is a key practice during preaching as ling'en Christians hold a high view of Christian scripture. The pastor mentions this text<sup>86</sup> and a

---

<sup>85</sup> My translation from the Chinese Union Version of John 10:27.

<sup>86</sup> At two fieldsites, it is not the pastor who reads the text. But rather another person – usually a female – who reads the text out loud in a controlled, reverential manner. Participants are sometimes asked to read along, but if not, they will listen to the reading.

handful of other verses to persuade the audience, in this case, that all believers have the inherent ability to “hear the voice of Jesus” (*ting yesu de shengyin*). But – as Chen continues – the ability to recognize (*rende*) is not natural and must be activated and maintained by the believers themselves through various spiritual practices; Chen mentioned the daily practice of “Quiet Time”, during which Christians read the “Daily Bread” publication and meditate on the personal significance of biblical text and the interpretation provided. According to Chen, believers who do not develop this ability cannot recognize “God’s voice”, and therefore cannot receive his guidance (*yindao*), cannot grow (*chengzheng*), and cannot experience “breakthroughs” (*tupo*). The conclusion that Chen draws is that all believers must learn to recognize Jesus’s voice. The irony is that the possibility of failing to recognize Jesus’s voice seems to contradict his earlier interpretation of John 10:27, thereby undermining the idea that all believers can hear Jesus. Instead, it establishes tension in that believers must do something to be able to hear Jesus, and as argued later, the Holy Spirit.

As Chen describes it, when believers can “recognize” Jesus’s voice, they can then “establish an intimate relationship” (*jianli yige qinmi de guanxi*) with Jesus. Chen draws from (1) the story of Adam and Eve in the pre-Fall Garden of Eden to demonstrate that “God desires to speak to his children” and (2) John 15:15 to interpret that the text of Jesus calling the disciples in the text “his friends” to mean that Jesus today calls believers “his friends”. Chen then proceeds into the main topic of the sermon, how to listen to “God’s voice”. He proposes three ways in how believers can hear God:<sup>87</sup> (1) that the Holy Spirit helps believers to think of words from the Bible (*shengling jiao women xiangqi shengjing zhong de hua*); (2) that the Holy Spirit uses different methods

---

<sup>87</sup> The pastor’s interchangeable use of “God’s voice” and “Jesus’s voice” while citing various biblical texts is representative of how ling’en use texts to support arguments. Often, literary context is not carefully examined. For example, the argument that God “enjoys” speaking to Adam and Eve in the pre-Fall Garden of Eden may suggest that the desire for communication has changed (for the worse?) following the Fall. This conclusion goes against the very desire of ling’en to hear God. Furthermore, the one that speaks – whether it is God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, or the Bible can be extremely convoluted. For this sermon, the intention of the pastor is to suggest that believers can hear the voice of God the Father.

to speak to us (*shengling jiezheshu butong fangshi xiang women shuohua*); and (3) that the Holy Spirit speaks to our conscience (*shengling hui dui women de liangxin shuohua*).

The first requires that believers read and meditate on the Bible, consistent with the discussion in earlier parts of this chapter. Chen describes that the Holy Spirit goes through believers' memory to draw out biblical verses in time of need.<sup>88</sup> For this point, he used two personal stories in which two sets of biblical verses came to him: Phil. 4:6-7 at a time of anxiety and 2 Cor. 12:9 to help him with a challenging problem. Here, Chen throws another wrench into the argument. If believers do not work hard at reading and meditating the Bible, they can incorrectly assume they are hearing from God but really hearing from themselves, or from Satan. To support the latter point, Chen draws from Matthew's account of Jesus's temptation in the desert during which Satan (the CUV names this entity the one who tempts [*na shitan rende*] and the devil [*mogui*]) used scripture to tempt Jesus. The argument is that likewise Satan can use scripture to tempt and confuse believers. The solution offered is that believers must become increasingly familiar with the Bible.

In the second point, Chen draws from biblical texts to show that the Holy Spirit speaks to believers through "a small voice" drawing from 1 Kings 19:12 and through visions (*yixiang*) and prophetic dreams (*yimeng*) from Acts 2:17-18. When read, the first text does not explicitly refer to the Holy Spirit, but instead it says, "Yahweh was not in the fire, after the fire there was a tiny voice".<sup>89</sup> I find that ling'en Christians frequently refer to Acts 2:17-18 to support visions, dreams, and prophecy. Visions, as Chen believes, are those images that appear in our minds (*naohai zhong*) and must be immediately written down and prayed over to understand their meaning and impact to the believer. Besides the content of the vision (drawing from participant examples: a vision to leave a particular church, a vision of a non-Christian struggling with a particular "sin"), the effect

---

<sup>88</sup> This points to the practice of memorization of the Bible.

<sup>89</sup> My translation from the Chinese Union Version.

on the person who receives the vision is to experience God and the veracity of text (Acts 2:17-18).

Finally, Chen notes that the Holy Spirit speaks through believers' conscience (*liangxin*). He cites Rom. 9:1 to argue that our conscience needs to be "woken up" (*huanxing*) by the Holy Spirit to work according to the will of God. And if believers hazard to ignore their conscience - in both the pre-awakened and awakened forms – they will lose their "inner peace" (*neixin pingan*) and must regain it through religious practices. An awakened conscience is subject to more than just a sense of what's right and wrong. It also must "verify" (*chayan*) if an idea is from God in a way similar to the verification of *gandong*. As a rule of thumb, it cannot conflict with the Bible. For example, Chen provides, suicide, divorce, and adultery conflict the Bible and therefore cannot come from God. Second, believers must look for inner peace (Chen cites Colossians 3:15a). And finally, they must pray for evidence (*yinzheng*) (Chen cites 2 Corinthians 13:1).

Throughout the sermon, Chen repeatedly refers to biblical texts to use as support for his arguments and reasoning. In the 48-minute sermon, Chen refers, paraphrases, or reads a total of 23 pericope – 6 from the Old Testament and 17 from the New Testament. Twelve of these are read communally with the text displayed through PowerPoint slides, 5 are displayed with PowerPoint slides but only read by Chen, and 7 are read or paraphrased with no display of the text. As such, the use of biblical texts in this (and most other sermons that I have heard) can be characterized by their practicality and ease of understanding. Texts primarily serve as vehicles to support the argument of the sermon.

Ling'en preaching usually covers very basic Christian beliefs, some might even say it is shallow (*fuqian*). Based on conversations with ling'en pastors, this is not a coincidence. Instead, ling'en preaching is designed to be able to speak convincingly to all audience members regardless of their knowledge of the ling'en faith. The other discursive/scriptural practices, including discussing sermon topic and reading the Bible communally in mid-week gatherings, attending adult Sunday school (which church

leaders repeatedly promote and encourage congregants to attend), and private readings of the Bible function together toward individual growth in ling'en Christianity. This form of Christianity differs from mainstream evangelicalism in that it promotes views that are unique to ling'en, including a heightened sense of literalism and perspicuity in biblical interpretation, the goals of "experiencing the Holy Spirit" through discursive/scriptural practices, and teaching the basics of ling'en theological concepts through preaching.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter began with an exploration of ling'en Christian view of the Bible and concluded with a list of beliefs that underlie their reading of the Christian scripture. They are literalism, perspicuity, religious conservatism, rejection of higher criticism, and continuationalism. Some ling'en also apply concepts found within heterodoxy to preclude mainstream evangelicalism from Christian orthodoxy. The chapter then explores three ling'en discursive/scriptural practices to show that they distinguish themselves from mainstream evangelicalism by focusing on goals that are outside the scope of evangelical discursive/scriptural practices – namely, to learn about and experience the Holy Spirit. However, the practices analyzed in the second section also reveal deep similarities between mainstream evangelicalism and ling'en, so much that their communal discursive/scriptural practices are nearly identical to their counterpart in mainstream evangelicalism. Thus, this exploration centered on the point of contact between the layers of ling'en and evangelicalism amongst participants and found that it is characterized by the *preservation*, *continuation*, and *re-envision* of discursive/scriptural practices.

Our analysis of ling'en discursive/scriptural practices have highlighted several interesting characteristics of Chau's discursive/scriptural modality. First, ling'en challenge the concept that Chinese people are drawn to the discursive/scriptural modality due to their interest in the texts (Chau 2011b, 68). To the contrary, I did not find that ling'en are generally attracted to practices within this modality because of the allure the Christian Bible. For example, participants noted that reading the Christian Bible prior

to their conversion to ling'en was dry or dull (*kuzao*). Rather, the direction seems to be inverted: it is because ling'en are interested in the supernatural experiences promised under a literalist and continuationist reading of the Bible that drive them to engage in discursive/scriptural practices. This reasoning works for both individual practices (such as reading the Bible alone) through which ling'en seek to "encounter Jesus" (*yujuan yesu*) through the text as well as communal practices (such as listening to sermons) through which ling'en teach and learn how to experience God. Second, while the product of the discursive/scriptural modality in Chinese religiosity has historically been texts (that is, new texts are created through discursive practices), the "product" of ling'en discursive/scriptural practices are primarily experiences. With that said, there are textual products in the form of ling'en commentary writings, but these seem to have limited impact within even SGV ling'en communities in part because, as I have discussed in chapter one, ling'en communities do not agree on normative ling'en practices. Finally, broadly speaking, the discursive/scriptural practices of both ling'en and Chinese religiosity seek to shape the behavior of their practitioners in ways that are generally deemed preferable. For example, some *shanshu* seek to regulate behavior by promoting what is righteous while ling'en seek to regulate behavior by nurturing supernatural experiences. Overall, the ling'en case study provides an interesting perspective to our understanding of the discursive/scriptural modality in that the ling'en view allows significantly more religious adherents to participate in the modality by adopting a goal which more people can aim for (spiritual experiences as opposed to discourse and the creation of new texts). This reveals a critical feature of ling'en discursive practices – a strong emphasis on the practicality of religious practices.

While we discussed an important ritual (sermon preaching) within Chinese Christianity, this chapter did not focus on the concept of ritual space and ritual specialists in ling'en Christianity. In the next chapter we turn our focus to rituals, ritual space, ritual specialists and gender.

## Chapter Six: Ling'en Ritual Space and Specialists, and Gender

### Introduction

In this chapter, I employ the liturgical modality to begin an analysis of the ritual space and ritual specialists of Chinese American ling'en Christianity. Like many of the rituals in Chinese religiosity, the rituals in ling'en Christianity are dependent on the concept of magical efficacy. As I have examined this concept in chapter four, this chapter will presume that the reader understands the importance and role of magical efficacy in both immediate-practical and liturgical practices. Instead, this chapter will prioritize its focus on the production of ritual specialists within ling'en Christianity. Based on the observation that women occupy a significant part of ling'en ritual space as ritual specialists, the latter portion of this chapter will discuss gender issues regarding ritual specialists as the point of contact between the layers of Chinese religiosity and ling'en Christianity.

Here I employ a combination of anthropologist Jack Goody and scholar of Pentecostalism Daniel E. Albrecht's definitions of ritual: "those standardized behavior (acts, actions, dramas, performances, and customs) that a community creates, continues, recognizes and sanctions as ways of behaving that express appropriate attitudes, sensibilities, values, and beliefs within a given situation." Albrecht also employs the term "rite" to refer to practices that are recognized by Pentecostals as part of their overall ritual (Albrecht 1999, 22; Robbins 2011, 50).<sup>90</sup> It should be noted that ling'en Christians would object to the terms "ritual" (*yishi*), "liturgy" (*liyi*), and "ritual specialist" (*yishi zhuanjia*). From the emic ling'en view, rituals and liturgies are generally perceived as meaningless, rigid performances that are diametrically opposed to the freedom when filled with the Holy Spirit. In the ling'en view the Holy Spirit cannot be restrained (cf. John 3:8) and that only a "spontaneous" style of worship authentically reflects this freedom. This view is shared by many Pentecostal-charismatic groups and

---

<sup>90</sup> Contrast to Chinese studies in rituals and rites in which rites include both folk and state rituals. Hu 2023.

is one reason why rituals have been largely ignored in the study of Christianity in some parts of the world (Lindhardt 2011, 2; see also Yeung 2011; Harrison 2010, 214-219).

I begin with an overview of the liturgical modality. I note that ritual specialists take a unique role in the rituals of these holidays. The chapter then continues with an in-depth discussion of ling'en ritual specialists with a focus on the concept of "equipping and training" (*zhuangbei xunlian*)<sup>91</sup>, a process which I noted to precede one becoming a ling'en ritual specialist. I then examine two rituals, healing and deliverance (*yizhi shifang*) and Harp and Bowl worship (*qinyulu jingbai*)<sup>92</sup> that SGV ling'en Christians practice. These two rituals have only occurred apart from the main Sunday gathering rituals. Participants explained that this is because ling'en churches prefer to keep their Sunday gathering religious practices akin to those of traditional (*chuantong*) evangelical churches to appeal to visitors who may be more familiar with the style of mainstream evangelicalism. This chapter argues that SGV ling'en offers immigrant Chinese Christians an alternative way of practicing Christianity in which its ritual space has become relatively egalitarian by allowing women and individuals who have not received theological training to participate as ritual specialists, thereby dispersing both institutional and charismatic authority within the ling'en church.

### **The Liturgical Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity**

According to Chau (2006, 75), the liturgical modality is generally the *modality for religious specialists* such as monks, Daoist priests, fengshui masters, *yinyang* masters, Confucian ritual masters, spirit mediums, exorcist-dancers, etc. The modality often involves esoteric knowledge and elaborate ritual procedures. Within the context of Chinese religions, the practices of this modality include exorcism, sutra chanting rites, fengshui maneuvers, feeding hungry ghosts, Imperial state rituals (e.g., the Grand

---

<sup>91</sup> This phrase is used specifically for the training of ritual specialists. It does not refer to the general training of the body described by other scholars. See Csordas 1994; Luhrmann 2004.

<sup>92</sup> It is also called "harp and bowl freely worship" (*qinyulu ziyou jingbai*). The addition of "freely" is to encourage the audience to worship without the formality normally attached to hymn singing. "Freedom" in worship is explicitly verbalized during the Harp and Bowl worship online sessions that I observed. This is characteristic of "Contemporary Praise & Worship", see Ruth and Lim 2021, 18, 315.

Sacrifice), Confucian rites, the Daoist rites of fasting and offerings, exorcism (e.g., a Nuo ritual drama), Daoist or Buddhist rituals for the universal salvation of souls, the Buddhist grand water and land dharma assemblies (Chau 2011b, 73). In his ethnography located in the Hebei plain of north China, Stephen Jones (2011, 154) adds the practices of vocal liturgy and melodic instrumental music for funeral and festivals for the gods and its ritual specialists to the diverse rituals of China. Compared with the personal-cultivational modality, liturgical practices aim at more immediate transformations of reality conducted in complex and highly symbolic forms. They may also be commissioned by and conducted for collective groups such as families, clans, villages, or neighborhoods, temple communities, or the state (Chau 2011b, 73). Within Confucian thought and Chinese religiosity, ritual (*li*) dictates official etiquette as well as sacrificial, birth, capping, wedding and mourning rites, religious services, clothing, correctness, rules of behavior, officials' equipment, inner attitudes and virtues; its meaning is significantly broader than "ritual" (Gentz 2013, 15-18; Fingarette 1998).

### **Pastors, Laypeople, and Female Itinerants as Ritual Specialists**

Since the liturgical modality is the modality of ritual specialists, it is necessary to first define and lay out the context of ling'en ritual specialists. By ling'en "ritual specialists", I refer to the individuals or groups of individuals that perform liturgical sequences (longer than immediate-practical practices)<sup>93</sup> among Christians and non-Christians for the purpose of evoking the Holy Spirit<sup>94</sup> and subsequently effecting immediate physical, mental, and spiritual healings, deliverances, and exorcisms. As far as I've observed, there is no single individual who has self-proclaimed mastery over every currently practiced ling'en ritual. Instead, individuals typically excel at between one and a small handful of ling'en gifts (*enci*). For example, one might consider herself an expert in receiving and interpreting charismatic dreams (*yimeng*) and another may be known as someone who is successful in exorcisms. From my fieldwork I place ritual specialists

---

<sup>93</sup> Usually ranging from half an hour up to a few hours per session. Contrast this to the length of the length of the rituals held in Chinese villages that last up to several days. See Jones 2011, 169.

<sup>94</sup> Since the Holy Spirit is involved, ling'en rituals can also be performed on the individual herself. However, in this chapter I will only discuss rituals that are primarily performed for people other than the performer.

into four categories: ordained and employed pastors (men and women), laypeople, female itinerant ritualists, and “special speakers” (*teshu jiangyuan*) – individuals who may have a close connection with the church but not a regular member.

The senior pastors (*zhuren mushi*) of my fieldsites exemplify the first category of ordained and employed pastors. are known to wield exceptional ling'en gifts. For example, ARC's senior pastor is a recognized ritual master in healing and deliverance. VOH's senior pastor is highly experienced a variety of ling'en gifts including praying in tongues and spiritual insights. GCCI's senior pastor was widely regarded as having a mature set of ling'en gifts that he can use at the appropriate times. In addition, these male senior pastors are known in their communities to be exceptional Christians. As such, each has their own Weberian charismatic authority<sup>95</sup>.

We narrow in on ARC's current senior pastor Fan Hongtai. During sermons he regularly brings up his experience of “being renewed by the Holy Spirit” (*shengling gengxin*) in 2000. By his narration, this was a pivotal moment in his life as a Christian and brought about the advent of his ling'en gifts, and this could be used to explain his authority. However, this does not paint a complete picture of Fan's authority. Prior to becoming the senior pastor of ARC, he was working under Ernest Chen Zhonghui, founding senior pastor of ARC, and over those years Fan's authority was nurtured by Chen. This points to a “traditional ground” explanation of his authority. The relationship between Chen and Fan could be described as that of master and disciple. While this relationship is not included in Weber's description of traditional authority, it somewhat resembles his description of ties based on personal loyalty (Weber 1997, 278). However, the master-disciple relationship is visible in the Chinese context. In addition to the refinement of his ling'en gifts, Fan also developed as a skilled preacher and evangelist but also ritual specialist, manager, YouTuber<sup>96</sup>, teacher, and other roles to sustain the future of ARC

---

<sup>95</sup> Weber (1997, 266-267, 291) argued that there are three pure types of legitimate authority: on rational grounds (relying on the legality of normative rules), on traditional grounds (resting on the sanctity of traditions), and on charismatic grounds (relying on devotion to an individual based on their exceptional sanctity).

<sup>96</sup> Rev. Fan has his own YouTube channel called “Fanstory” (*fan'geshua*) which has both short and long form videos that are broadly discursive/scriptural and personal-cultivational in nature.

as an organization. Therefore, Weber's charismatic type alone does not fully explain the authority of second-generation senior pastors (and in their role as ritual specialists) such as those of ARC and GCCI. Also significant to pastoral authority is the support they receive in their master-disciple relationships; through which the congregation can observe the training that the disciple receives and from which the disciple gains authority. Therefore, as SGV ling'en becomes increasingly mature as it moves into the 21<sup>st</sup> century and out of its beginnings in the 1980s and 90s, a mix of both charismatic (via ling'en gifts and Christian character) and traditional (via master-disciple relationship) grounds better describes pastoral authority and legitimacy in conducting rituals.

Within ling'en communities, some laypeople gradually take up the role of ritual specialists. These are usually longstanding members who are held in high regard for their ling'en gifts and usually in positions of authority to operate as ritual specialists. These individuals would usually qualify as "gandong masters".<sup>97</sup> In the context of the church, lay believers who intend to become ritual specialists may pose a threat to pastoral and lay leaders with similar ritualistic abilities. In the field, I have seen two broad responses. The first is re-establishing harmony and equilibrium between the ritual performances of pastoral leaders and lay believers; most frequently, lay believers may be ceded some power by receiving some opportunities to perform rituals in a variety of contexts. In this case, the pastoral leader may enter into a master-disciple relationship with the lay believer. For example, at ARC there is a significant demand for ritual specialists due to an increase in online attendance by mainland Chinese Christians. In these cases, lay believers may be encouraged to take up the role of ritual specialists to meet these demands while also honing their ritualistic skills.

The other phenomenon is disharmony, often leading to the lay believer breaking away from the institution and its pastoral authority. In my study, these cases were all women. Following this break, she goes on to conduct ling'en rituals by carving out her own

---

<sup>97</sup> The connection between cultivational mastery and religious specialists has been observed in Chinese religiosity including spirit mediums and meditating scholars (Goossaert 2008, 14).

space and establishing her own charismatic authority. I call this group of ling'en Christians "female itinerant ritualists". They conduct ling'en rituals apart from established institutions. They style themselves "pastors" (*mushi*), usually following theological education at ARC. Some ordain themselves and work primarily as ling'en specialists either not attached to any institution or for their own organization. A common theme amongst this group is that they are older in age, retired, and they and/or their spouse have pensions from decade long (non-church related) careers, Social Security Retirement benefits, and other forms of retirement (such as 401(k) Plan, IRA, and/or Taiwan's National Pension Insurance and claim that they do not require salaries to work as ritual specialists.

Female itinerant ritualists can and have started their own organizations, work in smaller gatherings such as fellowships, and can perform rituals in private homes. As such they do not need the sanction of their pastor and church and continue to gain in experience in conducting rituals. Indeed, several participants informed me that when they were still attending evangelical churches but learning to become ling'en ritual specialists, they not only kept hidden their practices but told others to do so too. Surprisingly, this remains true even as participants move into SGV ling'en churches – for example, an individual may attend GCCI regularly but also visit ARC to train to become a ritual specialist and then go on to use those gifts in more private spaces.

### **"Equipping and Practicing" as Process for Ritual Specialist Training**

#### *Equipping (zhuangbei)*

To conduct ling'en rituals, individuals must first discover their ritualistic ling'en gifts. Many ling'en gifts can be used in both ritual and individual settings. For example, speaking in tongues is often practiced during rituals (usually spontaneously) and privately. It is taught by ling'en that when tongues are used privately, it is for personal edification. However, no such teaching exists regarding ritualistic tongue use. Following discovery, they must have sufficient "equipping and practice" in various ling'en gifts. The goal of equipping and practicing is to ensure one's ability to effect change through rituals. Broadly speaking, the difference between the pastor and layperson is that the

pastor has received some form of “equipping of knowledge” (*zhishi de zhuangbei*) which denotes formal theological education. This “equipping at seminary” (*shenxueyuan de zhuangbei*) means earning a master’s degree and/or theological certificates from a local seminary. Through such programs, students may learn biblical languages, interpretation of Christian scriptures, church history, pastoral and organizational skills, and personal spiritual formation. Equipping of knowledge may also include other modes of theological studies such as attending theological courses in a church, including in the Sunday School (*zhurixue*) setting. While equipping of knowledge certainly has its value within the ling’en context and is a generally a prerequisite for employment as pastoral staff in Chinese immigrant churches in the United States, participants overwhelmingly perceive this mode of equipping by itself as *insufficient* for conducting effective ling’en rituals. On a practical level, they argue that those who undergo theological training lack the skills and experience necessary to conduct effective ling’en rituals. Contrast to some other Chinese ritual specialists that require esoteric knowledge (such as *yinyang* masters, Daoist priests, and Buddhist monks), ling’en ritual specialists require esoteric gifts through the filling of the Holy Spirit. These gifts may also be “transferred” or “prophesied” to one individual by another through prophecies.

The relationship between formal theological education and working as a ling’en ritual specialist can be elusive. Having the “right” amount and type of theological education can greatly augment one’s ability to work as a ritual specialist. For example, in reviewing videos of ling’en rituals it is advantageous for church leaders (both pastoral and lay) to be able to masterfully draw from biblical texts and interpretation to support ling’en practices. Ling’en pastors can impressively draw large quantities of biblical texts from memory. Yet on the other hand, participants reported that having excessive or the “wrong kind” of theological education may be considered a hindrance and viewed as “prideful” (*jiaobao*) endeavors. Ch’en (male, 60s) said “in seminary we study all sorts of knowledge (*zhishi*), but the most important thing about seminary is to learn about God... to go gain spiritual experience (*shuling de jingli*).” Here we can see Ch’en distinguishing head knowledge and spiritual experience, of which the latter translates into ling’en ritual experience. Therefore, the wrong kind of theological education refers to when a student

is overwhelmingly concerned with head knowledge and disregards spiritual experience. Furthermore, too much theological head knowledge may be perceived as a threat against ling'en and its practices. A simple example would be a theologically trained individual discussing the validity of cessationism in a ling'en gathering.

This leads to the second type of ling'en equipping: the "equipping of experiences" (*jingli de zhuangbei*), which in the context of SGV ling'en refers to the formal and informal learning and exercising of ling'en gifts. We are reminded here again of the tension between "head knowledge" and "experiential knowledge" that ling'en emphasize. Through interviews with many ling'en individuals who underwent equipping of experiences, I identify three phases in recent decades. The first phase spanned from the 1980s through the mid-1990s. This phase was characterized by the ling'en Christians' reliance on gatherings and courses offered by non-Chinese, Americans such as those of C. Peter Wagner and John Wimber. A small handful of participants who work as evangelists (*chuandao*) and pastors (*mushi*) reported their first encounter of ling'en and subsequent equipping of experiences during these years. From these experiences, participants learned one or more charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues, "power encounter", and "preaching or evangelism that is accompanied with power" (*daizhe nengli de budao*). According to Alan Tippet, power encounters are the clashing of the kingdom of God with the kingdom of Satan. Power evangelism is a "spontaneous, Spirit-inspired, empowered presentation of the gospel" that is "preceded and undergirded by demonstrations of God's presence and frequently results in groups of people being saved" (Wimber and Springer 2013, 40-41, 60). At this point, SGV ling'en Christians were primarily in the learning phase and had not begun to extensively put these gifts into ritualistic use.

The second phase extends from the mid-1990s through the 2000s primarily through the teachings of FRCC's Jiang. During this phase, Jiang's teachings – in particular "Construction of the Inner Life" (*neizai shengming de jianzao*) and "Filling of the Holy Spirit" (*shengling chongman*) made its way through evangelical churches across the

United States<sup>98</sup>, attracting some to study at FRCC and return to their original churches to operate privately as ritual specialists, primarily focusing on healing rituals. The third phase began in the second half of the 2000s and continues today. In this phase, ARC and its training institutions: Agape International Leadership Institute (AILI) and Agape iSchool play a central role in equipping SGV Christians with ling'en experiences.

Agape and its training institutions have the advantage of offering degree certificates (although these are not accredited by ATS) that focus on this second type of equipping. By doing so they avoid the pitfalls of the first type of equipping, namely theological education that does not meaningfully add to ling'en ritualistic needs. Beyond ARC, some non-Chinese pastors such as Mike Bickle (founder of the International House of Prayer) and Elias Antonas continue to equip ling'en Christians in this third phase. The range of ling'en gifts used in ritualistic settings expanded greatly during this phase. Furthermore, characteristic to the progression of these three stages is a gradual transition from Chinese American ling'en learning of ling'en gifts taught to them by non-Chinese Pentecostal-charismatic Americans toward Chinese American ling'en developing their own centers of ling'en training that operate, based on my observations in the field, primarily in Mandarin<sup>99</sup>. As part of this indigenizing process, ling'en rituals have naturally taken on its own characteristics that reflect Chinese, Taiwanese, Hong Kongese, Chinese American, and other Chinese immigrant sensibilities and needs. One clear example is the training of ritual specialists in healing and deliverance to know supernatural entities in Chinese cosmologies. The third phase is significant in that it represents a clearer pathway to the normalization of the training of ling'en ritual specialists. While ARC leads in this space, it will likely not remain the only source of ling'en ritualist training.

---

<sup>98</sup> From interviews, participants who were living in Chicago, New Jersey, New York, Seattle, and other places had heard about Jiang and many travelled to Northern California to attend special gatherings.

<sup>99</sup> The increased use of Mandarin may be partially explained by recent immigration patterns in the United States. Using "persons obtaining lawful permanent resident" status as an indicator, we see that mainland China's numbers since the 1990s have exploded. See United States 2023, 8-10.

### *Practicing (xunlian)*

If equipping is the process of how one learns ling'en gifts for the purpose of conducting rituals (we can visualize equipping as someone obtaining a degree), then practice (*xunlian*) is the subsequent training and refining of their charismatic abilities (we can picture practice as someone participating in an internship). Of course, there is some overlapping as suggested using the compound phrase "equipping and practice" (*zhuangbei xunlian*), however practice should be separately examined because it occurs well beyond any distinguishable equipping phase of a ling'en ritual specialist. Practice typically occurs in two settings: under controlled environments and "in the wild". For the former, many participants reported practicing ling'en gifts at FRCC and/or ARC. Take for example, Chu who went to FRCC to take courses at their training center (*xunlian zhongxin*). She immediately followed up with a comment to indicate that she knew the relevant difference between training center and a seminary (*shenxueyuan*), namely that the training center focuses on practice while her understanding of seminary is its focus on equipping of knowledge. At the FRCC training center, she practiced and obtained a self-reported mastery of the healing and deliverance (*yizhi shifang*) ritual. Later she would go on to perform this ritual on other ling'en Christians at ARC and privately. Practice out "in the wild" has also been used to retrospectively describe one's experience in putting ling'en gifts to use in a ritualistic setting. For example, one participant said:

Many years ago, when I was out of the country<sup>100</sup> (*zaiguowai*), I had many opportunities to do healing and deliverance and cast out demons. So, I practiced (*xunlian*) a lot. When I succeeded... no, not that I succeeded, but that Jesus did it, I gave glory to God.

As generally reported, participants may practice up to several years before they claim to be familiar with their ritualistic ling'en gifts. By then, they have and continue to grow in mastery over the gifts and conduct effective rituals. Also, like equipping (*zhuangbei*),

---

<sup>100</sup> By this they meant they were traveling out of the United States.

practicing (*xunlian*) conjures images of a person training in preparation before a battle. This warfare language can be found in Pentecostal-charismatic Christianity in other contexts (Marshall 2018).

Ling'en use of *xunlian* has two meanings. The first is identical to mainstream evangelical's use of the *xunlian*, for example as "discipleship training" (*mentu xunlian*) or "Bible training" (*shengjing xunlian*). The other use, which is exclusive to ling'en, refers to activities related to learning and developing, indeed, cultivating charismatic gifts. Some call this "training in the spirit" (*zai lingli de xunlian*). Seen through this lens, one could easily argue that *xunlian* belongs in the cultivational modality since it is about transforming oneself. However, because it is often used to describe training oneself or receiving training *for the explicit purpose of conducting rituals*, it fits better into the liturgical modality. To strengthen this argument, we consider that another term is used somewhat interchangeably with *xunlian* – that is *caolian*, which can also be translated as practicing or training. Since ling'en use of *caolian* almost always refers to a private practice that focuses on one's personal cultivation, it is by far more appropriate in the cultivational modality. In addition to *caolian*, participants also use the phrase "pursue" (*zhuiqiu*) to refer to practicing ling'en gifts. The phrase, *zhuiqiu*, highlights the idea that one must deliberately go out to learn and practice ling'en gifts as was the case for many participants who regularly attended mainstream evangelical churches. Contrast to *caolian* and *zhuiqiu*, which are characterized by their cultivational nature, *xunlian* denotes its telos in rituals.

We can make several remarks about the concept of equipping and practicing (*zhuangbei xunlian*) within ling'en. First, it captures the routinization of the processes through which ling'en gifts are taught, learned (or gained), practiced, and mastered. In this sense, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are regulated and restrained, generally framed within existing ling'en organizations, leadership, and key players. Yet the fact that there is the category of female itinerant ritualists – those who break some part of the existing mold through the opportunity to practice their gifts in ritualistic settings – suggests that the repertoire of ling'en gifts is not entirely captured by the current ling'en organizations

and pastoral leadership. Therefore, ling'en gifts as a category are unlikely to remain stagnant – as evidenced by the changes seen across the three phases of equipping in recent decades. Second, my findings contradict Gotthard Oblau's (2011, 312) report in China that the conducting of ritualistic healings are reserved for ordained evangelists and ministers. Instead, I found that equipping and practice is available (and sometimes even encouraged) to all ling'en Christians – regardless of gender, age, and theological training. Even the so-called degree of spiritual maturity (*shuling chengshudu*) is a factor that can be overlooked.<sup>101</sup> Again, this increased democratization of ling'en equipping and training suggests that it will continue to experience transformations.<sup>102</sup>

Finally, if ling'en rituals remain in demand (which recent history suggests that they will), ling'en ritual training will continue. As noted earlier, this ling'en training emphasizes the equipping of experiences and ling'en training of gifts, often with less concern for so called formal theological training (which is typically mandatory with Chinese American mainstream evangelicalism). This difference in viewpoint will ensure that the ritual specialists of ling'en and mainstream evangelicalism will continue to partially operate in their own spheres with the possibility of ensuring that ling'en and evangelicals will not agree on normative religious practices. Now that we have explored the training of ritual specialists of SGV ling'en, I would like to turn our attention to two rituals. The first is healing and deliverance performed by a male pastor, and the second is Harp and Bowl worship performed by a female layperson. As I noted earlier, there are many other rituals that ling'en perform. However, these two will help highlight some important factors of ling'en rituals: their liturgical complexities, the charismatic authority of the specialist, and the issue of gender in ling'en ritual space.

### **Ritual Specialists and Healing**

Ling'en healing rituals occur nearly always outside of the main Sunday gatherings. If organized by pastors, they are frequently held in their own church building (e.g., the

---

<sup>101</sup> See Robbins 2011, 56. Indeed, it was reported by a participant that a new believer had already begun to “practice” her gifts. Although it did not seem she was ready to conduct ling'en rituals yet.

<sup>102</sup> Haynes (2017, 86) discusses the egalitarian elements of Pentecostalism in her fieldsite of Zambia which is reflected in the sharing of ritual specialist tasks by laypeople during intercessory prayer.

ritual of “Miracle Reappears” held in the main sanctuary of ARC; the ritual of “Encountering God” held at GCCI) but may also be organized in other church buildings (e.g., GCCI members attending “healing and deliverance” rituals at ARC). As described in the previous section, rituals may also be held in the homes of fellow believers. Unfortunately, I was not able to observe any ling’en rituals conducted in the homes of individuals. However, a small number of participants described their participation in the ritual of “cleansing the house”. During this ritual, one or more ling’en ritual specialists will walk throughout the house and pray out loud for the purpose of “getting rid of evil spirits”. These specialists also function as “evil spirit detectors”, even capable of detecting details about the evil spirit(s) such as their strength and type. For example, one participant recounted her experience of detecting a strong “evil spirit of pride” (*jiaodao de ling*) during her visit of a fellow believer’s residence. In cases of intense evil presence, multiple experienced specialists may organize themselves to visit and use Christian paraphernalia such as the Bible and olive oil to cleanse and cast protection on the home and its inhabitants. Based on one participant’s experience of encountering evil spirits at a home that she had previously cleansed, the ritual – like many other ling’en rituals – may be repeated due to high likelihood of re-infestation of evil spirits.

Of the “official” rituals, there are two types of healing events – ones that are routinely held at ARC, and special gatherings during which members from one or more churches gather. When ling’en specialists conduct rituals, they call it “serving” (*fushi*). This is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide range of activities. For example, visiting an ill person at the hospital is called *fushi*; leading Bible study is *fushi*; and even bringing a dish to a potluck dinner can be called *fushi*. However, in the ling’en context, *fushi* also means to ritualistically serve others through ling’en gifts. For example, ling’en participants would say “I served (*fushi*) my brothers and sisters with visions (*yixiang*)”, meaning a person received one or more visions regarding another person, and proceeds to perform a brief prayer followed by sharing and explaining the vision and its meaning.

The boundary between fushi and practice is not always clear, and the two activities may be one in the same – while conducting the healing, the specialist will likely call it fushi (and not xunlian as to avoid skepticism on the part of the person receiving the ritualistic healing). However, years later (as in the pastor above), they may look back on the healings as xunlian and fushi. Ling'en specialists emphasize the importance of prayer (*daogao*) and fasting (*jinshi*) in the hours and sometimes days leading up to these rituals as they believe to be engaging with the “powers of darkness” (*hei'an de quanshi*) during the rituals.

In this section, I draw from a routine ritual conducted by a male senior pastor. Since 2020 until the present, ARC has held a weekly Friday evening gathering called “Miracle Reappears” (*shenji zaixian*)<sup>103</sup>. In these two-hour long gatherings, the first 75 minutes are for worship singing and sermon that is very similar to Sunday gatherings. The final forty-five minutes are for the healing ritual comprised of two components. First, prayers that closely involve the body. And second, for the presentation of “testimonies” (*jianzheng*) of healings from previous weeks.

As the prayers for healing begin, the general lights are dimmed, and the front stage lights are muted slightly. Light instrumental music begins to play. The pastor calls for everyone to prepare for ritual specialists to “pray and serve everyone” (*weidajia daogao fushi*). The pastor calls for people to stand up and close their eyes. He also instructs coworkers (*tonggong*) to put on colored vests. The ritual begins with an extended prayer in which the pastor speaks, and the audience repeats, with their hands extended out and palms facing up, eyes remaining closed, head tilted slight upward (*tou yangqilai*)<sup>104</sup>,

---

<sup>103</sup> During an interview, an ARC pastor told me that *shenji zaixian* was formerly (before 2020) called “Night of the Holy Spirit” (*shengling zhiye*), was held in-person on Thursday evenings, and recorded and uploaded to YouTube. The shift to “Miracle Reappears” occurred as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic when in person gatherings was restricted in Los Angeles County beginning in early to mid-2020. This was not only a change in time (from Thursday to Saturday) but more importantly, a transition to Zoom live gatherings such that people from mainland China (Beijing time 08:00 to 10:00), Taiwan, and the United States can attend. The compound characters for “reappears” is likely a play on the characters for “online” as they both have the same pronunciation in Mandarin. This double entendre points to “supernatural miracles” repeatedly occurring (first *zaixian*) through the Internet (second *zaixian*). Several ARC members considered this transition a huge success as Zoom participation regularly surpassed 500 people whereas in person gatherings were limited to fewer than 80 people due to the size of the hall.

<sup>104</sup> The upward tilting of the head allows for the individual to gain a better reception of the Holy Spirit.

and “mouth slightly opened” (*zuiba zhangkai yidian*). When asked why this posture was repeatedly emphasized, I was told by a participant that the opening of the mouth and tilting forward of the chin allows for easier movement of the Holy Spirit into the body. At the same time, the posture also gives sickness and evil spirits an opening to leave the body. Below is an example of the prayer:

Our dear Abba, Heavenly Father  
(each line is then repeated in unison by the audience)  
In the name of Jesus Christ  
Pray for your Holy Spirit  
To be on my body  
And move freely  
Take away ... inside me  
Whatever that does not belong to Christ's power  
Take away ... inside me  
All powers of illness  
All powers of curses  
Dearest Holy Spirit  
I fully rely on you  
I pray you come  
Now  
And release your powers  
To deal with the powers of illness  
To be completely removed  
Dearest Lord  
I welcome you  
Your Holy Spirit  
To be, now  
On my body  
In the name of Jesus Christ's name  
Amen

The pastor reminds everyone to keep their eyes closed. He continues with a spoken prayer for Jesus's healing. The pastor inserts into the prayer blessings such as “may the anointing of the Holy Spirit anoint you” (*shengling de engao gaomo ni*), “spiritual observations” such as “I see that there is fear, sadness, gloominess inside some people here” (*wokandao youxieren limian you jupa youshang jusang*), and commands such as

“release!” (*shifang*) while repeating “in Jesus’s name” and “hallelujah”.<sup>105</sup> The pastor instructs coworkers to walk around and place their hands on the shoulders of people and pray for them<sup>106</sup>. Meanwhile the pastor himself continues to instruct people to keep their posture, while going around putting his hand on people, praying for them and shouting *shifang*. This ritual lasts around fifteen minutes.

The pastor spends approximately five minutes per set of illnesses by body part. He first asks those who suffer from any item(s) in the set to stand up. In any given set, between three and ten people will stand up while the remaining (usually a majority) will remain seated. He then prays for them to receive healing. During these prayers his eyes are usually closed, but he also opens them throughout the prayer to observe the participants. On occasion, the pastor will ask participants to place their hands on the area with the illness or pain to suggest that God will heal that part of the body mediated through his prayers and their hands. Quite frequently, the pastor will ask participants to do brief physical exercises, such as head rotations for those who suffer from neck pain. Throughout these prayers and exercises, he repeatedly asks his participants whether they feel better or not. Some visibly nod up and down (signaling an agreement with the pastor) while others remain still. This is repeated for three to five sets of illnesses before the next section. Combined, these actions reinforce the idea that God intends to heal these illnesses, and this desire is channeled through the pastor, prayers, and brief physical movement.

The healing ritual described above is clearly an embodied liturgy (Robbins, 2010).<sup>107</sup> Those who desire to receive healing will be more likely to obey the pastor’s instructions to keep a very particular posture – standing up, eyes closed, hands out, palm facing up, head tilted up, mouth slightly opened. They were also instructed not to *pray* and to keep a posture of “receiving” (*lingshou*). On the other hand, the ritual specialists (pastor and

---

<sup>105</sup> While the emotions are often not as ecstatic as Cao’s (2011, 114) description of the “female mass meetings” in Wenzhou, there are many similarities to their rituals.

<sup>106</sup> In another church’s ritual healings, I have seen coworkers wrap their arms gently around the person being prayed for. In this way, men pray for men and women pray for women.

<sup>107</sup> Contrary to healing liturgies in many Chinese religious traditions that rely on talismans and medical prescriptions (*jifang*) through spirit-writings. See Goossaert 2022.

coworker) walked around, eyes open (to see who needed serving), hands ready to place on people, and mouths ready to pray. When prayed for them, bodies reacted differently. Some hunched their backs and lowered their heads as is the typical physical response to being prayed for; however, at this time, they were told to raise their heads and keep them raised so that they can continue to receive from the Holy Spirit. As the ritual concludes, each person remains standing as everyone “cools down”. This cool down period signifies that the ritual is ending and that the Holy Spirit has worked intensely throughout the ritual.

### **Harp and Bowl: A Case study of Female Itinerant Ritualists**

In their book, *A History of Contemporary Praise*, Ruth and Lim trace two theological ideas – *presence* and *purpose* – that reshaped Protestant liturgical practices in the second half of the twentieth century. Presence highlights the prioritization of fulfilling biblical promises about how God’s people can expect to experience God’s presence during worship. Purpose centers on the use of interesting, relevant, and accessible worship practices to attract people to Christianity and keep them as worshippers (Ruth and Lim 2011, 12). Ling’*en* participants of this study expressed similar ideas. They sought for worship through which they can experience togetherness with God (*jinglidaoshen de tongzai*). They also frequently criticize the worship of traditional church (*chuantong jiaohui*) as flavorless (*wuwei*), dry (*kuzao*), and most frequently not evoking *gandong* (*meiyou gandong*). For ling’*en* during worship, the presence of God was mostly recognized through the production of *gandong* accompanied by emotions (e.g., feeling elated, excited, peaceful, regretful), physical responses (e.g., feeling hot, speaking in tongues).

The three fieldsites employed contemporary praise for different purposes. At ARC the purpose of worship does not seem to be focused on drawing in new believers. Instead, as many ARC participants reported, the origination of its church was to provide a place for new graduates of their programs to have an income (*youge shouru*), to continue to practice (*xunlian*) to become ritual specialists, and to help all congregants to develop a deeper connection with God. However, the purpose at VOH and GCCI aligns more with

Ruth and Lim's argument – their primary purpose is indeed to attract “seekers” (*mudaoyou*) while retaining existing Christian congregants.

In my interviews I found that ling'en Christians across all fieldsites were drawn towards Harp and Bowl worship, a practice that I did not find amongst mainstream evangelicals. Harp and Bowl worship can be traced back to the Metro Vineyard Fellowship in Kansas City, Missouri in the early 1990s (as far as I know, there were few if any Chinese in these non-Chinese Harp and Bowl contexts). The congregation connected the Praise & Worship model of worship singing with intercessory prayer. Whereas Harp and Bowl worship was implemented at Kansas City's International House of Prayer to form the 24/7 worship movement, Harp and Bowl worship went another direction amongst ling'en Christians (Ruth and Lim 2021, 154-155). One stark difference I observed between Harp and Bowl in the non-Chinese versus the Chinese context is that in the Chinese context, women tend to be the majority of Harp and Bowl worshippers. The first time I heard about Harp and Bowl worship was from the first participant I interviewed, Chu. When I told her that I had never heard of the practice before, she was quick to point to its biblical basis from Revelation 5:8:

When he took the scroll, four living creatures and twenty-four elders fell down before the lamb, each holding a harp and a golden bowl full of incense. This incense is the prayers of the saints.<sup>108</sup>

Ling'en Christians have taken this image of prayer (and singing from the next verse) as a biblical foundation for Harp and Bowl worship. Ironically, during fieldwork I did not see anyone holding a harp or bowl (much less a golden bowl) for this style of worship. It was explained that the harp is a metaphor for worship singing while the bowl (not incense) is for prayers. As such, Harp and Bowl worship is a style of worship singing blended with prayers. One ARC pastor explains the motivation behind Harp and Bowl worship:

---

<sup>108</sup> My translation from the Chinese Union Version.

Harp and Bowl worship helps to bring us from intuition (*wuxing*) into spiritual (*lingxing*), from natural (*ziran*) into supernatural (*chao ziran*) ... we must put away our intuition and enter into the supernatural.

The concept of Chinese *wuxing* (also translated as the power of understanding, comprehension and intuition) differs from Western concept of rationality (often translated as *lixing*). *Wuxing* can be understood as the combination of Confucian “external intuition” and Daoist and Zen Buddhist “internal intuition” (Lian 2006). Participants make a distinction between “prayers based in comprehension” (*wuxing de daogao*) and tongue prayer (*fangyan daogao*) where the latter is viewed as the preferable form of cultivational prayer. Through Harp and Bowl worship, ling'en expect to go beyond Western rationality as well as Chinese *wuxing* to enter a wholly spiritual experience. It is in this spiritual experience that the production of gandong often occurs.

Although I was not able to attend a Harp and Bowl worship in person, one of my participants sent a video of herself leading a session. The video clip is nearly half an hour long and is pointed at one corner of the front stage of ARC's main worship hall. On the stage three people – two female and one male – are seated on metal and black leather stools. Behind them and against the back wall are several nations' flags on flag poles. These symbolize the evangelism of all nations and are not particular to the Harp and Bowl worship session. Besides these, there are no other symbolic objects. Therefore, the complexity of religious symbolism and liturgy of the Harp and Bowl worship does not lie in its use of objects, but rather in the elaborate combination of instrumental music, prayers, scripture recitation, and other vocal liturgies as we will see below.

The lead is female and in front of her is an electric piano, a music stand with a lamp attached, and a microphone pointed towards her face. Another woman is seated on a stool next to her. She holds a microphone and stands behind a music stand. A man is seated on the other side, with an electric guitar, foot pedals, and a microphone stand. Although all three individuals sing, pray, and speak throughout the worship session, the

lead is *the* ritual specialist. Before we describe the ritual itself, participants told me that there are many challenges to leading Harp and Bowl worship. For example, Fang – who regularly leads worship at ARC commented on the challenges and goals of leading:

Even though I have loved music and singing since my youth, leading (*dailing*) Harp and Bowl worship is difficult for me because I cannot capture the tempo correctly (*zhuabuzhu paizi*). When I lead, I want to bring the audience into the Spirit (*jinru dao lingli*). Once I find the direction of the Spirit, I may sing the same song for a long time.

Two participants – both female – report that to achieve the goal of bringing audience members into a spiritual experience *lingxing*, the specialist must prepare in advance by praying and selecting themes, biblical verses, prayers, and worship songs. Viewed this way, the ritual specialist must have adequate ritual knowledge (i.e., the process) but more importantly, she must be a *gandong* master – one who can produce *gandong* for her audience. Furthermore, the ritual itself is far less spontaneous than suggested by participants, and more routinized as found by scholars of Pentecostal-charismatic rituals (Robbins 2010, 164). In the remainder of this section, I will focus on the female ritualist. She gently plays the piano for a minute and begins the “prayer” section. In the following eight minutes, there are two types of prayers: one closely resembling the typical prayer that precedes Sunday gathering worship singing, and a second type of prayer, *scriptural-prayer*, in which the lead draws from various biblical texts to form a frame to the prayer. She continues to play the piano as she begins the first type of prayer. She speaks slowly, deliberately, and pauses into the microphone:

May God open our ears, open our eyes, open our hearts... Let us abundantly, fully receive all of what God wants to give to us. [pause] The Bible says, His will towards his sons and daughters, is not to bring disaster but to give peace... It is a desire to give blessings, so that we may have a future. [pause] So that we may have hope. It might be that our God is something we cannot understand even if

we spend our entire lives. [pause] But in our lives, every experience, every situation will bring us into a deeper experience of Him.<sup>109</sup>

What begins as spoken words (in the normal sense) quickly transforms into a prayer as her eyes close and she speaks to the rhythm of the instrumental music. Following the prayer, she slowly sings from two groups of phrases, selecting items from each group and repeating several times in no discernable order:

Group 1:

Lord, I/we worship you (*zhu, wo/women jingbai ni*)

Lord, I/we look up (*zhu, wo/women yangwang*)

Lord, I /we take refuge (*zhu, wo/women toukao*)

Group 2:

Then you support me/us (*nijiu fuchi wo/women*)

Then you held me/us up (*nijiu tuozhu le wo/women*)

Following a short pause, she continues with the *scriptural-prayer* phase of prayer, drawing from Psalms 61 verses 1 and 2, and John 16:33. In her prayer, she raises the description of “heart feeling faint” (*xinli fahun*) and connects it to the situation of the audience. As this session was recorded in 2020, the foremost issue was COVID-19, to which she makes an explicit connection.

As the light piano and electric guitar instrumental music continues, she continues the prayer by drawing from John 16:33. She reverses the text and prayerfully speaks:

Jesus said, “on earth you will have sufferings (*kunan*), but in me, you will have peace.” This peace is not empty (*kongde*) because Jesus said, “because I have already overcome this world”.

She wraps up the prayer by singing Psalm 61:2. This prayer lasts several minutes, and its central focus is to contextualize the themes of suffering, difficulties, and the

---

<sup>109</sup> My translation from the Mandarin prayer.

triumphant (*shengguo*) peace found in Jesus to herself<sup>110</sup> and to her audience. Furthermore, this prayer section is different from the initial prayer in that it goes beyond fulfilling biblical promises that Christians should be able to experience God during worship. Rather, ling'en expect to experience the specifics of the biblical promises through Harp and Bowl worship. In this case, to recognize within themselves feelings of the "heart feeling faint" because of their own suffering/trouble<sup>111</sup> (Psalms 6:2 and John 16:33), followed by the crying out to God (Psalms 61:1) and the resolution to their troubles in that Jesus has overcome the world (John 16:33). Here the resolution functions as a climax for the entire prayer section.

The next section is the interlude, which includes the use of various vocal devices including melismas<sup>112</sup> and ornamentals by the lead while the supporting members harmonize with her singing. A critical component to the interlude is the "call to worship", during which the lead bids the audience to "come before God" (*laidaoshen de mianqian*) and to "open the mouth, pray, and worship" (*kaikou daogao jingbai*).

Worship singing begins with the bridge of the worship song, "You Are Worthy" (*peide peide nishi peide, rongyao gui wo zhu*)<sup>113</sup>. The bridge is repeated several times and slowly. Then the lead transitions into the chorus of another worship song, Alabaster Jar (*xianggao de yuping*)<sup>114</sup>. The group continues to sing the chorus while mixing in the bridge of "You Are Worthy". The singing repeats and mixes, lasting a total of about fifteen minutes. Near the end of these fifteen minutes, there is a buildup of volume in vocals and instrumentals to a climax. Very quickly, the session winds down, vocals stop, and instrumental sounds become quieter as the lead prays to close the session.

---

<sup>110</sup> During this section, she directed much of the prayer to herself, saying "me/I" (*wo* 我).

<sup>111</sup> In the Chinese Union Version translation Jn. 16:33 uses the phrase "suffering" (*kunan*). However, the original word, ὀλιψις, is in reference to the persecution that the disciples will face. See Danker et al., s.v. "ὀλιψις". Note that the lead's use of the idea is incorrectly taken out of context, but its use is effective to the Harp and Bowl worship session.

<sup>112</sup> The singing of several notes on one syllable – either the vowel sound of the syllable or non-verbal sound. See Youssef, 2022 for a study on the use of melisma in Contemporary Popular Music.

<sup>113</sup> The worship song, "You Are Worthy" was produced by Stream of Praise Ministries (*zanmei zhiquan*)

<sup>114</sup> Translated into Mandarin from an English worship song by Gateway Worship.

As we see, Harp and Bowl is a complex liturgy comprising of a variety of prayers, call to worship, and worship singing. The ritual specialist has the task of preparing in advance (selection of themes, songs, and prayers) but also the spontaneous requirements “at the moment” (for example, the number of times a prayer, chorus, or bridge is used, and the order of singing within the worship singing section). We are reminded by Fang’s interview that leading this liturgy requires much skill, knowledge, and spontaneous decision-making from the specialist – of which is gradually acquired through the processes of equipping and practicing and personal-cultivational practices. While magical efficacy undergirds both the Miracle Reappears and Harp and Bowl worship rituals, the latter has greater complexity in its creative use of vocal and instrumental liturgies. Furthermore, whereas Miracle Reappears relies almost entirely on the gandong of the pastor (the audience’s primary role is to trust the gandong of the pastor and react accordingly), Harp and Bowl depend critically on the specialist’s ability to produce gandong as well as her own experience with gandong – and in this way, the latter ritual is more demanding. Based on interview data, it can take months, even years, to become a proficient specialist for this type of ritual, on top of the time it takes to become a gandong master.

### **Gender and Female Itinerant Ritualists in Ling’en and Chinese Religiosity**

The previous case raises the issue of gender amongst Chinese Christian ritual specialists. Studies have found that women are overwhelmingly more active in the Chinese church than men, yet men dominate leadership roles including traditional ritual specialist roles such as preaching and leading religious holidays (Kang 2016, 35; Cao 2011, 99; Fiedler 2013; Miller 2017, 19; cf. Tong and Yang 2017). Furthermore, it is well documented that female leadership has been a controversial subject in Chinese American evangelical churches (Yang 2004). In churches influenced by Reformed theology in mainland China, ethnographer Kang Jie (2019) found that men impose strict rules about doctrine learning and acquiring the “truth” while women hold less prominent roles in determining normative practices and are expected to play the roles of helper and assistant in church life. This is relevant because immigrant Chinese mainstream

evangelical churches as well as ling'en Christianity in the United States are deeply influenced by Calvinism (Ong 2020).

Beyond theological influences, Yang (2004) suggests that American fundamentalism and Confucian patriarchy also contribute to male domination in Chinese churches. Regarding the latter, some scholars have noted the role of Confucianism ideologies in shaping women's place and role in family and society (Gao 2003). However, this strict Confucian reading of "separate gender spheres" has been challenged through an analysis of historical texts reflecting "anti-Confucian" critiques. In her examination of women in the early centuries of the Chinese state, Lisa Raphals found that women of all classes advised their husbands on a wide range of matters, from personal employment to state affairs; that women are political and intellectual agents within their society rather than passive victims of it; that women possess a wide range of expertise and social mobility; and that later waves of Confucian ideologies, namely Han Confucian and Song and Ming-Qing neo-Confucian, recognized the "sage women" (*shengnü*) as fully realized persons (Raphals 1998; see also Ko 1992, 1994; Rosenlee 2012).

Nevertheless, we see that in the typical immigrant Chinese post 1960s evangelical church in the United States, while women may be more active in church life, they feature less prominently in institutional leadership roles – particularly when those roles reflect authority over men. A 2017 study of the experience of seven female Chinese American church leaders found that the role of women depends heavily on the practices of theological and denominational beliefs of the church and that these may significantly hinder their leadership experience including restrictions on ordination, licensing, and being accepted as a spiritual leader particularly in male dominated adult ministry contexts (Wong et al. 2017). Contrast this to some Chinese contexts where charismatic practices are confined to women; however, these practices are kept out of the formal worship of the church (Cao 2011, 111-118). The segregation of religious practices by gender as described by Cao in his study of Wenzhou Christianity is noticeably less prominent within SGV ling'en. Harp and Bowl worship is part of the formal worship of the church – usually during mid-week church gatherings but also sometimes during

Sunday gatherings. Furthermore, during Harp and Bowl worship both men and women are encouraged to leave behind *lixing* (associated with men, according to Cao) and *wuxing*. Emotionality (*ganxing*) – associated with women, according to Cao – is not mentioned, but ling'en above all seek "spirituality" (*lingxing*) which may then manifest as emotionality (*ganxing*). In other words, this practice and its desired effects are very much part of the normative religious practices and theological thinking of the institution.

While documentation of rituals performed by women in China are vastly overshadowed by male ritual specialists, there are too many appearances of women of various religions traditions operating as ritual specialists to discuss here. As some brief examples, the Way of Loyalty and Filial Piety (*zhongxiao dao*) relied on women for ritual performance and from it, several female Daoist leaders emerged including Mother Chen<sup>115</sup> (Despeux and Kohn 2003, 131). Amongst secret folk religions of the Ming and Qing, many influential sects were founded or led by women. Some of these women were fierce warriors in battle while others remained at home as caring mothers. Still others were leaders and ritualists in religious sects. It was from these women that the image of the Eternal Venerable Mother (*wusheng laomu*) was generated (Songqing 2011, 324-331). Both Chau (2011b, 72) and Mayfair Yang (2015) have documented that in contemporary urban China and in Taiwan, female spirit-mediums and healers appear to outnumber males.

Two themes emerge in the examination of female ritual specialists in Chinese religiosity. First, many women who become deities or ritual specialists (e.g., Mazu, Lady of Linshui *linshui furen*, and *baijie shengfei*) are known for heroism, martyrdom, and death related to their circumstances particular to women such as giving birth, having an abortion, resisting marriage, and being widowed – and in doing so they disrupt normative notions of femininity and become ritual specialists (Bryson 2017, 2; Baptandier 2008, 5; Yang 2020). The legitimacy of female ritual specialists is frequently contrasted against normative issues of family, celibacy, and sexual reproduction amongst women. However, in contrast to Chinese religions where female mortals become deities which in

---

<sup>115</sup> She was preceptor of the well-known Daoist priest, Xu Xun, of the Jin and founder of the Jingming Daoist school.

turn become the object of devotion amongst religious practitioners and ritual specialists, ling'en Christians have no such female deities. Thus, the closest approximation of female deities are female church leaders and ritual specialists.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, many female ling'en participants looked up to Jiang and other female ritual specialists. Note here that Jiang is not from SGV and runs a full-time ministry in Northern California. During my fieldwork, I did not hear about Jiang having ever traveled to SGV to teach. Instead, what is prevalent amongst ling'en participants is that they visit FRCC<sup>117</sup> to attend seminars during which Jiang speaks. Besides Jiang, there are only a small handful of female ritual specialists that female ling'en Christians look to as a source of admiration and learning. The second theme that emerges is that some scholars have pushed back against the notion that rituals are a system used to control women's behavior. The abundance of female ritual specialists (as well as women leader in various religious contexts) shows that it is prudent to examine women behavior (and rules that limit and encourage it) in comparison to those for men.

FRCC's Jiang reflects this pattern of disrupting normative notions of femininity and going on to become a ritual specialist as well as senior pastor. Within her community, stories circulated about her strong faith in God with an early example of her decision to turn down a marriage proposal from a man she liked because she knew it was not from God (Tong and Yang 2017, 334). In this way she pushed against female norms within Chinese culture of getting married and starting a family. I contend that her role as senior pastor depends in significant part on her ability to conduct rituals and teach others how to conduct rituals, particularly deliverance (*shifang*) as evidenced by her early production of audio tapes on how to practice certain meditation rituals. Even so, Jiang is an anomaly within Chinese American Protestantism. Although my fieldsites embrace female evangelists, pastors, and ritual specialists, they are all headed up by male senior

---

<sup>116</sup> Contrast this to Roman Catholicism in which Mary, mother of Jesus, has been given divine status as "Queen of Heaven" through which the Catholic Church has integrated feminine qualities and "balancing excessive masculinization of the theological structure." Kraemer 2023.

<sup>117</sup> For many ling'en Christians, this visit is described in a way very similar to making a pilgrimage.

pastors. We must keep this in mind as we discuss the concept of egalitarianism within ling'en.

Given the above warning, I suggest that in SGV ling'en we see a better balancing of the genders in ritual space compared to the typical mainstream evangelical congregation. On the one hand, the senior pastors of all three sites are men and hold formal ritual authority within institutional churches. Yet on the other hand, women dominate ling'en ritual space. This is particularly true at ARC, including both institutional and non-institutional ritual space. In her study of *Zambian Pentecostalism*, Haynes (2017, 96-103) contrasts between the "woman [who] really prays" and male pastors who serve as prophets, preachers, and skilled exorcists. While women dwarf men within *Zambian Pentecostalism*, their presence seems to be largely relegated to leading and praying in women circles and private meetings, focusing on what Haynes notes is a prayer of "reflection", or looking to the past. To the contrary, men like Pastor Ephraim use their charismatic gifts and prayer to effect change, or to effect "action" in the potential future. Haynes (2017, 108) provides one key explanation of this marginalization of women: as a practical issue of money. That is, wives can do ministry when their husbands make enough money, and as for those women whose husbands do not make enough money, they cannot go into full time ministry training.

Haynes' discussion on practicality brings a key insight into ling'en gendered ritual space. Note that the participants in this study are all over the age of thirty. As far as I am aware, there are few, if any, seminarians, pastors, and ritual specialists under the age of thirty in SGV ling'en. Furthermore, all female itinerant ritual specialists in this study are retirees. They live on comfortable retirements and do not need to make an income. It is in this life of relative financial freedom that many go through the process of equipping and training, sometimes at seminary. When my participants immigrated to the United States, they generally did so without extravagant monetary support. Most of them – both husbands and wives – worked hard to save money and raise a family. Younger couples (in their 40s) of this study also work hard to save money and raise a family. Being immigrants with relatively less support than their counterparts who remain in their home

countries, few female ling'en Christians have the economic freedom to become ritual specialists. Those that do have worked hard over a lifetime, saved up for retirement, and often have the support of their husbands.

With that said, it is primarily in the ritual space – whether apart from the institutional church or during special gatherings within the institutional church – where egalitarianism is more present. For example, women are far more likely to lead Harp and Bowl, to serve as coworkers in Miracle Reappears, and to go through the process of equipping and training than men. By my rough estimate, these activities are comprised of a minimum of 60-70% female.<sup>118</sup> In this way, women not only take on more leadership roles within ling'en churches, but they are also less relegated to functioning as helpers and assistants stuck in the church kitchen or childcare rooms. To the contrary, they are the main source of ritual specialists within SGV ling'en. Whilst the institutional female ritualist remained subordinate to the male leadership (i.e. the “senior pastor”), I am aware of no less than three female itinerant ritualists who operate independently and as far as I am aware, do not formally report to men. Thus, the dominance of female ritual specialists within ling'en challenges gender roles of some conservative Chinese Christianity.

Besides practicality, I propose an additional explanation for female dominance in ritual space. The idea comes from female ritual specialists in Chinese religiosity. In describing Chinese women devotion to the goddess Mazu, scholar of women's studies Zhang Yanchao (2021) note that devotee's relationship with Mazu was deeply personal, often intimate, and connected to their domestic and everyday lives – praying for their children's health and their family's prosperity. Thus, perhaps a more accurate way of understanding the domination of women in ling'en ritual space is therefore less on their deliberate challenge of patriarchal attitudes of Chinese Christianity but rather a direct result of feminine ling'en passion (*reqing*) for the Holy Spirit (Tong and Yang 2017,

---

<sup>118</sup> Contrast this gender proportion to Sunday worship gatherings and Sunday adult schools which do not see such gender imbalance, often with more men than women.

336).<sup>119</sup> The affective state of having passion towards the Holy Spirit is understandably crucial in gandong production, which is a key characteristic of a group of ling'en rituals. This may also explain why there are few female ritual specialists who conduct exorcisms as the process seems to require a different type of affective state than passion.

## **Conclusion**

To operate in the ling'en ritual space, ling'en Christians must undergo training with a particular emphasis on an informal process known as training. During this process, they obtain, train, and master a set of ling'en gifts by using them in a ritualistic manner. Of the three institutions examined in this study, ARC has the largest ling'en ritual space for such training to occur. This is in part due to their decades long functioning as a center for learning and training ling'en leaders and in particular, ritual specialists.

I then provided two ethnographic vignettes of ritual specialists (one man, one woman) using their ling'en gifts to conduct healing and lead ling'en worship. In both rituals, we see the importance of gandong production and magical efficacy. The second ritual brings up the issue of gender in Chinese society throughout history and in the Chinese Christian church. Where women are typically restricted from authority roles over men in the church, ling'en heightened value of rituals that produce gandong have helped women to carve out a significant ritual space in which they are encouraged to equip and train. In an analysis of ling'en ritual space and its specialists, we see that in some ways it retains Confucian-like notions of hierarchy and gender performance, while in other ways it challenges those notions. Furthermore, by focusing on these two rituals, we also gain a better understanding of the differences between ling'en and mainstream evangelicalism. We can draw the conclusion that the two groups differ in their ritual practices or where ritual practices are similar, ling'en interpretation vary significantly.

---

<sup>119</sup> While women dominate some ritual space, I am not suggesting that men cannot participate in ling'en "passion". To the contrary, male participants of this study find the emotionality of ling'en Christianity to be an extremely attractive quality. The experiences of these men also challenge what it means to be feminine.

In the point of contact on ritual specialists between the layers of Chinese religiosity and ling'en Christianity, we see that within Chinese religiosity ritual specialists are characterized by dependence on ritual efficacy, interest in long term survival in the religious market, and dependence on capturing a following (Chau 2006, 122; Chau 2013; Shahar 1998, 36). Ling'en ritual specialists share these key features. However, there are also many dissimilarities due to differing sociocultural contexts. Whereas ritual specialists of Chinese religiosity are generally managed by lay organizations and expand clientele through multiple religious belongings (Goossaert 2008; Chau 2006, 57), ling'en ritual specialists do not adopt multiple religious belongings and thus have limited space to conduct rituals. Consider that mainstream evangelicals – broadly speaking – reject a handful of ling'en practices which highlight magical efficacy, most notably being healing and deliverance. Thus, the ling'en ritual specialist is akin to a fledgling sectarian ritualist seeking to expand clientele in a religious environment that is broadly hostile towards her. Indeed, participants who were female itinerant ritualists did not speak with much enthusiasm and hope in their efforts to establish their own communities for ling'en rituals. This may explain why many ling'en ritual specialists, both women but especially men, tend to stay within institutional circles. Chinese American evangelicalism and ling'en tend to hire men as senior and auxiliary pastors. Therefore, for men, employment at the church is the lesser path of resistance towards earning a salary than becoming an itinerant ritual specialist.

Another key difference is that whereas the liturgical modality of Chinese religiosity (such as Daoism) generally requires esoterisms that are unknown to ordinary religious practitioners (Wolf 1974a, 17) and expertise, ritual specialism is possible to all ling'en Christians through equipping and training. This phenomenon can be explained by the argument I laid out in chapter two – that ling'en Christians engage in the cultivation of gandong. Every ling'en Christian has access to these cultivational practices, thus each person can theoretically become a "gandong master". In the way I have interpreted the personal-cultivational and liturgical modalities, they are deeply interwoven. The egalitarianism of ling'en gifts, however, must always be viewed through the long process of equipping and training. In this way, the liturgical modality highlights the role and

experience of ritual specialists is shared between the layers of Chinese religiosity and ling'en Christianity. Our interpretation of ling'en ritual space has benefited from the liturgical modality as it allows us to examine ling'en rituals, bypassing the earlier noted rejection of "rituals" by ling'en. This chapter's contribution to the liturgical modality is in its explication of the equipping and training process, a unique process within Chinese American Protestantism.

In the next chapter we turn to the final modality – World Management – to examine how the Chinese desire to shape the world is driven by religious practices and how ling'en engage in these practices in 21<sup>st</sup> century United States.

## Chapter Seven: Ling'en Management of the World through Sociopolitical Participation

### Introduction

This chapter proposes a sixth modality in understand how Chinese people, including SGV ling'en Christians, practice religion. The "World Management"<sup>120</sup> (WM) modality encompasses religious practices employed by people who seek to engage and shape public space – the space between the state (e.g., court and bureaucracy) and family. I devote a significant portion to propose and explain this modality as central in understanding how Chinese people do religion. To demonstrate that this modality is relevant to Chinese religiosity in various contexts, I draw from examples in mainland China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong.

The chapter then outlines WM practices amongst the ling'en of my fieldsites – these include attending local rallies, consuming political commentary in the form of ethnic social media, and discussing, praying, and listening/giving sermons centering on political issues. Having conducted fieldwork at the onset of COVID19 lockdowns, fieldsites scurried to get their most basic ministries (e.g., Sunday worship and small group gatherings) and tithing (monetary donations) in order. In these hurried and challenging months, missions was distinctly absent and thus this chapter does not discuss ling'en missions as a WM practice. Its absence implies that these fieldsites (and other churches that I observed during fieldwork) did not consider missions to be essential. Instead, the chapter draws from ethnographic data to outline two varieties of sociopolitical participation amongst ling'en Christians. The first is a generally non-partisan style characterized by a pursuit of harmony and used to promote Chinese immigrant needs – and reflects many of the WM practices within mainstream evangelicalism. The second corresponds closely with the ideas presented in the Christian nationalism of the United States and is characterized by political activism. Through various religious practices, this second type responds to fears of secularization

---

<sup>120</sup> I am indebted to Alexander Chow for proposing this idea during a supervision meeting on 25 October 2023. In his book, *Chinese Public Theology*, Chow (2018, 27-47) shows that the tradition of the Confucian scholar-officials shaped understandings of Chinese public intellectualism and Chinese public theology.

and social and moral decay. The second type highlights ling'en heightened embracing of United States Christian nationalism due to several factors including misinformation and disinformation in ethnic social media, suspicions toward the CPC, and a particular view of "spiritual warfare" (*shuling zhengzhan*). This chapter argues that SGV ling'en WM practices are shaped by and reflect several sociocultural factors including experiences from their country of birth, sociopolitical responsibilities as citizens of the United States, and ling'en religious concepts – and through these WM practices, they intend to shape the space between government and family in ways that are deemed good and moral.

### **World Management Modality in Chinese Religiosity and Chinese Christianity**

In this section I describe how the decline of the Ming shaped the Confucian understanding of WM. My goals here are twofold: first, to show that the WM modality can stand on its own despite the many overlaps with the other modalities.<sup>121</sup> Second, I want to expand WM to include religious traditions beyond Confucianism and its focus on intellectualism. Finally, I provide several examples of WM in Chinese contexts to show the modality in action.

The "World Management" modality is inspired by the tradition known as *jingshi*, translated as managing or governing the country, society, or world. It first appeared in the Daoist classic Zhuangzi but was not widely used for political thought until Confucianism was established as state doctrine by the Han emperor Wudi (156-87 BCE) (Stupperich 2019, 25). Chow (2018, 16) highlights the cultivational and intellectual aspects of the WM tradition and linked the latter to Chau's discursive modality of religious practices. The discursive modality – which requires a high level of literacy and a penchant for philosophical and theological thinking - undoubtedly shaped the religious practices of Confucian scholars. This thinking also influenced individuals like Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864) who was deeply involved in Confucian training and went on to embrace Christianity and Ma Xiangbo (1840-1939) who was shaped by the intellectual worlds of Confucianism and Christianity (Chau 2011b, 68; Chow 2018, 35-36). Hong

---

<sup>121</sup> Chau notes that the modalities are ideal types and often overlap. See Chau 2011b, 68.

Xiuquan and Ma Xiangbo engaged in the WM modality by seeking political transformation: Hong Xiuquan through the Taiping Rebellion and creation of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom whilst Ma Xiangbo engaged in the public space for nearly two decades, leaving his legacy as an educator, founding several institutions of higher learning, before returning to a religious life as a Jesuit priest (Chow 2018, 34-37).

If the discursive modality could fully explain religious practices that underlie the jingshi desires to “manage the world” then perhaps there would be no need for this new modality. However, the advent of the jingshi tradition in late Ming reveals a different understanding. The first Confucian jingshi movement began in the late Ming<sup>122</sup> and was triggered by the Manchu led conquest of Beijing and formation of the Qing. This first generation of Qing Confucian scholars emphasized that the ultimate importance of the *dao* was its power to set things right when the human world went terribly wrong, referring to the fall of the Ming (Cua 2013, 122-123). Because of the failures and downfall of the Ming, many Confucian scholars who previously believed that “bringing *dao* to the world with the blessing of the sovereign” (*dejun xingdao*) had become disillusioned (Cua 2013, 123). Thus, the first jingshi movement of the Ming/Qing signifies an involvement in current affairs, a political commitment to public service, and a realization of the need for a reform of political institutions and practices. In the genesis of this late-Ming jingshi movement, pragmatism was a deliberate push against the strain of Confucian intellectualism of the Song and Ming. The sinologist Benjamin I. Schwartz (2009, 6) wrote that:

The epigoni of Chu Hsi (Zhu Xi) and Wang Yang-ming had, it was alleged, simply concerned themselves with abstractions spun out of their own heads which they had then read back into the Confucian classics. This irresponsible infatuation with “empty words” had turned their attention from the tasks of self-cultivation

---

<sup>122</sup> Several omens including an earthquake in Fengyang, strange colored pears appearing on trees around the capital, an ominous wind before the start of the annual sacrifice to Confucius, and a tale of a fortune teller predicting the dire future of the emperor preceded the fall of Beijing, the death of Emperor Chongzhen, and the fall of the Ming dynasty. See Swope 2014, 190-191.

and practical statesmanship to a concern with inconsequential metaphysical disputations, thus helping to precipitate the fall of the Ming dynasty.

Schwartz's assessment was not against all (Neo-)Confucian intellectualism but highlights a shift in priority amongst Confucian intellectuals in their thinking about the jingshi tradition towards pragmatism and utilitarianism. It is no surprise that amongst anti-Manchu Confucian scholars of the failing Ming, jingshi referred to "statecraft pragmatism" *jingshi zhiyong* (ordering the world and extending utility) (Yang 2016, 122).<sup>123</sup> However, pragmatic political reformers put themselves at risk of criticism for their perceived upsetting the balance of the Confucian ideal of "inner sageliness, outer kingliness" (*neisheng waiwang*), a phrase which describes the balance between self-cultivation and the ordering of the world (WM modality). Indeed, some pragmatic reformers were accused of abandoning self-cultivation and orthodox Confucianism whilst adopting heterodoxy (Yang 2016, 123-124). In this way, pragmatic statecraft was in many ways put up against both self-cultivation and so called "empty word" intellectualism. Schwartz describes this inherent quality of Confucianism as the polarity of the inner and outer realms. Where the inner realm is the "innate spiritual and moral capacities of the individual human being" while the outer realm is the "objective social and cultural order". I suggest that we can view practices of the WM modality as primarily belonging to this outer realm while many of the cultivational and discursive practices are characterized by the inner realm (Schwartz 1964, 7-8). This is because WM practices inherently seek to shape the space between the state and the family – the public space.

---

<sup>123</sup> Also see McMahon 2005; Dykstra 2020. Perhaps one of the best representatives of pragmatic Confucian thinkers of the jingshi tradition was Yan Yuan (1635-1704). Born during the last phase of Ming struggle against the Manchu "barbarians", Yan advocated for a return to the Confucian classics and fiercely criticized Zhu Xi and Neo-Confucianism in general. Although Yan died with little impact and few followers, his disciple Li Gong founded the pragmatic Yan-Li *xuepai* school of thought which provided the intellectual basis for the project of turning Neo-Confucianism from quietism to activism. Yan articulated that the primary function of Confucianism must be understood as setting the world in good order, and throughout his writing he frequently referred to the idea of jingshi. The Chinese American historian and sinologist Yu Ying-shih concluded that out of all the Qing Confucians, Yan gave the idea of jingshi its fullest intellectual expression. See Yang 2016, 32-38 for a summary of Yan's childhood tragedies during the tumultuous time. Also see Cua 2013, 834-837.

One key characteristic of the jingshi movements is that their response to existential threats to the state was to become more involved in governance, representing an emphasis toward the thisworldly.<sup>124</sup> As we will see later, the response within other religious traditions will be the opposite and turn towards the otherworldly. While the jingshi tradition was popularized through Confucianism, we should not ignore the religious practices of other Chinese religious traditions which reflect a fundamental desire to manage the world. Thus, practices of the WM modality can be broadened beyond the Confucian “outer kingliness” half of *neisheng waiwang* to all religious actions that intend to shape public space. Indeed, the desire to manage and order the world can be seen across history and within many Chinese contexts including those of Hong Kong and Taiwan.

Furthermore, the WM modality as I have defined it (as seeking to influence the space between government and family) necessarily includes the religious practices of traditions that have not enjoyed state sponsorship. The precursor to religious Daoism, The Orthodox Unity (*zhengyi*) (Feuchtwang 2000) is a good example because it highlights a religious tradition that lacked state patronage engaging in WM practices. The first Celestial Master (*tianshi*) Zhang Daoling (34-156 CE) was an alchemist and immortal (*shenxian*) who had received revelations from Laozi (Nickerson 2000, 259). Zhang’s purported son and grandson created a hierarchical, theocratic state which existed (c. 191-215) in the Hanzhong region of modern-day southeastern Shaanxi and northeastern Sichuan provinces (Kleeman 2016, 200). The creation of this state is described in an early text, the “Precepts and commands of great Daoism” (*Da daojia lingjie*):

On the first day of the fifth month of the Han’an reign period, at Redstone Castle in Qu district of Linqiong County of Sichuan, the Dao created the Way of the Correct and Unitary Covenant with the powers in order to seal a contract with Heaven and Earth, establish the twenty-four parishes, and distribute the

---

<sup>124</sup> Chow (2018, 136) notes that Confucianism is concerned with both thisworldly and otherworldly. However, here I want to highlight the thisworldly component of jingshi, especially when juxtaposed against some other religious traditions.

Mysterious, Primordial, and Inaugurating pneumas to govern the citizens.  
(Kleeman 2016, 69)

This region was ordered into “parishes”, each administered by priests called “libationers” (*jijiu*). Each household was responsible for ensuring accurate household registration for the collection of taxes in rice<sup>125</sup> and the effective dispensing of exorcism, healing, and forgiveness of sins from libationers. The act of establishing and maintaining the Hanzhong state, though short lived, is a good example of the WM modality in action.

The early Celestial Masters is a particularly revealing case of WM modality in practice for several reasons. First, it demonstrates that WM modality operates apart from Confucian thinking since Zhang Daoling had rejected Confucianism for its inability to provide immortality.<sup>126</sup> Second, central to the Hanzhong state were the revelations that Zhang Daoling received from Laozi, which provided the basis for his millenarian view of the decline of the Han and to bring about a period of Great Peace. This “revelatory” precursor leading to desires to order the world was central to Hong Xiuquan’s desire for WM and, as we will see later, also to ling’en Christians.<sup>127</sup> The ending of political autonomy at Hanzhong did not result in the demise of the Celestial Masters movement but instead resulted in its fast expansion, transmitting its teachings to faraway places and ensuring its continued survival. The Celestial Masters was the first manifestation of organized religious Daoism in Chinese history. Although the subsequent Way of the Celestial Masters (*tianshidao*) generally limited their activities of rebellion and submitted to political authority, most Daoist movements were influenced by the Way of the Celestial Masters and had an apocalyptic or eschatological vision which described the

---

<sup>125</sup> The movement was originally called the “Way of the Five Pecks of Rice” referring to the required annual tithe of five pecks, or roughly nine liters, of rice by each family to the priests.

<sup>126</sup> Mu-chou Poo (1995, 177) summarized from primary sources that those who sought immortality in Daoism had earlier found unsatisfactory answers to problems such as the brevity of life in Confucian learning. In his review of early sources, Vincent Goossaert (2022, 18) notes that Zhang Daoling was a student at the imperial academy (presumably undertaking Confucian learning) before turning to studying the alchemical acts of immortality.

<sup>127</sup> While Chow highlights the Confucian learnings of Hong Xiuquan as central to desire to seek political transformation (2018, 35), my emphasis here is on his revelatory visions that he was the younger brother of Jesus Christ and called to restore China to the worship of *Shangdi*.

end of the world as imminent, which shaped their WM practices (Hendrichke 2000, 135). As we will see later, the apocalyptic tendencies within some Daoist movements make their appearance within ling'en Christianity and shape ling'en WM practices.

We also consider examples of WM from contemporary Greater China religiosity to emphasize two strands of WM religious practices: charitable works and political activism. This will lay the groundwork for our analysis of the WM modality amongst ling'en Christians. André Laliberté (2022, 20) writes that in China's history, religious institutions have been central in providing charity, health care, education, and assistance to vulnerable populations. For example, McLeister (2012, 266) found that Three-Self churches in mainland Protestantism are "a force for political change, albeit on a small scale... [they] do not confront the state directly, unintentionally, the interaction between the churches and the local state are gradually, and in a small way". They are also a force for social change by getting involved in welfare projects through which church leaders voice their position that they are contributing to the development of a "harmonious society" (*hexie shehui*) (McLeister 2012, 247). Driven by a doctrinal debate over the Buddhist's responsibility in contemporary society, Humanistic Buddhism<sup>128</sup> have helped with disaster relief in over forty countries and distributed aid in war torn regions (Pacey 2005).<sup>129</sup>

In mainland China, campaigns against religious organizations such as Falungong (*falun dafa*), Muslim communities, and Christian unregistered churches suggests that the Communist Party of China (CPC) views religious actors as challenges to its authority (Laliberté 2020). There are numerous examples of WM practices by religious organizations driven by political activism. Some include the "Tuidang Movement" or "quitting the Communist Party"<sup>130</sup> (Ford 2011) and the "disappearance" of human rights

---

<sup>128</sup> "Buddhism for the human world" or Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao* and *rensheng fojiao*) was theorized by Buddhist reformers such as Taixu (1890-1947) and Xingyun (1927-2023) and institutionalized in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>129</sup> See also Laliberté 2022, 79-125 for a historic overview of Buddhism's efforts in health care, disasters relief, and poverty alleviation throughout the history of China.

<sup>130</sup> I have seen or spoken to "aunties who assist in quitting the Communist Party" in many locations including Seattle, Los Angeles, New York City, Philadelphia, London, and Edinburgh. They seem to appear where there are

lawyer and activist, Gao Zhisheng, who spoke against the torture of Falungong practitioners (Pils 2009, 260); the eventual failure of Early Rain Covenant Church (*qiuyu shengyue jiaohui*) under Wang Yi's leadership to gain social and legal influence in China<sup>131</sup> (Ma 2020); the banning of Shouwang church by government authorities in Beijing to rent or buy a place to worship<sup>132</sup> (Dickson 2021); and the struggle for democracy, identity, and self-autonomy amongst *Bhod Dedon Tsokpa*, the Tibetan Welfare Association (Wangmo Dhomba 2018). Also, segments of Chinese Catholic and Protestant Christians have dissented by rejecting to join the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association (CCPA) and the Chinese Christian Council (CCC). There are far too many examples of Chinese religious organizations employing charity work and political activism to shape public space. Thus, we see the WM modality is part of the Chinese religious landscape.

To summarize the WM modality: it is the modality that encompasses the ways in which people engage in public space through religious practices. The WM modality is diverse and flexible, encompassing the religious practices of rulers in the style of king-priest (e.g., during the Shang and Zhou dynasties), statecraft “experts” during the late Zhou dynasty, religious figures who shaped Chinese policies such as the visitation of the Fifth Karmapa by the emperor Yonge (Zhu Di), Catholic scholar-officials during the Qing dynasty, religious leaders of political rebellions such as leader of the Yellow Turban Rebellion Zhang Jue, groups of religious adherents pushing for legislative changes, political dissidents, and religious members negotiating for opportunities of activism. The key practices of this modality are offering sacrifice, appealing to and negotiating with emperors, kings, and state power through religion, protesting and rebellion<sup>133</sup>, creating and managing religious communities, some prayers depending on content and intention

---

large numbers of Chinese residents and/or tourists. According to a handful of conversations, many of them work for very low pay or are volunteers. They are always connected to the Falun Gong movement. However, because I have never joined the CPC and am not a member of the CPC, I was unable to complete the process with them.

<sup>131</sup> This is carefully documented in sociologist Li Ma's 2020 book, *Religious Entrepreneurism in China's Urban House Churches: The Rise and Fall of Early Rain Reformed Presbyterian Church* as she traces the church through three stages of development: consolidation, expansionism, and radicalization.

<sup>132</sup> During my time in Beijing, I had heard of the “heroic” efforts of Shouwang members to continue worship service in local public parks (Tao 2019).

<sup>133</sup> For a more recent example see Chu 2021.

(for example, the monk who prays for peace in the world), political and social activism, political dissent and protest, participating in international politics through religion, and large-scale efforts to reshape society according to religious convictions<sup>134</sup>.

### **Overview of WM Practices amongst SGV Ling'en Christians**

In the rest of this chapter, we turn our attention to the ways in which ling'en Christians in the United States engage in the WM modality. In the context of the political environment of the United States, the WM modality encompasses religiously motivated actions and practices through individual or collective action at the national or local level that seeks to support or oppose state structures, authorities, and decisions regarding the allocation of public goods (Conge 1988, 247). The United States is a democratic republic, meaning that it is governed by its citizens (as opposed to a monarch) and that representatives of the people are chosen through elections. The United States is paradoxically notable for its strict institutional separation of church and state and the strong role that religion has played on social and political life. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." – from which separation of church and state as a legal and political principle is derived (Congress.gov. n.d.). However, this does not mean that the political realm does not have a religious dimension. Religiously motivated WM practices in the United States can take many forms.

Chinese immigrants who go on to obtain United States citizenship enjoy access to a wide range of WM practices motivated by their own religious traditions. This was not true until recent history. For example, Chinese immigrants were restricted from holding government jobs and between 1854 and 1872, Chinese individuals could not testify against whites (Freedman 2000, 123). Chinese Americans had very little access to political participation and did not have the right to vote until the Magnuson Act allowed for Chinese immigrants to become citizens (Freedman 2000, 123-125). At the time of

---

<sup>134</sup> An example of this is Taiwan's "Seven Mountain" (*qige shantou*) strategy beginning in the late 2010s in which an alliance of conservative Christians endeavored to transform society's "seven mountains": arts and entertainment, business, church, distribution and media, education, family, and government (Aho 2021).

this study, Chinese immigrants who become American citizens have access to significantly more access including voting for representatives, contacting elected officials, making donations to campaigns, attending local government meetings, attending political rallies or events, looking for information in news sources and judging its accuracy, participating in political discussion, working or volunteering with a political campaign, circulating petitions, joining political organizations, volunteering in the community, running for office, lobbying for particular interests, organizing a demonstration, protesting, and even rioting. However, practices that are not accepted include political violence, and breaking local, state, or federal laws.

The historian Timothy Tseng (2006, 122-123) describes Chinese American evangelicalism since 1949 as “separatist”, abstaining from politics and the interests of mainline Protestant institutions. Many of the Chinese separatist evangelicals were anti-Communist and felt that avoiding Sino-American politics was the best course of action, instead choosing to focus on ethnic evangelism. Migrant Chinese evangelicalism has for the most part kept their distance from contemporary partisan politics. From his fieldwork amongst Chinese Christians in America in the 1990s, Yang (1999, 125) noted that amongst conservative evangelical churches, they usually do not promote political participation beyond encouraging members to be “good citizens” and to vote in elections where being a “good citizen” meant not breaking laws, not committing crimes, not participating in violent riots, among others.<sup>135</sup> Some churches have gone further and made their political stance part of doctrine. For example, the doctrine of the Evangelical Formosan Church (a denominational-like multi-site church founded by Taiwan born immigrants) states that the church is “not to function primarily as social or political organizations” and attributes the church’s endeavors into politics to mid-twentieth century liberal theology (Chen 2010, 86).

These and other Taiwanese churches turned away from politics partially in response to the rise of tense political discussions in Taiwanese churches in the face of increasing

---

<sup>135</sup> Far more common is the tendency to advise its members to be “good citizens”. In the mainland China context, McLeister (2018, 94) found that Protestants want to present themselves as “good citizens”.

migration from mainland China (Chan 1996, 338). But also, as Tseng (2006, 122) has described, immigrant Chinese Protestants “aversion to mainstream politics or mainline Protestantism can be attributed, in part, to a history of revivalism in which Chinese evangelicals emulated Fundamentalist or Pentecostal missionaries in the early twentieth century”. At roughly the same time, mainline White Christianity experienced a radical change in the 1960s and 1970s as their membership suffered greatly. Meanwhile, white evangelical denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention began to see strong growth. And by the end of the 1970s, power in American Protestantism had shifted to the conservative evangelical churches (Compton 2020, 11). These and other factors help to explain why the immigrant Chinese church in the United States have adopted a conservative political stance. For example, my fieldsites continue to support conservative political viewpoints on issues such as marriage and family, LGBTQIA+ rights, legalization of certain drugs, and abortion. These and other conservative viewpoints are aligned with the views developed through the Moral Majority, an American political organization and movement closely associated with the Republican Party<sup>136</sup> that began in the late 1970s. They specifically targeted White evangelicals to gain their vote as part of the “Southern Strategy” (Maxwell and Shields 2019). It seems that their sustained efforts have paid off not only amongst White evangelicals but also ling’ en Christians.

Then between 2000 and 2020, even as the number of Asian American eligible voters grew by 139%, Chinese Americans exhibited the highest proportion of voters who said they were “undecided” before the election (Budiman and Ruiz 2021; APIAVote 2024). In 2023, amongst Asian American groups, Chinese Americans had the highest percentage of “don’t know” in questions that sought their political party leanings in upcoming House Race (25%), Senate Race (44%), and Presidential Race (23%) votes (Asian American Voter Survey). These point to a significant portion of migrant Chinese American

---

<sup>136</sup> The Republican and Democratic parties are the two major contemporary political parties of the United States. The Republican Party, also known as the Grand Old Party (GOP) emerged in the 1850s. In recent decades, segments of evangelicals – particularly white evangelicals – have fused with the Republican Party to form the “Christian Right”. Besides the Republican and Democratic parties, there are “third parties” including the Green Party, Libertarians, and Constitution Party, among others.

Protestants who may be disinterested in voting, one of the most fundamental avenues of political participation in the United States. While this data points to aversion to political participation amongst Chinese Americans, this study's ethnographic data suggests a much livelier picture at the micro level. This study's data points to a diversity of WM practices amongst participants of the three fieldsites of this study.<sup>137</sup> First, I will discuss those of GCCI then ARC followed by VOH. Beyond describing their WM practices, they reveal that ling'en Christians participate in political activities with a noticeably increased acceptance of United States Christian nationalism than their evangelical counterpart. Before I continue, I want to note that many of these WM practices are shared by mainstream evangelicals. Since their differences are quite nuanced and a matter of gradation (as opposed to categorical differences), I highlight components that ling'en emphasize over their evangelical counterpart. The key area where they differ in gradation is Christian nationalism undergirded by a ling'en propensity toward belief in "spiritual warfare" (*shuling zhengzhan*) like that of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). This reveals that in the point of contact of WM practices between the layers of evangelicalism and ling'en Christianity is characterized by *preservation, alteration, and addition* of new material.

### **Ling'en Management of the World**

Ethnographic data suggest ling'en Christians are deeply concerned with moral and political issues at the state and federal levels. In response to these concerns, they wield WM practices to promote what they perceive to be moral and good. The way they do is through the WM practice of political activism, including the consumption of social media created by foreign-born Chinese living in North America and communicate with other members ideas consistent with Christian nationalism in the United States.<sup>138</sup> According to sociologists Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry (who is also a religious studies

---

<sup>137</sup> Here I must remind the reader that the interview data for this section comes from ten participants across three fieldsites. As such they do not reflect the views of all members. While there are broad patterns (such as generally voting Republican), there is significant diversity in political views in fieldsites based on numerous conversations I had while in the field.

<sup>138</sup> Christian nationalism has appeared in other contexts. For example, in Ghana (Haynes 2023), Brazil (Barbosa and Casarões 2022), and Russia (Perry et al. 2023).

scholar of American conservative Christianity and political life) (2020, 10), “Christian nationalism is a cultural framework – a collection of myths, traditions, symbols, narratives, and value systems – that idealize and advocates a fusion of Christianity with American civic life.” They also note that the “Christianity” of Christian nationalism includes ideas well beyond orthodox Christian theology such as nativism, white supremacy, patriarchy, heteronormativity, authoritarianism, populism, nationalism, and militarism (see also Miller 2023). In the context of migrant Chinese ling’ en, nativism is a particularly worrying quality of Christian nationalism. Less than one century ago, migrant Chinese – whether legal, illegal, or native-born – were victims of a prolonged nativist movement of the time. The nativism of Christian nationalism has simply found a new racial victim (Lee 2003, 216). Furthermore, in their definition of Christian nationalism, Whitehead and Perry (2020, 10) argue that it is completely different from “civil religion” and religion writ large.

Whitehead and Perry (2020, 12) found the following predictors for adherence to Christian nationalism: identifying with political conservatism; identify as “Bible-believing”; Bible is the literal word of God; Bible is perfectly true (though not literally interpreted); Frequent in religious practices (attending religious service, prayer, and reading scripture); Believe that the nation is on the brink of moral decay; Believe that God requires the faithful to wage wars for good; Believe in the “rapture”. From previous chapters the reader should recognize that ling’ en Christians hold to most of these beliefs<sup>139</sup>, but also that their Christian nationalism is driven by other factors which I will discuss below.

In addition, ling’ en Christians employ the WM practices of political prayer and charity work. For example, Sunday service at GCCI frequently includes prayers for politically related events. Since 2020, prayer topics ranged from the United States presidential election, local policies, China-Taiwan cross-strait relations, the Russo-Ukrainian War,

---

<sup>139</sup> In chapter six we saw that ling’ en Christians (and mainstream evangelicals) identify as “Bible-believing” and that the Bible is the “Word of God”. In all chapters we see that immigrant Chinese Christians highly value religious practices. As literal interpreters of the Bible, most immigrant Chinese Christians also believe in some form of “rapture” through an interpretation of 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

and the Israeli-Hamas war of 2023 to present (as of 2025). For example, in response to Nancy Pelosi's (Democrat who at the time was serving as the House of Representative speaker) proposed visit to Taiwan in August of 2022, this prayer was projected to the white walls on the two sides of the stage two Sundays prior to the planned date:

Pray for recent tensions between United States (*meiguo*) and China (*zhongguo*), and cross strait relations. Pray that the Lord would send down salvation and peace, to resolve all of the opposition between U.S-China and cross-strait. We beg God to be in charge of the hearts the three countries' leaders, and to extend his powerful wing to destroy that which obstructs his plan of salvation.

This prayer reflects the anxieties which people had regarding the impact and risk that a high-profile figure like Nancy Pelosi might have on cross-strait relations between China and Taiwan. Many pastoral and lay leaders at GCCI are first generation immigrants from Taiwan while the composition of the congregation has seen a rise in immigrants from mainland China in recent two decades. Contrast this to Evangelical Formosan Church (founded by Taiwanese immigrants) which according to its "Faith and Order" document suggests that "go[ing] into politics" is contrary to the preferred public engagement style of "community evangelism" (Chen 2010, 86).<sup>140</sup> At GCCI, the sensitive nature of cross strait politics is not lost on the leadership. Instead of entirely avoiding political discussions, the prayer represents a different approach by advocating peace for all parties involved. Based on my observation, this strategy of avoiding political discussions was characteristic of all church gatherings. By appealing to the Christian teachings of peacemaking (cf. Matthew 5:9), GCCI's Taiwanese majority leadership has seemed to avoid conflict in gatherings. Prayers like the one above are taken very seriously. Heads

---

<sup>140</sup> Since I have not visited EFC, I cannot claim that their congregations do not pray for political issues such as Pelosi visiting Taiwan. I suspect that they would pray for these issues because they have made public statements surrounding politicized issues such as the 2022 Laguna Woods shooting in which a pro-unification second generation Taiwanese man shot (killed 1, injured 5) based on anti-Taiwanese sentiment. In response, EFC made a public post calling for Christians to be more vigilant in protecting the Taiwanese elderly community (EFC General Assembly 2022). Nevertheless, their "Faith and Order" document has hinted at a rejection of political engagement when political engagement takes away from evangelism. Compared to EFC, the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan aligned church, the Irvine Taiwanese Presbyterian Church (*taiwan jidu zhanglao jiaohui*) congregation which was attacked, conducts its gatherings in Taiwanese Hokkien and strongly emphasizes political participation.

are bowed, eyes are closed, some hands are raised while other hands are weaved together prayerfully. They believe in the power of prayer and use their prayers as an avenue to shape the world.

GCCI also has a long tradition of “prayer walking” (*zoudao*) on the annual July the 4<sup>th</sup> Independence Day Parade organized by the City of Ontario, California. On this day, hundreds of GCCI congregants and staff wear white, red, and blue colored tee-shirts, jeans/pants/shorts, walking shoes, and hats. The colors of their clothing reflect the colors of the United States flag. They also wave a United States flag. Their shirts contain various logos such as “國際大使命教會<sup>141</sup>/Great Commission Church International” and “God bless America”. As they walk, they shout in English and in unison: “God bless America”, “Jesus is the way”, and for “America to return to God”. Some are organized into flag waving troupes while others blow shofars. Following the end of the “prayer walking” at 10:30 in the morning, GCCI participants gather around for a short prayer. Attending the Ontario Independence Day Parade is not only political participation but also a way for Chinese to experience social vibrancy, interact with the local community, and share their Christian faith.

Additionally, following Chen and GCCI’s shift towards ling’en, the church became increasingly involved in charity work. Two brief examples highlight this increase. First, in 2010, members of the church organized into four groups and walked down several streets in Hacienda Heights picking up trash. Also in the same year: in response to financial problems that the police and fire departments as well as local elementary and middle schools were facing following the economic downturn of 2008, GCCI raised over \$27,000 in donations (Shi 2013).<sup>142</sup> Throughout each year, the church may organize several charity events (such as Operation Christmas Child). Thus, we see that charity is a key WM practice that GCCI uses to manage the world following Chen and GCCI’s turn toward ling’en. Of course, this does not mean that mainstream evangelical churches in

---

<sup>141</sup> The name of the church in traditional Mandarin script was printed on the t-shirts.

<sup>142</sup> In the mainland context, Shouwang church emphasized the need for the church to act as a non-governmental organization (NGO) and serve society (Chow 2018, 106).

SGV do not participate in political prayers and charity, but that GCCI is a case which demonstrates how one evangelical church following their transition to ling'en has opened them up to new WM practices with a focus on managing the world through political prayers and charity - all of which are characterized by a Christian interpretation of harmony. These WM practices are not only supported in the United States democratic system but encouraged.

WM practices at ARC seemed to be generally quieter due to their beginnings as a retreat center for pastors, later transforming into a training center for ling'en practices, and only recently having formed a local church. Ethnographic data (dozens of videos of Sunday worship service, mid-week broadcasts of "Miracle Reappears", and interviews) of ARC suggests that they are far more interested in immediate-practical and liturgical practices than WM practices. One note of significance is that regarding the Taiwan issue, ARC has apparently decided against retaining a strong loyalty to Taiwanese politics. They have opened to both immigrants from mainland China and even extended their ministry to the mainland. This represents a significant shift in strategy from some other Taiwanese churches in SGV (Chan 1996, 152).

### *Ling'en Spiritual Warfare*

In this section I will show that ling'en conception of spiritual warfare (*shuling zhengzhan*) contributes to a belief in the moral and religious (i.e. Christianity) decline in the United States. First, I will go through a few examples drawn from participant interview data. In my interview with Su (male, 60s), he was very enthusiastic to share his perspective on the education problems in California.

The next step will be controlling the media and the education sector, including school boards and teachers' unions in the United States. They have become extremely irrational.

Beginning with the 1992 Presidential Election, California became increasingly Democratic. Since 2008, Democrats have won at least 60% of the vote. For some

participants, “Democrat” and the pejorative use of “liberal” have become synonymous. In the above statement, Su frames the education system as increasingly victimized by secularization. He references the secularization of institutions like “Harvard, Yale, and Princeton,” once having strong Christian denominational ties, as evidence of the corrosion of the education system. In his mind, there are only two sides: the preservation of practiced religiosity within institutions or its absence through the work of Satan. This belief was shared by Taiwan-born Ch’uan (male, 50s):

Because we have observed that in the past few decades, this education system has been changing and it is anti-church, very anti-church. You will find that all bad things, including heresies (*yijiao*), Islam, and other religions, are more tolerant... I think the evil one [referring to Satan] is behind this, and through the education system they bring in many wrong things.

Ch’uan, a member of ARC, was clearly concerned about the trajectory of Californian policies. In particular, he expressed concerns about the education system and its influence on the next generation. He was also concerned that increased tolerance to other faith traditions will lead to poorer treatment of Christians in California, and prefers that Christianity remains the overwhelming influence in public space. Chuan’s continues into the second theme of sex and gender issues amongst ling’en Christians:

As in California now, education regarding homosexuality has already begun in elementary schools, teaching them that it is normal to have two fathers and two mothers in the family. There are even some textbooks on how men and men have sex.

This quote is in reference to California’s Healthy Youth Act (2015) which sought to address teenage suicide cases due to bullying for sexual and gender identifications not in line with traditional gender binary. But also, to address education regarding human development and sexuality, including education on pregnancy, contraception, and sexually transmitted diseases (Buzzell 2024). I found that attitude of Ch’uan towards

sex education for minors to be widely held amongst ling'en Christians.<sup>143</sup> These conservative attitudes towards sex and gender juxtapose California as one of the most liberal states in the United States regarding LGBTQIA+<sup>144</sup> rights. Since 1976, same sex sexual activity has been legal.<sup>145</sup> Public schools are also required to teach about the history of LBGT community – a policy that every participant who brought it up found immoral. Major metropolitan areas such as Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco represent hubs of support for LBGT rights. According to the American Values Atlas, in 2020 (the year of the interviews), in the metropolitan area of Los Angeles 70% favored same-sex marriage while 25% opposed (PRRI 2024).

Recall that in chapter three, we explored the diverse cosmology of ling'en Christianity and their relationship to immediate-practical practices. With regards to WM practices, ling'en Christians are once again pointing to some supernatural reality that interacts with the physical world through language which includes terms such as Satan (*sadan*), enemy (*choudi*), dark powers (*hei'an de quanshi*), and evil (*xie'e*). Whereas in immediate-practical practices, ling'en talk about spiritual warfare in terms of harmful entities drawn from the cosmologies of Chinese religiosities, spiritual warfare in WM practices always refers to the generic Christian supernatural entity of Satan and supernatural entities from American cosmologies. That is, I did not hear any ling'en put the blame of moral decay in California on Guanyin bodhisattva or door gods (*menshen*). This suggests that at the point of contact on supernatural entities in relations to their view of American society, the layer of Chinese religiosity and culture is largely irrelevant. This is an interesting as it implies that the influence of supernatural deities from Chinese religiosity is culturally bounded – that is, their influence is limited to Chinese immigrants

---

<sup>143</sup> Research suggests that Asian American adolescents and young adults tend to show more sexually conservative attitudes (Okazaki 2010).

<sup>144</sup> LGBT refers to anyone who identifies as non-heterosexual, non-heteroromantic, or non-cisgender. Anti-LGBT stance can be found across other Chinese Christian contexts as well. See Ma 2020, 82; Yang 1999, 113.

<sup>145</sup> In 2008, California passed Proposition 8 to ban same-sex marriage. The result was quickly ruled unconstitutional and overturned. In the months before the proposition was put to the ballot, Cantonese evangelicals of the Bay Area had rallied support for Prop 8. However, despite their efforts Asian Americans were split 51% no, 49% yes on the initiative. See Tse 2013, 224-232. Although my participants did not talk about Prop 8 and fieldwork did not extend back to 2008, ling'en hold the traditional belief in "one man one woman" marriage (*yinan yinü fuqi*) which suggests that they supported Prop 8.

in the United States. For example, they are perceived as capable of affecting evangelical, ling'en, Buddhist, and other non-Christian Chinese immigrants and institutions but hold no sway over their non-Chinese counterparts. To extend this logic, ling'en Christians might hold to the belief that Chinese supernatural entities do not have the power to influence the wider American society.

In a handful of interviews and conversations with ling'en, they cited key concepts drawn from Third Wave and NAR movements. For example, at ARC, C. Peter Wagner's teachings are prominently featured in some ling'en publications. Wagner, who was a missionary in Bolivia, had once considered himself anti-charismatic and preached against claims of healing that were seen in nearby Pentecostal churches and as a result, rapidly growing. But being a student of church growth founder, Donald McGavran, Wagner was urged to study the fast expansion of Pentecostal churches. It was after he cotaught the well-known MC510 "Signs, Wonders, and Church Growth" course in 1982 with John Wimber that he increasingly began to adopt spiritual dimensions into his ministry. Furthermore, Wagner's introduction to spiritual warfare prayer was heavily influenced by Vonette Bright. Bright played a key role in organizing the World Prayer Assembly (WPA) in Seoul, South Korea in 1984. Before the assembly, Wagner admits that he viewed prayer as an unimportant task left to women and hyper-spiritual men, and instead believed teaching church growth principles and developing mission strategies to be the more substantive tasks of church leaders. However, his view would change with WPA Seoul as he gained a deeper appreciation for intercessory prayer and experienced its power in his own life. Five years later at Lausanne II, participants of the Global Consultation on World Evangelization (GCOWE I) unofficially formed the beginning of the AD2000 & Beyond Movement (Holvast 2008, 81). The AD2000 umbrella had many ministries underneath it, and being a prayer-centered organization, the most visible track was the United Prayer Track which Wagner headed up and through it disseminated a particular understanding of spiritual warfare.

According to Wagner (2011), there are three levels of spiritual warfare. The first, "ground-level spiritual warfare", can take the form of casting out "ordinary demons"

within the individual through deliverance prayers and exorcism. These evils include addiction and depression. The second level is “occult-level spiritual warfare”, and it combats mid-level formations such as shamanism, astrology, New Age, and witchcraft, among others. Notice that ling'en immediate-practical practices primarily engage with these two levels of Wagner's demonology. Wagner believed that demons operating at each increasing level have higher rank and influence, thus spiritual warfare against such powers requires more faith and knowledge as we move up the levels. At the highest level, Wagner contends that Christians can engage the “territorial-level” or “strategic-level” spiritual warfare (commonly referred to as SLSW) by praying down powerful high-ranking demons that have taken possession over geographical regions such as a city or even a nation. Wagner explains that repentance of past bloodshed, idolatry, or immorality may be necessary to deal with the territorial spirits. Through prayer and repentance, the power of these demons can be reduced, though they can never be destroyed. According to Wagner and other individuals such as Cindy Jacobs, George Otis, Ed Silvoso, and John Dawson who closely associate with the New Apostolic Movement (a term originally used by Wagner to describe a theological movement within Pentecostal-charismatic churches), SLSW is based on two concepts: spiritual mapping and strongholds. The term “spiritual mapping” was first used by Otis at a Manilla Group meeting in 1990. Spiritual mapping describes the church as being on the border between God's kingdom and Satan's territory (Holvast 2008, 4-5).

Ling'en conception of spiritual warfare in relation to the WM modality sits somewhere between levels two and three, drawing characteristics from both levels. Broadly speaking, they view non-Chinese concepts such as New Age religion and witchcraft as contributing to American moral decline, but they do not participate in NAR's proposed response of repentance to SLSW. Ling'en, however, broadly hold the belief that at the state and national levels there is a spiritual battle between good and evil, between God and Satan. For ling'en, the evidence of this battle is in their perception of moral decline and the rising influence of non-Christian religions. Su, one of my participants, was extremely animated and filled with passion when speaking about fighting against moral

decline and against Satan. In this way, he and many ling'en engage in WM practices toward what they believe to be good and moral.

For many ling'en, one answer to spiritual warfare is to support the Republican Party because believe that it promotes political, social, and religious conservatism and moral goodness. All ling'en participants who were eligible voted for Republicans at state and national levels and to varying degrees, expressed opinions against the Democratic Party. They believe that the Democratic Party represents liberalism, secularism<sup>146</sup>, and the erosion of morality in the United States. Therefore, these ling'en participants advocate for a moral basis for society grounded on their church and its teachings to contend with real and perceived changes in society that are viewed as immoral and destructive – a key predictor to Christian nationalism.

Furthermore, VOH participants either directly stated or suggested that the United States was “founded on Christianity”. To them, this belief has three time-components. In the past, the United States was founded by Christians and on the tenets of Christianity, and that God sustained its history, and his blessings is the reason why the United States was “better” in the past. In the present, the moral and social decays is evidence that the United States has “lost God’s blessings” primarily due to the rise of secular influences as imagined in the Democratic Party and so called “extreme liberals”. And in the future, that Christians have a mandate to “take back control” of the country in part by voting for Republican nominees. Su has gone further by teaching part time at a local Bible college promulgating ideas consistent with Christian nationalism as well as strongly encouraging the immigrant church to be more proactive in discussing politics in ways consistent with Christian nationalism. In the year following our interview, I have reviewed the handful of sermons that he has given at VOH and in them, he continues to

---

<sup>146</sup> According to a Pew Research Center (2015) study conducted between 2007 and 2014, the majority (63%) of Democrats are Christian. Furthermore, United States Presidents of the Democratic Party have been Christians, including Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, Joe Biden. Biden has the support of liberal Catholics for his reliance on Catholic social teaching in policy agenda. At the same time, Biden has been criticized by conservative Catholics (Barb 2022).

espouse views aligned with American Christian nationalism, primarily through language that attempts to convince the audience that they are on the moral side in these issues.

A final key predictor which Whitehead and Perry (2020, 16) found is that Christian nationalism motivates Americans, whether they are evangelical or not, to see Trump as a defender of the values they perceive are under attack. Ling'en Christians overwhelmingly supported former President Trump before and after the 2020 United States Presidential election. Beyond this, several participants (especially those from VOH) strongly believed in election fraud and the victory of Democratic nominee Joseph Biden.<sup>147</sup> Kwok (male, 60s) of VOH is an immigrant from Hong Kong:

... about election fraud, I feel there are many areas of suspicion.

Kwok goes on to bring up various complaints such as ballot fraud and rigged voting machines. However, Kwok also noted that it is the role of the government, and not individual Christians, to investigate election fraud. Wu (male, 60s), an immigrant from Taiwan and attends VOH:

This is another aspect that saddens me deeply. If we go by some of the data and videos that Trump and we have seen, I do believe, or I can only say there's a high probability that such an event occurred. However, it's quite unfortunate that the United States, a country that prides itself on justice and fairness, the highest court in the land refused to grant an investigation into such an event. This is very disappointing because even if we do not consider who it is, in a country that values justice and fairness, all the data and evidence have been presented, but the judiciary still did not grant it.

Kwok and other participants from VOH reverberate the suspicions of election security and question the judiciary system in finding cases of election fraud. This is even though

---

<sup>147</sup> Despite the many attempts to subvert and overturn the election results, an Associated Press review found far too little vote fraud to overturn the election result (Cassidy 2021).

under the Trump administration, three justices were appointed to the United States Supreme Court, fifty-four judges to the appellate court, and 174 judges to the District Courts (Nemacheck 2022; Zengerle 2018). Undoubtedly, Trump has successfully reshaped the federal courts toward political conservatism.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, in the weeks following the Presidential Election, state and federal judges – some installed by Trump – have dismissed more than 50 lawsuits brought by Trump and his allies alleging election fraud (Pennycook and Rand 2021). However, a common thread amongst these participants is their distrust of institutions that do not agree with their views. We see ling'en Christians at VOH and ARC have adopted all of Whitehead and Perry's predictors for adherence to Christian nationalism.

Before that, I want to note that GCCI participants did not adopt all of Whitehead and Perry's predictors. For example, they were the least likely to be concerned with the election. In interviews with GCCI participants, none of them expressed the same level of concern as VOH/ARC participants nor did they show a strong preference for Trump. During one of my visits to GCCI before the election, the church had invited a guest speaker<sup>149</sup> (*jiangyuan*) who promoted Trump during his sermon. After the benediction as people shuffled out of the church, I inquired a staff member about the frequency of political talk in the church and was told that it is extremely rare, and they had not expected the guest to speak so directly on the topic. My explanation for GCCI's avoidance of divisive political talk is in line with their treatment of cross-strait relationship: they place peacebuilding and harmony over partisan politics.

### *Ling'en Political Activism and Consumption of Ethnic Media*

When I probed VOH participants for the source of their belief in election fraud and distrust of the Democratic Party, they turned to an important WM practice: the consumption of ethnic political commentary. Of the VOH participants I interviewed about the election, all of them said they do not trust mainstream media (*zhuliu meiti*). The term

---

<sup>148</sup> For example, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), the United States Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* (1973), which guaranteed a constitutional right to abortion.

<sup>149</sup> Guest speakers are popular in my three fieldsites, appearing around one time per month. They are not members of the church and may come from different parts of the country and world.

“mainstream media” is used to refer to various large mass news media sources. In the American context these include Fox, NBC, ABC and CNN news. American distrust of news media jumped significantly in response to Trump’s inaugural use of the term “fake news” in December 2016, a term employed by VOH participants (*jia xinwen*).<sup>150</sup> Participants also include digital news sources such as the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. Ironically, many said they watched Fox News which is the preferred news source for Republicans.<sup>151</sup> This suggests that when participants use the term “mainstream media”, they mean news sources that do not align with their political viewpoints.

Participants also expressed a difficulty in understanding English news due to a lack of familiarity of English vocabulary surrounding politics. As a result, they prefer to consume Chinese language sources for their political commentary. Indeed, ethnic media has been found to be very important amongst Chinese Americans, more than 60% consume ethnic media for their political news (Wong et al. 2011, 70-71). However, one study found that right leaning outlets were found to be extremely visible amongst first generational Chinese Americans in the months leading up to the 2016 election. Chi Zhang (2018) found that right-wing discourse is both forceful and extreme, creating a singular set of ideologies with no moderate voices or alternative perspectives. Through my interviews and various conversations during fieldwork, Chinese American Christians (ling’*en* and non-ling’*en*) did not bring a single source of left leaning ethnic news commentary when asked about their news consumption. Furthermore, participant interview data and casual conversations with ling’*en* Christians suggest that many ling’*en* Christians support the Trump and his authoritarian style to push against the CPC.

The above suggests that ling’*en* support for Christian nationalism led by the strongman Trump is strongly motivated by suspicions against the CPC. This is fundamentally

---

<sup>150</sup> According to a 2018 poll, 89% of Republicans and 61% of Democrats believe that major news outlets report fake news at least occasionally. Lee and Hosam 2020.

<sup>151</sup> According to the “Election News Pathways project” conducted in 2020 by the Pew Research Center, Republicans trust Fox News more than any other outlet while Democrats distrust it more than any other outlet. Gramlich 2020.

different from white evangelical support for Trump, which is founded in prejudices based in ethnocentrism and nativism, and anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiment (Dean and Altemeyer 2020; Knuckey and Hassan 2020). While prominent amongst white evangelicals who adhere to Christian nationalism, more data is needed to determine the strength of prejudices arising from anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiment amongst evangelical and ling'en immigrant Chinese Christians.

I also contend that another key mechanism of ling'en inability to be good citizens in the democratic process is due to their consumption of partisan news commentary that often perpetuates misinformation (unintentional incorrect or misleading information), disinformation (intentional false information designed to deceive), and biased and partisan information. Misinformation was first conceptualized in 2000 and has been called "dangerous" as it "distorts people's views about some of the most consequential issues in politics, science and medicine" (Kuklinski et al. 2000; Hochschild and Einstein 2015; Flynn et al. 2017). In context of this chapter, the result of consuming such media is an increased alignment with Christian nationalism. As stated earlier, consuming mis/disinformation is significant because political participation in the United States requires citizens to check the veracity of their sources to fully participate in the democratic process. Although this has been made easier with the rise of fact checking websites in recent years, participants did not report using these sources while some questioned the neutrality of sources, with a strong tendency to question the legitimacy of non-right leaning sources.

Accurate information and access to information are significant areas which need improvement. However, they are only part of the greater need for increased ethnic resources to overcome barriers that minorities face in political participation. According to political scientist Janelle Wong (2008, 3), lower immigrant participation is due to the inability of American political parties and advocacy organizations to mobilize immigrant voters. Indeed, during fieldwork, non-partisan advocacy for voting was non-existent. This is despite efforts of non-profit organizations like the Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIAVote) which provides voting instructions and information in

traditional and simplified Chinese characters. Indeed, I did not see any APIAVote or similar voting materials at fieldsites. Thus, even the most basic opportunity for political participation through voting is difficult as it requires naturalization and English capabilities adequate for understanding complex electoral procedures, propositions, and referendums. At VOH, leaders have filled this void by promoting political participation based on the consensus model driven by misinformative ethnic news commentary.

Clearly the consumption of partisan political commentary as a WM practice has great effect on how these ling'en Christians understand U.S politics and their goals in political engagement. What they read and see in turn affects the other WM practices at church. Some of these resulting practices include prayers that are partisan in nature, sermons that engage political topics, integrating political topics into local Mandarin-language seminary teaching, and informing church members toward partisan voting behavior. Take for example prayers at VOH. They are not only overtly political (which is also common amongst mainstream evangelicals) but more importantly, they are openly partisan. Take for example, for one Sunday worship gathering at VOH a staff member prays:

Dear heavenly Father, regarding this presidential election, we reverently look to you. Lord, we invite you to lead... according to the will of your heart, according to the truth and standard of the Holy Scripture, and according to the direction of the United States You will put the candidate who does these in that seat. You will also lead the entire process – the upcoming week, and the coming one and two months, and give the entire United States peace that surpasses all understanding because your hand and your will is amongst us. You will place those who belong to God (*shushen de*) and respect God in that position (referring to the President).

While this prayer may appear mundane and typical for Chinese congregations in the United States, we must view it in the greater context. Following the prayer, the speaker provided two sources on how to vote. One was produced by a member of the church

and the other was created by Bethel Church, a megachurch in California closely associated with the NAR. Both sources explicitly supported Trump. The Bethel production was a film called “The Trump I Know” in which the filmmakers sought to present a “humanized side” of the Trump family and an explanation of why “God placed their family in the White House”. In effect, this recommended film attempts to resolve claims of Trump as an immoral person, disqualifying him as a presidential candidate. The VOH in house creation was a thirty-minute video explaining why not to vote for the Democratic Party and why to vote for Trump. Therefore, considering these instructions, the prayer above is not only a political prayer, but also a partisan prayer.

In these partisan materials, they make the analogy of the Republican Party (except for “RINOs”<sup>152</sup>) and Trump as “belonging to God”. This means that that their political opponents – the Democratic Party, its members, and its supporters – do not belong to God. Some participants expressed an even stronger belief: that supporters of the Democratic Party “belong to the devil” (*shuyu mogui*). In casual conversations, this was indeed the case. Furthermore, Chinese American Christians who favored the policies of the Democratic Party said they felt fearful and unable to express their political alignment and their personal reasons while discussing United States politics with other Christians. If those who support the Democratic Party belong to the devil, then it is not difficult to understand why some ling’*en* would support the destruction of those aligned with the Democratic Party. This suggests that their alignment with the Republican Party, Trump, and American Christian nationalism as guided by morality undergirded by a particular religious understanding. That is, if one were convinced of the reality of the ling’*en* understanding, including spiritual warfare, then it is likely morally superior to hold their political positions. However, I maintain that ling’*en* thinking is problematic and dangerous because the democratic ideals of the United States do not operate on the idea that the losing political party is to be destroyed following an election. If such destruction were to happen, it may lead to authoritarianism. Therefore, by spiritualizing the democratic process ling’*en* Christians have falsely equated the totality of God’s rule

---

<sup>152</sup> An acronym for “Republican in Name Only” and a pejorative for those who call themselves Republicans but are viewed as not ascribing to “accepted” Republican stances such as the 2020 election being stolen.

with the totality of Republican rule in the United States. This is not only anti-thetical to the United States democratic system but further contributes to ling'en Christian inability to be good citizens.

Here we notice that in the absence of official political party advocacy to mobilize ethnic voters, the church has selected its own approved source of guidance on how to vote. The issue should be clear: ling'en Christians are not provided with unbiased facts about each political parties' stance, giving each person a fair opportunity to consider the options and choose based on personal preference and religious beliefs. Instead, they are influenced (or misguided) to think and vote in a particular way. Furthermore, political activism against Democrats is likely to be fueled by suspicion against the CPC. Some participants explicitly connect Democrats to the CPC by claiming that work for "Satan". Yet the Democratic Party of the United States shares few similarities with the Chinese Communist Party – thus they falsely transpose their anxieties towards the CPC onto an entirely different category.<sup>153</sup> Thus, for amongst some ling'en Christians, Christian nationalism is fueled by misinformation and disinformation presented in ethnic social media and activism against CPC on top of Whitehead and Perry's predictors.

A key difference between VOH and earlier pro-Republican conservative churches as described by Yang is that many of VOH's politically motivated documents are created by and for members and staff of the church. Whereas in Yang's (1999, 125) study of a conservative evangelical church, flyers that promoted the Republican Party were not authored by church members. Through the lens of the WM modality, we see that VOH engages in political participation through the consumption of ethnic media. This then shapes their other WM practices that seek to shape society according to Christian nationalism. This study does not address if these WM practices translate into higher voter participation although one participant was extremely vocal in his efforts to mobilize

---

<sup>153</sup> Some Republican-aligned individuals have repeatedly called the Democratic Party and liberalism "socialist" and "communist" (Swenson 2023). I contend that these individuals are drawing on (or attempting to revive) McCarthyism – a movement in which left-wing Americans were repressed due to misplaced fears of Soviet and communist espionage in the 1940s and 1950s. This fear coincidentally reflects the experience of minority groups including Chinese Americans and Cuban Americans, attracting them to align with the GOP (Bishin et al. 2012).

Chinese American ling'en Christians to vote for Republican nominees in elections of all levels.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have delineated and defended the WM modality in the way the Chinese do religion. The WM modality is flexible and encompasses a wide range of practices across different religious traditions. It helps us to see an important aspect of religion: that religiosity amongst the Chinese tightly fused to public space. I contend that the modality includes practices that are outside the scope of Chau's existing five modalities. Whereas personal-cultivational practices are concerned with the interiority of the individual and seek to transform the self, WM practices seek to transform the external world. Where the Immediate-practical modality relies on deities and minimal ritual elaboration to seek immediate magical efficacy on personal matters, WM practices rely on a balance of human effort and magical efficacy of deities on societal issues. Whereas the relational modality centers on the production and management of sociality, the WM modality centers on influencing and reshaping the wider society and the world beyond the narrower scope of a religious community and its local influences. Whereas the discursive/scriptural modality involves the composition and use of texts, requiring a high level of literacy and a penchant for philosophical or theological thinking, the WM modality represents a shift away from intellectual pursuits and towards the pragmatic work of managing the physical world. Whereas practices in the liturgical modality are conducted in complex and highly symbolic forms, and is the modality of ritual specialists, often involving esoteric knowledge and elaborate ritual procedures, the WM modality does not require lengthy rituals. Thus, the WM modality is characterized by practical human efforts to reshape the external world based on visions of a better world and undergirded by belief in the supernatural.

I then explored the ways in which immigrant Chinese ling'en Christians practice WM in the United States. Ling'en WM practices are diverse, even within the three fieldsites of this study. For GCCI, they are used primarily for proselytization and charity with the underlying theme of Christian harmony. Contrast this to the many WM practices of VOH

and ARC which suggest a strong embrace of Christian nationalism due to personal and communal religious belief, partisan and misinformed social media news commentary, and a church environment that promotes political participation characterized by a rejection of “liberalism”, the Democratic Party, and evil spiritual forces native to Christianity (as opposed to Chinese religiosity). I have tried to show that this second set of WM practices are based on a particular understanding of spiritual warfare and in response to concerns over moral and religious decline. The driving factors behind ling’ en political activism deserves further examination. In particular, the issue of misinformation and disinformation amongst immigrant Chinese American Christians deserves scrutiny. With that said, ling’ en Christians, with their understanding of spiritual warfare, are doing what they recognize as religiously moral.

When compared with WM practices of other religious traditions, ling’ en WM practices do not share the qualities of Confucian WM throughout China’s history. Namely, while Confucian literati enjoyed state sponsorship, ling’ en Christians are a double minority (ethnic minority, religious minority within evangelicalism) but also exist in a nation that institutionally separates church and state. Their embrace to American Christian nationalism is therefore quite different from, for example, Christian nationalism in Zambia (see Haynes 2021; 2023) in that ling’ en Christians wield limited political power. Perhaps it is due to this limitation that they have aligned with the more powerful force of White Christian nationalism, rationalized through overlaps in Pentecostal concepts such as spiritual warfare. Furthermore, ling’ en WM are less so based in the “empty word” intellectualism of Confucian WM. To the contrary, Daoism and ling’ en are similar in that the revelations of the Celestial Masters leading to several WM practices are akin to the Holy Spirit guiding ling’ en Christians in their understandings and religious practices aimed at managing the world. Indeed, Yang (1999, 161) connects charismatic Christians to Daoism, even calling them “Daoist” Christians although this chapter suggests that the link can be made based on WM practices.

## **Conclusion**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, we return to the research questions that were laid out in the introduction chapter of this study. We then consider possibilities for further research in ling'en Christianity based on the limitations of this study.

### **Modalities of Doing Religion and Layered Thinking**

Chau developed the modalities framework within his field, the study of Chinese religions, in part to address a significant problem with the “Three Teachings” model of identifying and understanding the religious traditions of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. The issue, as he rightly argues, is that when examining the religious practices of ordinary people in their daily lives, the “Three Teachings” model quickly breaks down and practices on the ground do not reflect such neatly bounded categories. For example, in their homes, the Chinese have shrines with statues of deities drawing from a variety of religious traditions as well as ancestral worship (cf. Knapp 1999, 81-101). Chau (2011b, 82) concludes that Chinese religious matters on the ground is a “congruence of local customs, historical accidents, social environment, personal temperaments”, and configurations of the modalities of doing religion framework. This framework has been demonstrated to be an insightful way of understanding Chinese religious practices and has been applied in varying degrees in fieldwork-based studies (cf. Cao 2023a; Cao 2023b; Yue 2014; Rogers 2018)

This is the first monograph length thesis to employ the entirety of Chau's modalities in the analysis the religious practices and understandings of an immigrant Chinese Christian community. I have demonstrated that application of the modalities framework is reasonable and relevant to immigrant ling'en Christianity in SGV. By considering an expression of Christianity, we expand the modalities framework to include religious traditions that center around doctrines such as Abrahamic religions. In doing so, we offer two challenges: one to the study of Chinese religions and another to the anthropological study of Christianity.

First, it has been widely held that Chinese religions are predominantly concerned with social life rather than forming a separate religious institution and adopting a unified formal theology (Tan 2018, 4; Goossaert and Palmer 2011, 20). From this, one implication is that Christianity, even as the Chinese practice it, might be less concerned with social life due to Christianity being a religion based in doctrines and denominational adherence (Chau 2011a, 548). This examination of the religious practices and understandings of ling'en Christians suggests that these assumptions are not entirely correct. With regards to doctrines, while ling'en Christians are certainly concerned with doctrines in the sense that they form a foundation, their religious practices and underlying understandings are not limited to doctrine. On the contrary, their religious practices are rife with concerns for the social lives of themselves and others. For example, they desire to live better lives through establishing intimate *guanxi* (social connectedness) with God, believers, and the communities in which they live; they pray and work towards their understanding of the moral good; they seek to provide comfort and aid to those who experience trauma through the migration process. Nevertheless, it remains true that Christian doctrine – of varying importance to the individual ling'en – often function as an essential component to religious practices and underlying understanding. With regards to denominational adherence, the participants in this study cannot be said to be highly concerned with denominational loyalty. Church switching was frequent amongst participants. They do so for pragmatic reasons such as moving homes, but more pervasively, they view SGV as a marketplace to shop for and fulfill ling'en concerns such as magical efficacy, *gandong*, and the study and training of ritualistic practices. Like the Chinese who visit temples based on their purported magical efficacy, ling'en Christians seek ling'en efficacy through several activities including pilgrimages to FRCC and ARC, church switching, seeking out local female itinerant specialists, and attending special conferences. In this way, their allegiance is not to any institution or denomination but rather to their religious, moral, and social concerns. Viewed this way, SGV ling'en Christianity is indeed a very “Chinese” way of doing religion.

Second, from the perspective of anthropological study of Christianity, many scholars have dwelled on the issue of continuity and discontinuity, particularly in the conversion

of a community to Christianity. The crux of the problem, as I see it, is that conversion to Christianity demands at least some “break” in the lives of individuals. This very notion is visible in ling’*en* language of *fanzhuan* (to radically change; lit. to inverse) and *chuantong* (traditional). These terms suggests that the individual is a “new creation” – old things (*chuantong*) have passed, and new things are brought into reality. We must maintain this emic perspective in analysis of Christian conversion. However, as my proposed layered thinking has suggested, conversion to Christianity (and subsequent religious practices) typically occurs in relation to some pre-existing cultural material. In reality, no one has their memory wiped clear following conversion; no one is brought to an entirely foreign environment in which they must learn what it means to be Christian in a vacuum devoid of layered material. Therefore, it seems to me that layered thinking responds to issue of continuity and discontinuity in that *both occur in conversion to Christianity*. In this way, layered thinking is a *both/and* response: *both* in that it acknowledges continuity and discontinuity, while allowing for precision, creativity, and nuanced thinking through the *and*. Scholars can therefore examine *how* the layers interact at any points of contact that are uncovered through data generation and analyses.

Beyond general discussions of conversion to Christianity, this thesis also addressed conversion from evangelicalism to ling’*en*. In chapters two and three, I noted that conversion from evangelicalism to ling’*en* primarily occur in context of personal-cultivational and immediate-practical practices. In layered thinking, conversion from evangelicalism to ling’*en* can be understood as placing a layer of ling’*en* on top of an existing layer of evangelicalism where notable points of contact are sources of knowledge (head knowledge vs. experiential knowledge) and views on magical efficacy (viewed as limited in evangelicalism while expansive in ling’*en*). While these two layers can be considered a single layer (and indeed, they are considered one layer by participants who converted into ling’*en* directly, bypassing anti-ling’*en* evangelicalism), the chapter on discursive/scriptural practices highlight the distinctions between these layers as well as some of what occurs at points of contact. With regards to conversion, layered thinking is clearly helpful by distinguishing how ling’*en* preserves and alters evangelicalism. Thus, we could take either the view that ling’*en* is a separate entity built

on top of evangelicalism or that it is an extension and modification of evangelicalism; participant language tends to support the former view while rejecting the latter.

In this study, I demonstrate that layered thinking – characterized by multiple (more than two) layers and points of contact – is a useful tool in the examination of the religious practices and understandings of SGV ling'en Christians by providing increased nuance and precision. While the modalities framework centers on religious practices, it makes some presumptions which this thesis has challenged. First, several chapters of this thesis reveal underlying religious understandings which form the foundation of Chau's formulation of the modalities. In response, I expand the modalities primarily by offering new (additional) presumptive understandings. Take for example the chapter on the relational modality: where Chau presumes social vibrancy, pre-existing familial affective bonds, and *laiwang* (back and forth), ling'en relational practices operate on an entirely different set of presumptive understandings. Second, the modalities framework presumes that Chinese religions/religiosity is a discrete category. Layered thinking may be one framework through which we can analyze Chinese religions to better understand how practices and understandings evolved, which in turn might expand the robustness of the modalities framework.

With regards to SGV ling'en Christianity layered thinking has helped us to not only understand their religious practices and understandings but also sheds light as to how ling'en Christianity expands the modalities framework. The modalities framework is not only expanded by including Christian religious practices but also their underlying understandings and presumptions. There are, of course, limitations and problems with layered thinking. As I have insinuated above, the identification of layers should be carefully considered as one may draw out too many layers which may impede on analysis. Thus, the first step to using layers it to consider those that are clearly relevant to a study. Another limitation of layered thinking is the tendency to view layers as discrete entities. On the contrary, layers often overlap in different ways at points of contact, and its content also evolves – something that researchers should note.

## Immigrant Chinese Doing Religion in the United States

In this section I contend that ling'en Christianity represents a way for Chinese immigrants to do religion in the United States. With regards to "Chinese", the relational, immediate-practical, and liturgical modalities highlight this aspect. The relational modality highlights their concern for guanxi (social connectedness) making and sustenance as well as cultural preservation and experiences of social vibrancy. The immediate-practical modality highlights negotiation of their conceptions of the supernatural world (drawing in large part from Chinese religiosity) which in turn informs some of their core religious practices. The liturgical modality highlights key features of Chinese thinking about the relationship between master and disciple and the need to become experts before effectively conducting ling'en rituals.

With regards to "immigrants in the United States", the cultivational, relational, and world management modalities highlight their status as immigrants. The relational modality shows that ling'en are deeply concerned about living well in a community of believers and in relationship with their God. The cultivational modality reveals that their concerns regarding gandong in part stems from trauma that is related to their migratory experiences. For some female participants, migration pushed additional pressure on their marriages, leading to divorce and their desire for emotional fulfillment through gandong. For some male participants, pressures generally revolved around employment stress in part due to migration. Finally, the world management modality reveals that ling'en Christian have become more interested in participating in the public space as citizens with inalienable rights. Contrast this to a different set of WM practices in the more restrictive mainland China and to a lesser degree, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Indeed, this analysis using the modalities framework has highlighted how this community of Christians engage in religious practices that reveal them as Chinese and as immigrants in the United States.

In the other direction, this analysis of SGV ling'en Christianity has highlighted, challenged, and extended the modalities framework in several ways. First, the modalities framework is further strengthened in that it is applicable to a population not considered in its original conception. Even in their embrace of a *yangjiao* (foreign

religion) in a foreign land, this community of Chinese practice religion in a distinctly Chinese way and in many ways the underlying layers of Chinese religiosity and culture shine through the layers of migration and Christianity. Second, the modalities framework is challenged by this community of religious adherents who understand that the core of their religious practices is their relationships to God. In this way, ling'en belief in the Christian God's existence and its desire to be in relationship with humans underscores the importance of religious belief – an aspect which Chau (2006, 60-61) did not find important in his study of Chinese religiosity. Third, the framework is expanded by the World Management modality. This expansion is important as the practices from numerous Chinese religious traditions seek to shape public space. Ultimately, I contend that by expanding the modalities framework in religious practices and understandings, the boundary extends outward to include this group of Chinese Christians doing religion in the United States.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

There are several limitations to this study. I conducted fieldwork in the year following the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic. As a result, my originally planned fieldwork was extended from six months to thirteen months (from 1 July 2020 through end of July 2021), of which during more than half of the time sites were closed and in person religious activities ceased. Therefore, further studies may be able to extend, test, and modify the findings of this study by conducting more substantial participation observation in formal and informal gatherings. These may include various gatherings such as those in which ling'en Christians come together to learn how to pray in tongues or "spirit dancing" (*lingwu*); itinerant ritual specialist's rituals of exorcism in private homes, and other activities that are hidden if one were restricted to participation in the main Sunday worship gathering. For those who are not "total insiders" and wish to examine religious practices, this study may provide a useful starting point.

As I mentioned in chapter one, ling'en Christianity can be found in several other churches and institutions in SGV and beyond. While this study has examined three

types of ling'en institutions<sup>154</sup>, there are several additional types of ling'en institutions that are worth examining with respect to their religious practices and understandings. One type is churches belonging to denomination-like groups with ling'en characteristics such as Bread of Life church (*lingliangtang*) and Evangelical Formosan Church. Beyond these, further studies can also investigate the religious practices of the Local Church congregations in SGV (a group which grew out of the ministry of Ni Tuosheng)<sup>155</sup> and more challenging, the scattered small independent Chinese gathering points of less than twenty people that could be described as practicing ling'en religiosity<sup>156</sup>. Beyond SGV, further research can test, challenge, and expand the findings of this study by examining ling'en Christianity in other parts of North America (e.g., River of Life Christian Church), United Kingdom<sup>157</sup>, Europe, Greater China, etc. A broadening of fieldsites is almost guaranteed to reveal ling'en practices and understandings not raised in this study. While this study included ARC, the site is significant enough in global ling'en to warrant its own focused study. The transregional (FRCC) and transnational (ARC in Taiwan and elsewhere) aspect of ling'en is also worth investigating through the frameworks of modalities of doing religion and layered thinking.

At least three major topics are largely absent in this thesis and deserve further research: apostasy, missions, and money. While I briefly explained in chapter two (through the case of Li) why apostasy is absent in this thesis, it is certainly an interesting topic to explore given that many SGV ling'en experience a "second conversion" from evangelicalism to ling'en. What then might cause these converts to leave the Christian faith? What does it look like – a slow "falling away" or a drastic turning away? I

---

<sup>154</sup> These include (1) immigrant Chinese Vineyard church which has adopted some Vineyard-like ling'en practices; (2) mainstream evangelical church with ling'en characteristics; and (3) the immigrant Chinese ling'en training center with an attached church.

<sup>155</sup> The Local Church was partially studied by Hu Jiayin (2017, 177-178), concluding that some Local Church practices developed before Pentecostalism and that its members do not consider themselves to be Pentecostals. Would they consider themselves in terms of ling'en?

<sup>156</sup> This type of gathering came to my attention during an interview with a mainland China born man in his 70s. Prior to his attendance at VOH, he had spent over a year in a small gathering of Christians that emphasized the religious practices of prophecy (the group was led by a "prophet" *xianzhi*) and praying in tongues.

<sup>157</sup> Based on conversations with Chinese Christians in Edinburgh, there is at least one immigrant Chinese church in London that engages in ling'en practices. Based on 2023 report, Elim, a denomination with a Pentecostal tradition, has emerged as one of the fastest growing Chinese denomination in Britain (Huang 2023).

considered missions as an important WM practice in the introduction of chapter seven, but lacked sufficient data to conduct analysis due to COVID19 lockdowns. Future research may explore how ARC envisions missions compared to churches influenced by the traditional evangelical perspective. Briefly, I hypothesize that ARC's mission extends beyond the classic evangelical interpretation of missions (i.e. sharing the gospel to non-Christians) but could also include convincing evangelicals to adopt ling'en beliefs and practices. The reason for this hypothesis is due to the many participants of this study who experienced a second conversion in part due to ARC's "missions" work. Finally, discussions on how money is understood and managed by ling'en is not only an important topic but can be incredibly fruitful. How do ling'en organizations and individuals consider money in the now and present as well as the Parousia? Unfortunately, COVID19 restrictions did not allow for me to gain sufficient trust to peer into fieldsite and individual money management. This is a challenge that I leave to future researchers.

## **Conclusion**

In this final chapter I have returned to this study's research questions. Ultimately, I contend that SGV ling'en Chinese American Christians are Chinese doing religion. I discuss how this study has expanded Chau's modalities framework while offering layered thinking as a tool to potentially advance our understanding of Chinese religious practices and understandings in contexts that may require additional nuance and precision.

I close this study by turning to a concept proposed by Haynes (2017, 7-11): "anthropology of the good". Haynes first considers that "good" is made up by "value" as a noun and as a verb. Together, these values shape social life and are constantly in process, opening new modes of expression (Haynes 2017, 10). In her conclusion, Haynes (2017, 163-164) argues that in Zambian Pentecostalism there is a constant effort to reimagine and make new claims about the "good" as a powerful explanation as to why Pentecostalism is so popular. While Haynes has analyzed what it means to have a good life is largely in reference to social life including relationships and organization of

one's resources, this study considers religious practices and their underlying meaning to respond to the question of "what is a good life?"

Ling'en Christianity in the United States does not enjoy the same level of popularity as Zambian Pentecostalism. Some of the reasons can be inferred from this thesis – for some immigrant Chinese who do not adopt belief in the supernatural, immediate-practical practices may be difficult to understand and experience; for others who place family guanxi at the center of their social life, it may be difficult to expect them to disrupt these hh guanxi for an hG guanxi. Yet for those who make the conversion towards ling'en, the good life is inexorably tied to their religious practices and understandings. In all aspects of life, they desire a faithfulness toward God – in how they manage their guanxi (social connectedness) with God and with others, how they read the Christian scriptures, how they vote and pray, how they practice and conduct ling'en rituals, and how they deal with the troubles experienced through migration and in daily life. They expect their faithfulness to translate to the persistent and frequent filling of the Holy Spirit, which in turn animates them and sustains them through their religious practices. This, to them, is significant in what makes a good life.

## References Cited

- Abel, Andrew. 2006. "Favor fishing and punch-bowl Christians: Ritual and conversion in a Chinese Protestant church." *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 2: 161-178.
- Adams, William C. 2015. "Conducting semi-structured interviews." In *Handbook of practical program evaluation*, edited by Kathryn E. Newcomer, Harry P. Hatry, and Joseph S. Wholey, 492-505. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Adler, Amy. 2024. "Arousal by Algorithm." *Cornell Law Review* 109, no. 4 (2024): 787–842.
- Aho, James. 2021. "Christian Dominionism and Violence." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*. <https://oxfordre-com.eux.idm.oclc.org/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-732>.
- Albrecht, Daniel E. 1999. *Rites in the Spirit: A ritual approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic spirituality*. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press.
- Alumkal, Antony. 2000. "Ethnicity, assimilation, and racial formation in Asian American evangelical churches: A case study of a Chinese American and a Korean American congregation." PhD diss., Princeton University.
- Alumkal, Antony. 2002. "The Scandal of the 'Model Minority' Mind? The Bible and Second-Generation Asian American Evangelicals." *Semeia*, no. 90/91: 237-249.
- Ambros, Barbara. 2006. "Ethnic Identity in Overseas Chinese Protestant Churches in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area." In *Religious Pluralism in the Diaspora*, 97-117. Leiden: Brill.
- Anderson, Allan H. 2010. "Varieties, taxonomies, and definitions." In *Studying global Pentecostalism: Theories and methods*, edited by Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André F. Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan, 13-29. California: University of California Press.
- Anderson, Allan H. 2013. *To the ends of the earth: Pentecostalism and the transformation of world Christianity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Anderson, Allan H. 2017. "Conclusion: Challenges, Theories, and Methods in Studying Chinese 'Pentecostalism'." In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 345-354. Leiden: Brill.
- Angel, Joseph. 2009. "The Use of the Hebrew Bible in Early Jewish Magic." *Religion Compass* 3, no. 5: 785-798.
- Archer, Kenneth. 2004. *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community*. London: T & T Clark International.
- APIAVote. 2024. "Asian American Voter Survey". <https://apiavote.org/policy-and-research/asian-american-voter-survey/>
- Baggini, Julian. 2016. "The myth of mythos." In *Religion and Atheism: Beyond the Divide*, 38-47. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bandak, Andreas, and Jonas Adelin Jørgensen. 2012. "Foregrounds and Backgrounds – Ventures in the Anthropology of Christianity." *Ethnos*, 77:4, 447-458. DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2011.619662

- Baptandier, Brigitte. 2008. *The Lady of Linshui: A Chinese Female Cult*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Barbalet, Jack. 2017. "Dyadic characteristics of guanxi and their consequences." *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 47, no. 3: 332-347.
- Barbalet, Jack. 2021. *The theory of guanxi and Chinese society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Barbosa Jr, Ricardo, and Guilherme Casarões. 2022. "Statecraft under God: Radical right populism meets Christian nationalism in Bolsonaro's Brazil." *Millennium* 50, no. 3: 669-699.
- Barrett, Timothy H. 2008. "Taoism and Neo-Confucianism." In *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, edited by Fabrizio Pregadio, 139-141. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bays, Daniel H. 1982. "Christianity and the Chinese sectarian tradition." *Ch'ing Shih Wen-t'i* 4, no. 7: 33-55.
- Bays, Daniel H. 2012. *A new history of Christianity in China*. Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Bediako, Kwame. 1995. *Christianity in Africa, The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Bell, Duran. 2000. "Guanxi: A nesting of groups." *Current anthropology* 41, no. 1: 132-138.
- Benn, James Alexander. 2007. *Burning for the Buddha: self-immolation in Chinese Buddhism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Benton, Gregor, and Edmund Terence Gomez. 2011. *Chinese in Britain, 1800-present*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Berger, Peter L, and Thomas Luckmann. 1979. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Bethel. 2011. *Glory Cloud Explained*. YouTube. Retrieved June 21, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvJMPccZR2Y>.
- Bialecki, Jon. 2017. *A diagram for fire: miracles and variations in an American charismatic movement*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Bian, Yanjie. 1994. *Work and inequality in urban China*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Bian, Yanjie. 2019. *Guanxi, how China works*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Bishin, Benjamin G., and Casey A. Klofstad. 2012. "The Political Incorporation of Cuban Americans: Why Won't Little Havana Turn Blue?" *Political Research Quarterly* 65, no. 3: 586-599.
- Blake, C. Fred. 2011. "Lamponing the paper money custom in contemporary China." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70, no. 2: 449-469.
- Bokenkamp, Stephen R. 1997. *Early Daoist Scriptures*. Berkeley: University of California Press. <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/9780520923126>
- Boltz, Judith M. 2008. "Daozang and subsidiary compilations." In *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*, edited by Fabrizio Pregadio, 28-33. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Brokaw, Cynthia Joanne. 1991. *The ledgers of merit and demerit: Social change and moral order in late imperial China*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Bryson, Megan. 2017. *Goddess on the Frontier: Religion, Ethnicity, and Gender in Southwest China*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

- Budiman, Abby, and Neil G. Ruiz. 2021. "Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group in the US." Pew Research Center.
- Bundy, David D. 2012. *Keswick: A Bibliographic Introduction to the Higher Life Movements*. Wilmore, Kentucky: First Fruits Press.
- Burrell, Gibson, and Gareth Morgan. 2019. *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Butler, Nick, and Sverre Spoelstra. 2023. "What is the point of method sections?" *Organization* 30, no. 6: 1266-1272.
- Buzzell, Patrick P. 2024. "Reviewing Inclusive Sex Education Curriculum: A Policy Analysis of California's Healthy Youth Act." PhD diss., The City University of New York. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
- Calhoun, Craig J. 1992. "Habermas and the Public Sphere." Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Cannell, Fenella. 2020. "Introduction." In *The Anthropology of Christianity*, edited by Cannell Fenella, 1–50. New York, USA: Duke University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822388159-002>.
- Cao, Meng. 2020. "Diverse efficacy and moral complexity: The religious revival in rural China." PhD diss., Australian National University. <http://hdl.handle.net/1885/203333>
- Cao, Meng. 2023a. "The consumption of ritual and the changing values of filial piety in ancestor worship." *The Australian journal of anthropology* 34, no. 1: 15-28.
- Cao, Meng. 2023b. "The Flowing of the Sacred Space: How Reciprocal Exchanges with Deities Are Affected by Urbanization." *Religions* 14, no. 2: 187.
- Cao, Nanlai, and Lijun Lin. 2024. "Contextualizing Transnational Chinese Christianity: A Relational Approach." *Religions* 15: 510. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040510>
- Cao, Nanlai. 2005. "The church as a surrogate family for working class immigrant Chinese youth: An ethnography of segmented assimilation." *Sociology of Religion* 66, no. 2: 183-200.
- Cao, Nanlai. 2011. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Ccbiblestudy. n.d. "Chajing ziliao wangzhan 查经资料网站" [Bible study website]. <https://www.ccbiblestudy.org/>
- Census.Gov. 1914. "Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1913.", Last modified December 16, 2021. <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1914/compendia/statab/36ed.html>.
- Chambon, Michel. 2017. "Are Chinese Christians Pentecostal? A Catholic Reading of Pentecostal Influence on Chinese Christians." In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 181-199. Leiden: Brill.
- Chambon, Michel. 2020. *Making Christ Present in China: Actor-Network Theory and the Anthropology of Christianity*. 1st ed. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55605-1>.
- Chan, Sharon Wai-Man. 1996. "The dynamics of expansion of the Chinese churches in the Los Angeles basin." PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary.
- Chang, Wen-Chin. 2014. *Beyond Borders: Stories of Yunnanese Chinese Migrants of Burma*. Ithaca, New York, NY: Cornell University Press.

- Chang, Xiangqun. 2010. *Guanxi or li Shang Wanglai? Reciprocity, Social Support Networks, & Social Creativity in a Chinese Village*. Taipei, Taiwan: Airiti Press.
- Chau, Adam Yuet, and Liu Jianshu. 2020. "Spirit mediumism in Shaanbei, north-central China." In *Spirit Possession and Communication in Religious and Cultural Contexts*, edited by Caroline Blyth, 92-118. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Chau, Adam Yuet, ed. 2010. *Religion in contemporary China: Revitalization and innovation*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2006. *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2011a. "Modalities of doing religion and ritual polytrophy: Evaluating the religious market model from the perspective of Chinese religious history." *Religion* 41, no. 4: 547-568. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2011.624691>.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2011b. "Modalities of doing religion." In *Chinese religious life*, edited by David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri, 67-84. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199731398.003.0005>
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2013. "A different kind of religious diversity: ritual service providers and consumers in China." In *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*, edited by Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Joachim Gentz, 141-154. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2014. "Household sovereignty and religious subjectification: China and the Christian West compared." *Studies in Church History* 50: 492-504.
- Chau, Adam Yuet. 2019. *Religion in China: Ties that bind*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chen, Carolyn. 2006. "From filial piety to religious piety: Evangelical Christianity reconstructing Taiwanese immigrant families in the United States." *International Migration Review* 40, no. 3: 573-602.
- Chen, Carolyn. 2008. *Getting Saved in America*. Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press.
- Chen, Issac. 2010. *Evangelical Formosan Church Book 1 Faith*. EFC Churches. <https://media.efcga.org/books/FaithandOrder1E.pdf>
- Chen, Xia. 1999. 陈霞. Daojiao quanshanshu yanjiu 道教劝善书研究 [A study of Daoist morality books]. Chengdu: Bashu shushe.
- Chen, Xiao-Ping, and Chao C. Chen. 2004. "On the intricacies of the Chinese guanxi: A process model of guanxi development." *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 21: 305-324.
- Choi, Susanne Yuk-Ping, and Yinni Peng. 2016. *Masculine compromise: Migration, family, and gender in China*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Chow, Alexander. 2013a. *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chow, Alexander. 2018. *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198808695.001.0001>
- Chow, Christie Chui-Shan. 2013b. "Guanxi and gospel: Conversion to Seventh-day Adventism in contemporary China." *Social Sciences and Missions* 26, no. 2-3: 167-198.

- Chow, Kai-wing, On Cho Ng, and John B. Henderson, ed. 1999. *Imagining Boundaries: Changing Confucian Doctrines, Texts, and Hermeneutics*. SUNY Press.
- Chu, Calida. 2021. "Social Media as Tools of Social Activism: Public Theology of the Umbrella City Cyberchurch." In *Christian Social Activism and the Rule of Law in China*, edited by Fenggang Yang and Chris White. Lanham, Maryland: Lehigh University Press.
- Chua, Liana. 2012. "Conversion, continuity, and moral dilemmas among Christian Bidayuhs in Malaysian Borneo." *American ethnologist*, 39 (3): 511-526.
- Clart, Philip. 2012. "Chinese popular religion." *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions*: 219-235.
- Clart, Philip. 2022. "Popular Religion and Prognostication." In *Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China*, edited by Michael Lackner and Zhao Lu, 345-363. Leiden: Brill.
- Cline, Erin M. 2010. "Female spirit mediums and religious authority in contemporary southeastern China." *Modern China* 36, no. 5: 520-555.
- Coffey, Amanda, and Paul Atkinson. 1996. *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Colijn, Bram. 2019a. "Christmas Reverberations in Xiamen: Insights from a Grand Religious Festival in Contemporary China." *Protestantism in Xiamen: Then and Now*, edited by Chris White, 193-221. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Colijn, Bram. 2019b. "Interrituality in contemporary China as a field of tension between abstention and polytropy." *Interreligious relations and the negotiation of ritual boundaries: Explorations in interrituality*: 227-244.
- Compton, John W. 2020. *The end of empathy: why white protestants stopped loving their neighbors*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190069186.001.0001>
- Conge, Patrick J. 1988. "The concept of political participation: Toward a definition." *Comparative Politics* 20, no. 2 (January): 241-249.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/421669>
- Congress.gov. n.d. Constitution of the United States. Retrieved 7 July, 2024, from <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/>
- Cowan, Douglas E. 2014. "Opposition to the Occult." In *The Occult World*, edited by Christopher Partridge, 744-751. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 2000. *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench*. New York, NY: New Press.
- Csordas, Thomas J. 1994. *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520919068>.
- Cua, Antonio S. 2013. *Encyclopedia of Chinese philosophy*. New York, NY: Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203953624>
- Cunningham, Clark E. 2008. "Unity and diversity among Indonesian migrants to the United States." In *Emerging voices: Experiences of underrepresented Asian Americans*, edited by Huping Ling, 90-108. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

- Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. 2000. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Daswani, Girish. 2013. "On Christianity and Ethics: Rupture as Ethical Practice in Ghanaian Pentecostalism." *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 3: 467–79.
- Day, Abby. 2011. *Believing in belonging: Belief and social identity in the modern world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dean, John, and Bob Altemeyer. 2020. *Authoritarian Nightmare: The Ongoing Threat of Trump's Followers*. Brooklyn: Melville House.
- Despeux, Catherine, and Livia Kohn. 2003. *Women in Daoism*. Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press.
- Dickson, Bruce J. 2021. *The Party and the People: Chinese Politics in the 21st Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9780691216966>
- Dueck, Jonathan. 2017. *Congregational Music, Conflict and Community*. New York, NY: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315546247>
- Dunch, Ryan. 2012. "Chinese Christianity." In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Chinese Religions*, edited by Randall L. Nadeau, 261-282. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Dwyer, Sonya Corbin, and Jennifer L. Buckle. 2009. "The space between: On being an insider-outsider in qualitative research." *International journal of qualitative methods* 8, no. 1: 54-63.
- Dykstra, Maura. 2020. "A crisis of competence: Information, corruption, and knowledge about the decline of the Qing State." *Journal for the History of Knowledge* 1, no. 1. <https://doi.org/10.5334/jhk.11>
- Engelke, Matthew Eric. 2007. *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Engelke, Matthew. 2010. "Past Pentecostalism: Notes on Rupture, Realignment, and Everyday Life in Pentecostal and African Independent Churches." *Africa* 80 (2): 177–99. <https://doi.org/10.3366/afr.2010.0201>.
- Esler, Joshua. 2016. "Chinese Ghosts and Tibetan Buddhism: Negotiating between Mythological and "Rational" Narratives." *Modern China* 42, no. 5: 505-534.
- Fan, Ying. 2002. "Questioning guanxi: definition, classification and implications." *International business review* 11, no. 5: 543-561.
- Fei, Xiaotong, Gary G Hamilton, and Zheng Wang. 1992. *From the Soil, the Foundations of Chinese Society: A Translation of Fei Xiaotong's Xiangtu Zhongguo, with an Introduction and Epilogue*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Feuchtwang, Stephan. 2000. *Popular Religion in China: The Imperial Metaphor*. Richmond: Curzon.
- Feuchtwang, Stephan. 2010. *The Anthropology of Religion, Charisma, and Ghosts: Chinese Lessons for Adequate Theory*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Fhl. n.d. "Xin Wang Ai 信望爱" [Faith Hope Love] <https://www.fhl.net/ngb/>
- Fiedler, Katrin. 2013. "The emergence of Christian subcultures in China: Beginnings of an inculturation from the grassroots?" In *Christianity in Contemporary China*:

- socio-cultural perspectives*, edited by Francis Khok Gee Lim, 138-152. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fingarette, Herbert. 1998. *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press.
- Fisher, Gareth. 2011. "Morality books and the regrowth of lay Buddhism in China." In *Religion in contemporary China: revitalization and innovation*, edited by Adam Chau, 53-80. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fitton, Triona. 2022. "Interpretive ethnography: a UK charity shop case study." In *Researching Voluntary Action: Innovations and Challenges*, edited by Jon Dean and Eddy Hogg, 24-35. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Flynn, Daniel J., Brendan Nyhan, and Jason Reifler. 2017. "The nature and origins of misperceptions: Understanding false and unsupported beliefs about politics." *Political Psychology* 38: 127-150.
- Folse, Brandon. 2023. "Strategic Citizenship in China: Birth Tourism and the 'American Hukou.'" *Social Problems* 70, no. 1: 238–55. <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spab038>.
- Ford, Caylan. 2011. "Tradition and Dissent in China: The Tuidang Movement and its Challenge to the Communist Party." PhD diss., The George Washington University. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/tradition-dissent-china-tuidang-movement/docview/908636913/se-2>.
- Foucault, Michel. 1988. *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Freedman, Amy L. 2000. *Political participation and ethnic minorities: Chinese overseas in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the United States*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Fu, Xuanning. 1995. "Impact of the 1993 Chinese student protection act on American and Chinese societies." *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* 14, no. 2: 3-22.
- Fuhua, Li, and He Mei. 2015. "A Brief Survey of the Printed Editions of the Chinese Buddhist Canon." In *Spreading Buddha's Word in East Asia: The Formation and Transformation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon*, edited by Jiang Wu and Lucille Chia, 311-320. New York, NY: Columbia University Press
- Gallup International. 2015. "Losing our religion? Two thirds of people still claim to be religious." <https://www.gallup-international.bg/en/33531/losing-our-religion-two-thirds-of-people-still-claim-to-be-religious/>
- Gao, Xiongya. 2003. "Women existing for men: Confucianism and social injustice against women in China." *Race, gender & class* 10, no. 3: 114-125.
- Garcia-Navarro, Lulu. "Inside the Heritage Foundation's Plans for 'Institutionalizing Trumpism.'" *The New York Times*. Last modified January 21, 2024. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/21/magazine/heritage-foundation-kevin-roberts.html>.
- Gemignani, Marco. 2014. "Memory, remembering, and oblivion in active narrative interviewing." *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 2: 127-135.
- Gentz, Joachim. 2013. *Understanding Chinese Religions*. Edinburgh: Dunedin.
- Giazitzoglu, Andreas, and Geoff Payne. 2018. "A 3-level model of insider ethnography." *The Qualitative Report* 23, no. 5: 1149-1159.

- Gold, Thomas, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank, ed. 2002. *Social connections in China: Institutions, culture, and the changing nature of guanxi*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gooren, Henri. 2014 "Anthropology of Religious Conversion." In *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, Oxford Handbooks, <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195338522.013.004>
- Goossaert, Vincent. 2008. "Mapping Charisma among Chinese Religious Specialists." *Nova Religio* 12, no. 2: 12-28.
- Goossaert, Vincent. 2022. *Making the Gods Speak: The Ritual Production of Revelation in Chinese Religious History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Asia Center.
- Goossaert, Vincent, and David A Palmer. 2011. *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- GOV.UK. 2020. "Chinese Ethnic Group: Facts and Figures." <https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/summaries/chinese-ethnic-group/>.
- Gramlich, John. "5 Facts about Fox News." Pew Research Center. Last modified April 8, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/04/08/five-facts-about-fox-news/>.
- Green, Judith L., Audra Skukauskaite, and W. Douglas Baker. 2012. "Ethnography as epistemology." *Research methods and methodologies in education* 309: 309-321.
- Guo, Sheng Ping. 2021. "Third Space: The Bread of Life Christian Church (Ling Liang Tang) as Independent Sinophone Christianities in the Global Landscape (1942-2017)." PhD diss., University of Toronto. <http://hdl.handle.net/1807/109731>
- Guthrie, Douglas. 1998. "The declining significance of guanxi in China's economic transition." *The China Quarterly* 154: 254-282.
- Hall, Brian. 2006. "Social and cultural contexts in conversion to Christianity among Chinese American college students." *Sociology of Religion* 67, no. 2: 131-147.
- Hammersley, Martyn. 2013. *The myth of research-based policy and practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Han, Huamei. 2016. "'Love your China' and evangelise: religion, nationalism, racism and immigrant settlement in Canada." In *Race, Ethnography and Education*, edited by Rodney K. Hopson and Adrienne D. Dixon, 61-80. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. Doi: 10.1080/17457823.2011.553080
- Harrington, Austin. 2000. "Alfred Schutz and the 'Objectifying Attitude'." *Sociology* 34, no. 4: 727-740.
- Harrison, Henrietta. 2010. "Global modernity, local community, and spiritual power in the Shanxi Catholic Church." In *Religion in contemporary China: revitalization and innovation*, edited by Adam Chau, 203-221. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Harrison, Henrietta. 2013. *The missionary's curse and other tales from a Chinese Catholic village*. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Hausheer, Roger. 1996. "Three major originators of the concept of Verstehen: Vico, Herder, Schleiermacher." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 41: 47-72.
- Haynes, Naomi. 2017. *Moving by the Spirit: Pentecostal social life on the Zambian Copperbelt*. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Haynes, Naomi. 2021. "Taking dominion in a Christian Nation: North American political theology in an African context." *Pneuma* 43, no. 2 (2021): 214-232.

- Haynes, Naomi. 2020. "The Expansive Present." *Current Anthropology* 61, no. 1: 57–76. <https://doi.org/10.1086/706902>.
- Haynes, Naomi. 2023. "Presidents, priests, and prophets: covenantal Christian nationalism and the challenge of biblical analogy." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 29, no. 1: 85-102.
- Henderson, John B. 1998. *The construction of orthodoxy and heresy: Neo-Confucian, Islamic, Jewish, and early Christian patterns*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hendrichke, Barbara. 2000. "Early Daoist Movements." In *Daoism handbook*, edited by Livia Kohn, 134-164. Leiden: Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391840\\_007](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391840_007)
- Herrmann Pillath, Carsten, and Man Guo. 2023. "Interaction Ritual Chains and Religious Economy: Explorations on Ritual in Shenzhen." *Identities (Yverdon, Switzerland)* 30, no. 1: 75–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2021.1911474>.
- Hochschild, Jennifer L., and Katherine Levine Einstein. 2015. "Do facts matter? Information and misinformation in American politics." *Political Science Quarterly* 130, no. 4: 585-624.
- Holland, Kenneth M. 2007. "A history of Chinese immigration in the United States and Canada." *American Review of Canadian Studies* 37, no. 2: 150-160.
- Holmes, Michael W. 2008. The Biblical Canon. In *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199271566.003.0021>
- Holvast, René. 2008. *Spiritual mapping in the United States and Argentina, 1989-2005: A geography of fear*. Leiden: Brill.
- Hong Kong Yearbook. 2024. Chapter 21: Religion and Custom. <https://www.yearbook.gov.hk/2021/en/pdf/E21.pdf>.
- Hoon, Chang-Yau, and Ying-kit Chan. 2021. *Contesting Chineseness: Ethnicity, Identity, and Nation in China and Southeast Asia*. 1st ed. Singapore: Springer, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-6096-9>.
- Hsu, Chung-Chang David. 1990. "The Mission Strategic Analysis of Taiwanese Church in North America: A Case Study of Evangelical Formosan Church." PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary.
- Hu, Jiayin. 2017. "Spirituality and Spiritual Practice: Is the Local Church Pentecostal?" In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 161-180. Leiden: Brill.
- Huang, Caleb. n.d. *Christian Digest Bible Commentary*. Chinese Christian Bible Study. [https://zyesu.com/xinyangbaoku/Books/CD\\_Commentary/gb/](https://zyesu.com/xinyangbaoku/Books/CD_Commentary/gb/)
- Huang, Xiaoshi. 2015. 黄小石. "Ruoge shequ jidu jiaohui de chengzhang" 若歌社区基督教会的增长 [The development of Rutgers Community Christian Church]. In *Dayang bi'an* 大洋彼岸 [Across the ocean], edited by Su Wenfeng 苏文峰, 74-86. Torrance: Overseas Campus Ministries.
- Huang, Xu, Ye Liu, Desheng Xue, Zhigang Li, and Zhilei Shi. 2018. "The effects of social ties on rural-urban migrants' intention to settle in cities in China." *Cities* 83: 203-212.
- Huang, Yinxuan. 2023. *Chinese Christianity in Britain*. [https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/news/china\\_report\\_2023/English\\_report\\_v2.pdf](https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/content/news/china_report_2023/English_report_v2.pdf).

- Husin, Zuraiza, and Jaffary Awang. 2016. "Christian Denominations among Chinese Population in Peninsular Malaysia and Their Understanding on Trinity Doctrine." In *Proceedings of Arts & Humanities Conferences*, no. 3805497. International Institute of Social and Economic Sciences.
- Hwang, Kwang-kuo. 1987. "Face and favor: The Chinese power game." *American Journal of Sociology* 92, no. 4: 944-974.
- Ingalls, Monique M., and Amos Yong, ed. 2015. *The spirit of praise: Music and worship in global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Inouye, Melissa Wei-Tsing. 2016. "Miraculous Modernity: Charismatic Traditions and Trajectories within Chinese Protestant Christianity." In *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850-2015 (2 vols.)*, edited by Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerwey, 884-919. Leiden: Brill.
- Inouye, Melissa Wei-Tsing. 2018. *China and the True Jesus: Charisma and Organization in a Chinese Christian Church*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Iskra, Anna. 2021. "Chinese New Age milieu and the emergence of homo sentimentalism in the People's Republic." *China Information*, 35(1), 89-108.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0920203X20939238>
- Jacobs, J. Bruce. 1979. "A preliminary model of particularistic ties in Chinese political alliances: Kan-ch'ing and Kuan-hsi in a rural Taiwanese township." *The China Quarterly* 78: 237-273.
- Jacobs, Cindy. 2001. *Deliver Us from Evil: Putting a Stop to the Occultic Influence Invading Your Home and Community*. Ventura, California: Regal Books.
- Jaramillo, Juanita, Deepika Goyal, and Carmen Lung. 2019. "Birth tourism among Chinese women." *MCN: The American Journal of Maternal/Child Nursing* 44, no. 2: 94-99.
- Jasper, David. 2004. *A short introduction to hermeneutics*. Westminster: John Knox Press.
- Jenkins, Philip, and Daniel Maier-Katkin. 1992. "Satanism: Myth and reality in a contemporary moral panic." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 17: 53-75.
- Jeung, Russell, Seanan S Fong, and Helen Jin Kim. 2019. *Family Sacrifices: The Worldviews and Ethics of Chinese Americans*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Jeung, Russell. 2005. *Faithful generations: Race and new Asian American churches*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Johnson, David, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski, ed. 2023. *Popular culture in late imperial China*. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.
- Jones, Martyn Wendell. 2016. "Inside the Popular, Controversial Bethel Church." *Christianity Today* 24: 2016.  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/may/cover-story-inside-popular-controversial-bethel-church.html>
- Jones, Stephen. 2011. "Revival in crisis: amateur ritual associations in Hebei." In *Religion in contemporary China: revitalization and innovation*, edited by Adam Chau, 154-181. New York, NY: Routledge.

- Junnawatt, Montira. 2022. "Women Who Live in Two Worlds: From the Stories of Roman Women in Antiquity to Women from Thailand." PhD diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago.
- Kang, Jie. 2016. *House Church Christianity in China: From Rural Preachers to City Pastors*. Switzerland: Springer.
- Kang, Jie. 2019. "The Rise of Calvinist Christianity in Urbanising China." *Religions* 10, no. 8: 481.
- Karimi, Aryan, and Rima Wilkes. 2023. "Classic, Segmented-, or Neo-Assimilation, Which Theory to Use? A Scientific-Method Investigation." *The International Migration Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183231205560>.
- Katz, Paul R. 2019. "Chen Hailiang's Vision of Buddhist Family Life: A Preliminary Study." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 47, no. 1: 33–60. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jcr.2019.0001>.
- Kaur-Gill, Satveer, and Mohan J. Dutta. 2017. "Digital ethnography." *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods* 10, no. 1.
- Kiernan, James P. 1992. "The herder and the rustler: deciphering the affinity between Zulu diviner and Zionist prophet." *African Studies* 51, no. 2: 231–242.
- Kilcourse, Carl S. 2016. *Taiping Theology: The Localization of Christianity in China, 1843–64*. New York, NY: Palgrave Mcmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53728-7\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-53728-7_3)
- King, Ambrose Yeo-chi. 1991. "Kuan-hsi and Network Building: A Sociological Interpretation", *Daedalus* 120(2): 63–84.
- Kipnis, Andrew B. 1997. *Producing guanxi: Sentiment, self, and subculture in a north China village*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Kipnis, Andrew B. 2002. "Practices of Guanxi Production and Practices of Ganqing Avoidance." In *Social Connections in China: Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi*, edited by Thomas Gold, Doug Guthrie, and David Wank, 21–34. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511499579.003>.
- Kipnis, Andrew B. 2021. *The funeral of Wang: Life, death, and ghosts in urbanizing China*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.
- Kleeman, Terry F. 1994. *A God's Own Tale: The Book of Transformations of Wenchang, the Divine Lord of Zitong*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Kleeman, Terry F. 2016. *Celestial Masters: History and Ritual in Early Daoist Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9781684170869>
- Knuckey, Jonathan, and Komysha Hassan. 2020. "Authoritarianism and Support for Trump in the 2016 Presidential Election." *The Social Science Journal* 59 (1): 47–60. doi:10.1016/j.soscij.2019.06.008.
- Ko, Dorothy. 1992. "Pursuing Talent and Virtue: Education and Women's Culture in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century China." *Late Imperial China* 13, no. 1: 9–39. <https://doi.org/10.1353/late.1992.0002>.
- Ko, Dorothy. 1994. *Teachers of the Inner Chambers: Women and Culture in Seventeenth-Century China*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Kohn, Livia. 2008. *Chinese healing exercises: the tradition of Daoyin*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

- Knapp, Ronald G. 1999. *China's Living Houses: Folk Beliefs, Symbols, and Household Ornamentation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1515/9780824845216>
- Kraemer, Sonia. 2023. "The Divine Feminine in Christianity." *Feminist Theology* 32, no. 1: 32-39.
- Kuehn, Julia, Kam Louie, and David M. Pomfret, ed. 2013. *Diasporic Chineseness after the rise of China: Communities and cultural production*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Kuklinski, James H., Paul J. Quirk, Jennifer Jerit, David Schwieder, and Robert F. Rich. 2000. "Misinformation and the currency of democratic citizenship." *The Journal of Politics* 62, no. 3: 790-816.
- Küng, Hans, and Julia Ching. 1989. *Christianity and Chinese Religions*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Kwok, Wai Luen. 2020. "Sola Scriptura's and the Chinese Union Version Bible's Impact upon Conservative Christian Leaders: The Case of Watchman Nee and Wang Mingdao." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 30, no. 1: 93-103.
- Lai, H. Mark. 2004. *Becoming Chinese American: A history of communities and institutions*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Lackner, Michael, and Zhao Lu, ed. 2022. *Handbook of Divination and Prognostication in China: Part One: Introduction to the Field*. Leiden: Brill.
- Laliberté, André. 2020. "Religions, Charity, and Non-State Welfare in Contemporary China." *Working Paper Series of the HCAS "Multiple Secularities – Beyond the West, Beyond Modernities"* 19. Leipzig University.
- Laliberté, André. 2022. *Religion and China's Welfare Regimes: Buddhist philanthropy and the state*. Singapore: Springer Nature.
- Larmer, Miles. 2021. *Living for the City: Social Change and Knowledge Production in the Central African Copperbelt*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Latham, Kevin, and Bin Wu. 2013. *Chinese immigration into the EU: New trends, dynamics and implications*. London: Europe China Research and Advice Network.
- Law, Jeannie O. 2023. *Bethel worship leaders respond to church criticism: "where there's life, there are messes" (part 1)*. Bethel worship leaders respond to church criticism: 'Where there's life, there are messes' (part 1). <https://www.christianpost.com/news/bethel-worship-leaders-respond-to-criticism-of-their-church.html>
- Leavy, Patricia. 2017. *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory research approaches*. New York, NY: Guilford Publications.
- Lee, Erika. 2003. *At America's Gates: Chinese Immigration during the Exclusion Era, 1882-1943*. Chapel Hill, N.C.; University of North Carolina Press.
- Lee, Haiyan. 2014. *The stranger and the Chinese moral imagination*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Lee, Helen. 2009. "Silent exodus." *Asian American Christianity Reader*: 99-104.
- Lee, Taeku, and Christian Hosam. 2020. "Fake news is real: The significance and sources of disbelief in mainstream media in Trump's America." In *Sociological Forum*, vol. 35, pp. 996-1018.

- Legislation.Gov.Uk. 2025. "Data Protection Act 2018."  
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2018/12/contents>.
- Lewandowsky, Stephan, Ullrich KH Ecker, John Cook, Sander Van Der Linden, Jon Roozenbeek, and Naomi Oreskes. 2023. "Misinformation and the epistemic integrity of democracy." *Current opinion in psychology*: 101711.
- Li, Guoping. 2023. "The Spirit-Writing Movement in the Chaozhou Region: Response to Modern Crises (1840–1949)." *Religions* 14, no. 4: 429.
- Li, Jie, Wangshuai Wang, Gong Sun, Zhou Jiang, and Zhiming Cheng. 2018. "Supervisor–subordinate guanxi and job satisfaction among migrant workers in China." *Social Indicators Research* 139: 293-307.
- Li, Richard. 2018. "Believing through belonging: a sociological study of Christian conversion of Chinese migrants in Britain." PhD diss., Loughborough University.
- Lian, Shuneng. 2006. 连淑能. "Zhongxi siwei fangshi: wuxing yu lixing – jianlun hanyu changyong de biaoda fangshi" 中西思维方式:悟性与理性——兼论汉英预言常用的表达方式 [Chinese and Western ways of thinking: understanding and rationality - also on the common expressions in Chinese and English]. *Waiyu yu waiyu jiaoxue 外语与外语教学*, 7: 35–38. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1004-6038.2006.07.009>
- Liang, Hui. 2021. "God Speaks in Chinese: The Reception and Translation of the Bible in China." In *Yearbook of Chinese Theology (2021)*, edited by Paulos Z. Huang, 127-143. Leiden: Brill.
- Lin, Jing. 2019. "Enlightenment from Body–Spirit Integration: Dunhuang’s Buddhist Cultivation Pathways and Educational Applications." In *The Dunhuang Grottoes and Global Education*, edited by Xu Di, 113–31. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13356-6\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-13356-6_7).
- Lin, Judith C.P. 2020. *The Charismatic Movement in Taiwan from 1945 to 1995: Clashes, Concord, and Cacophony*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-48084-4>.
- Lin, Nan, and Yanjie Bian. 1991. "Getting ahead in urban China." *American journal of sociology* 97, no. 3: 657-688.
- Lin, Wei-Ping. 2015. *Materializing Magic Power: Chinese Popular Religion in Villages and Cities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lindhardt, Martin, ed. 2011. *Practicing the faith: the ritual life of Pentecostal-charismatic Christians*. New York, NY: Berghahn Books.
- Liu, Garland. 1998. "The role of the True Jesus Church in the communal development of the Chinese people in Elgin, Scotland." *The Last Half Century of Chinese Overseas*: 425-446.
- Liu, Yi. 2017a. "Pastor Hsi’s Legacy: A Local Christian Community in South Shanxi." In *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2017*, edited by Paulos Z. Huang, 97-110. Leiden: Brill.
- Liu, Yi. 2017b. "The "Galilee of China": Pentecostals without Pentecostalism." In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 200-216. Leiden: Brill.
- Liu, Yi, and Meng Liu. 2023. "Spiritual Christians in Republican China: Reconceptualization beyond Pentecostalism and Indigenization." *Religions* 14: 1525. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14121525>.

- Lizhu, Fan. 2003. "Popular Religion in Contemporary China." *Social Compass* 50, no. 4: 449–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0037768603504004>.
- Lu, Yaxin, Loren Marks, and Loredana Apavaloiae. 2012. "Chinese immigrant families and Christian faith community: A qualitative study." *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal* 41, no. 2: 118-130.
- Luhrmann, Tanya M. 2004. "Metakinesis: How God becomes intimate in contemporary US Christianity." *American anthropologist* 106, no. 3: 518-528.
- Ma, Li. 2020. *Religious Entrepreneurism in China's Urban House Churches the Rise and Fall of Early Rain Reformed Presbyterian Church*. London: Routledge.
- Macdonald, Fraser. 2019. "Breaking Points: Mediating Rupture and Discontinuity within Oksapmin Church Performances, Papua New Guinea." *Anthropologica (Ottawa)* 61, no. 1: 123–36. <https://doi.org/10.3138/anth.2017-0051>.
- Madsen, Richard. 2010. "Chinese Christianity: Indigenization and conflict." In *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*, edited by Elizabeth J. Perry, and Mark Selden, Taylor & Francis Group, 239-257. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Madsen, Richard. 2014. "Secular Belief, Religious Belonging in China." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 1, no. 1: 13–28. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22143955-04102003>.
- Mariz, Cecilia Loreto, and Maria das Dores Campos Machado. 2018. "Pentecostalism and women in Brazil." *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America*: 41-54.
- Marshall, Kimberly Jenkins. 2016. *Upward, Not Sunwise: Resonant Rupture in Navajo Neo-Pentecostalism*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Marshall, Ruth. 2018. "Destroying arguments and captivating thoughts: Spiritual warfare prayer as global praxis." In *Prayer and Politics*: 92-113. Routledge.
- Mason, John. 2002. *Researching your own practice: The discipline of noticing*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Maxwell, David. 2006. *African Gifts of the Spirit: Pentecostalism & the Rise of a Zimbabwean Transnational Religious Movement*. Ohio: Ohio University Press.
- Maxwell, Angie, and Todd G. Shields. 2019. *The long southern strategy: How chasing white voters in the South changed American politics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Mazza, Jacqueline. 2016. *Chinese migration to Latin America and the Caribbean*. Inter-American Dialogue.
- McKeown, Adam. 2010. "Chinese emigration in global context, 1850–1940." *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 1: 95-124.
- McLeister, Mark. 2012. "Negotiating policy and practice: a micro-level analysis of Three-Self churches in a coastal Chinese city." PhD diss., University of Sheffield.
- McLeister, Mark. 2013. "A Three-Self Protestant church, the local state and religious policy implementation in a coastal Chinese city 1." In *Christianity in Contemporary China: socio-cultural perspectives*, edited by Francis Khek Gee Lim, 234-246. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McLeister, Mark. 2018. "Chinese Protestant Reactions to the Zhejiang "Three Rectifications, One Demolition" Campaign." *Review of Religion and Chinese society* 5, no. 1: 76-100. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22143955-00501005>
- McLeister, Mark. 2019. "Popular Christianity, Sensation, and Ling'en Authority in Contemporary China." *Asian ethnology* 78, no. 1: 127-154.

- McLeister, Mark. 2024. "A Cure for Insomnia? Dr. Du's Audio Bible Player." <http://www.sccg.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/SCCG-Summer-Newsletter-FINAL.pdf>.
- McMahon, Daniel. 2005. "Statecraft Values in Early Nineteenth Century China: Yan Ruyi's (1759-1826) Activist Historiography." *Journal of Oriental Studies* 38, no. 1/2: 16-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2023.2189277>
- Menz, Bradley D., Natansh D. Modi, Michael J. Sorich, and Ashley M. Hopkins. 2024. "Health disinformation use case highlighting the urgent need for artificial intelligence vigilance: weapons of mass disinformation." *JAMA internal medicine* 184, no. 1: 92-96.
- Menzies, William W. 2011. "Non-Wesleyan Pentecostalism: A Tradition Keswick and the Higher Life." *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 14, no. 2: 213-25.
- Metzger, Bruce M. 1997. *The canon of the New Testament: Its origin, development, and significance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meulenbeld, Mark. 2019. "Vernacular 'Fiction' and Celestial Script: A Daoist Manual for the Use of Water Margin." *Religions* 10, no. 9: 518.
- Meyer, Birgit. 1998. "'Make a Complete Break with the Past.' Memory and Post-Colonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostalist Discourse." *Journal of Religion in Africa* 28, no. 3: 316–49. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006698X00044>.
- Meyer, Birgit. 1999. *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Miles, Steven B. 2020. *Chinese Diasporas: A Social History of Global Migration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller, Daniel D. 2023. "Christian nationalism" In *Christianity in North America*, 386-397. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781399507448-037>
- Miller, Donald E. 2017. "Contextualizing the Contemporary Pentecostal Movement in China." *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 15-32. Leiden: Brill.
- Miller, Donald E., and Tetsunao Yamamori. 2007. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Mohan, Giles, and Ben Lampert. 2013. "Chinese migrants in Africa: bilateral and informal governance of a poorly understood South-South flow." *Regional Governance of Migration and Socio-Political Rights: Institutions, Actors and Processes*.
- Montag, Christian, Benjamin Becker, and Chunmei Gan. 2018. The multipurpose application WeChat: a review on recent research. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 2247.
- Moskowitz, Marc L. 2001. *The Haunting Fetus: Abortion, Sexuality, and the Spirit World in Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Mulder, Niels, Gharad Bryan, Neil Lee, Juliana Oliveira-Cunha, Benjamin Shawa, Shahrukh Wani, and Eric Werker. 2024. "Unlocking economic prosperity in the Zambian Copperbelt." Policy Framing Paper. London: London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://www.theigc.org/publications/unlocking-economic-prosperity-zambian-copperbelt>

- Music, David. 2001. *Christian hymnody in twentieth-century Britain and America: an annotated bibliography*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.
- Nagata, Judith. 2005. "Christianity among Transnational Chinese: Religious versus (Sub)Ethnic Affiliation." *International Migration* 43, no. 3: 99–130.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2005.00327.x>.
- Naugle, David K. 2002. *Worldview: The History of a Concept*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Nee, Watchman. 1999. *How to study the Bible*. Anaheim, California: Living Stream Ministry.
- Nemacheck, Christine L. 2022. "Trump's lasting impact on the federal judiciary." In *The Trump Administration*, edited by Toby S. James, 115-133. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Ng, Emily. 2020. *A Time of Lost Gods: Mediumship, Madness, and the Ghost after Mao*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press. <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1525/9780520972636>
- Ng, Kwai Hang. 2002. "Seeking the Christian tutelage: Agency and culture in Chinese immigrants' conversion to Christianity." *Sociology of Religion* 63, no. 2: 195-214.
- Ni, Tuosheng. n.d. *Put on the Helmet of Salvation*.  
<https://www.ccbiblestudy.org/Topics/83Spiritual/221S.htm>
- Nickerson, Peter. 2000. "The southern celestial masters." In *Daoism Handbook*, edited by Livia Kohn, 256-282. Leiden: Brill.  
[https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391840\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004391840_011)
- Noll, Mark A. 2014. "Defining evangelicalism." In *Global evangelicalism: Theology, history and culture in regional perspective*, edited Donald M. Lewis and Richard V. Pierard, 17-37. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Oblau, Gotthard. 2011. "Divine healing and the growth of practical Christianity in China." In *Global Pentecostal and charismatic healing*, edited by Candy Gunther Brown, 307-330. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Okazaki, Sumie. 2002. "Influences of culture on Asian Americans' sexuality." *Journal of sex research* 39, no. 1: 34-41.
- Ong, Andrew David. 2020. "Toward a Chinese American evangelical theology: the promise of neo-Calvinism." PhD diss., University of Edinburgh.
- Oostveen, Daan. 2019. "Religious Belonging in the East Asian Context: An Exploration of Rhizomatic Belonging." *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 10, no. 3: 182-.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10030182>.
- Pacey, Scott. 2005. "A Buddhism for the human world: Interpretations of renjian fojiao in contemporary Taiwan." *Asian Studies Review* 29, no. 1: 61-77.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10357820500139505>
- Palmer, David A, Glenn Shive, and Philip L Wickeri, eds. 2011. *Chinese Religious Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199731398.001.0001>.
- Palmer, David A. 2007. *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Palmer, David A. 2011. "Religion in Chinese social and political history." In *Chinese religious life*, edited by David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri, 155-

170. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199731398.003.0010>
- Palmer, David A. 2011. "Chinese Religious Innovation in the Qigong Movement: The Case of Zhonggong." In *Religion in Contemporary China: revitalization and innovation*, edited by Adam Chau, 182–202. New York, NY: Routledge
- Peirce, Charles Sanders. 1934. *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.
- Pennycook, Gordon, and David G. Rand. 2021. "The psychology of fake news." *Trends in cognitive sciences* 25, no. 5: 388-402.
- Perry, Samuel L., Sarah Riccardi-Swartz, Joshua T. Davis, and Joshua B. Grubbs. 2023. "The Religious Right and Russia: Christian nationalism and Americans' Views on Russia and Vladimir Putin Before and After the Ukrainian Invasion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 62, no. 2: 439-450.
- Pew Research Center. 2012. "Asian Americans: A Mosaic of Faiths."  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2012/07/Asian-Americans-religion-full-report.pdf>
- Pew Research Center. 2015. "*Religious landscape study*."  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religious-landscape-study/database/compare/christians/by/party-affiliation/>
- Pew Research Center. 2023a. "Measuring Religion in China 4. Christianity."  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/08/30/christianity/#fn-69913-54>
- Pew Research Center. 2023b. "Religion Among Asian Americans."  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2023/10/11/christianity-among-asian-americans/>
- Pihlaja, Stephen. 2021. *Talk about Faith: how debate and conversation shape belief*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108629881>
- Pils, Eva. 2009. "Rights activism in China: the case of lawyer Gao Zhisheng." In *Building Constitutionalism in China*, edited by Stéphanie Balme and Michael W. Dowdle, 243-260. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Poo, Mu-Chou. 2004. "The concept of ghost in ancient Chinese religion." *Religion and Chinese society* 1: 173-191.
- Poo, Mu-Chou. 2022. *Ghosts and Religious Life in Early China*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009086523.007>.
- PRRI. 2024. "Views on LGBTQ Rights in All 50 States: Findings from Prri's 2023 American Values Atlas." PRRI, Last modified March 12, 2024.  
<https://www.prii.org/research/views-on-lgbtq-rights-in-all-50-states/>.
- Puett, Michael. 2004. "Forming Spirits for the Way: The Cosmology of the Xiang'er Commentary to the Laozi." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 32, no. 1: 1-27.  
<https://doi.org/10.1179/073776904804760020>
- Pulla, Venkat, and Elizabeth Carter. 2018. "Employing interpretivism in social work research." *International Journal of Social Work and Human Services Practice* 6, no. 1: 9-14.
- Rabinow, Paul, and William M. Sullivan, ed. 1979. *Interpretive social science: A reader*. Vol. 218. Los Angeles, California: University of California Press.

- Raphals, Lisa Ann. 1998. *Sharing the Light: Representations of Women and Virtue in Early China*. Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press.
- EFC General Assembly. 2022. "Response to the shooting in Laguna Woods." <https://www.efcga.org/response-to-the-shooting-in-laguna-woods/>
- Robbins, Joel. 2003. "On the Paradoxes of Global Pentecostalism and the Perils of Continuity Thinking: Symposium: Anthropology of Christianity." *Religion (London. 1971)* 33, no. 3: 221–31.
- Robbins, Joel. 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley, California; University of California Press.
- Robbins, Joel. 2007. "Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture: Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity." *Current Anthropology* 48, no. 1: 5–38. <https://doi.org/10.1086/508690>.
- Robbins, Joel. 2010. "Anthropology of religion." In *Studying global Pentecostalism: Theories and methods*, edited by Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André F. Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan, 156-178. California: University of California Press.
- Robbins, Joel. 2011. "The Obvious Aspects of Pentecostalism: Ritual and Pentecostal Globalization." In *Practicing the Faith: The Ritual Life of Pentecostal-Charismatic Christians*, edited by Martin Lindhardt, 49–67. United States: Berghahn Books.
- Rogers, Megan Christine. 2018. "Faiths and Fortune: Religion and the Professional Middle Class in Urban China." PhD diss., University of Notre Dame.
- Rosenlee, Li-Hsiang Lisa. 2012. *Confucianism and women: A philosophical interpretation*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Roth, Harold D. 1996. "The Inner Cultivation Tradition of Early Daoism." In *Religions of China in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez Jr., 123-148. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691234601-014>
- Ruan, Ji. 2017. *Guanxi, Social Capital and School Choice in China: The Rise of Ritual Capital*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40754-8>.
- Rumbaut, Rubén G. 2004. "Ages, life stages, and generational cohorts: decomposing the immigrant first and second generations in the United States 1." *International migration review* 38, no. 3: 1160-1205.
- Ruth, Lester, and Lim Swee Hong. 2021. *A history of contemporary praise & worship: understanding the ideas that reshaped the Protestant church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- Rychetská, Magdaléna. 2022. *Uneasy Encounters: Christian Churches in Greater China*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Saldaña, Johnny. 2021. "Coding techniques for quantitative and mixed data." *The Routledge reviewer's guide to mixed methods analysis*, edited by Anthony J. Onwuegbuzie and R. Burke Johnson, 151-160. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sarat, Leah M. 2013. *Fire in the Canyon: Religion, Migration, and the Mexican Dream*. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- Schmidt-Leukel, Perry, and Joachim Gentz, ed. 2013. *Religious Diversity in Chinese Thought*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Schwartz, Benjamin Isadore. 1964. "Some polarities in Confucian thought." In *Confucianism and Chinese Civilization*, edited by Arthur F. Wright. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503621206>
- Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine, and Dvora Yanow. 2013. *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Scorgie, Glen G, Kate Scorgie, Alexander Chow, and Nicholas Hsieh. 2022. "Touched by Love: Spiritual Experience in Chinese Christian Conversion Narratives." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 15, no. 1: 44–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19397909221074669>.
- Swartz, Benjamin. 2009. *In search of wealth and power: Yen Fu and the West*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvk12gqv>
- Setiyawan, Dahlia Gratia. 2014. "Collective and conflict memories in narratives of migration from Indonesia to the United States." In *Southeast Asian Diaspora in the United States: Memories and Visions, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, edited by Jonathan H. X. Lee, 14-25. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Shahar, Meir. 1998. *Crazy Ji: Chinese religion and popular literature*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Shehata, Samer S. 2009. *Shop Floor Culture and Politics in Egypt*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Shen, Cuihua, and He Gong. 2019. "Personal ties, group ties and latent ties: connecting network size to diversity and trust in the mobile social network WeChat." *Asian Journal of Communication* 29, no. 1: 18-34.
- Shi, Lingyu. 2013. Gaier dadaoshang de saojie duiwu – qizhu guodu shequ de guoji dashiming jiaohui [Street sweepers on Gale Avenue – Great Commission Church International building a kingdom community]. Retrieved from <https://www.shen-guo.org/street-sweepers-s.html>
- Silliman, Daniel. 2017. "The Bible in the Evangelical Imagination." In *The Bible in American Life*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190468910.003.0026>.
- Smart, Graham. 1998. "Mapping Conceptual Worlds: Using Interpretive Ethnography to Explore Knowledge-Making in a Professional Community." *The Journal of Business Communication* (1973) 35, no. 1: 111–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002194369803500107>.
- Spradley, James P. 2016. *Participant observation*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Starr, Chloë, ed. 2008. *Reading Christian Scriptures in China*. London, UK: T&T Clark.
- Statistical Yearbook of Interior. Accessed December 6, 2024. [https://ws.moi.gov.tw/001/Upload/OldFile/site\\_stuff/321/2/year/year\\_en.html](https://ws.moi.gov.tw/001/Upload/OldFile/site_stuff/321/2/year/year_en.html).
- Statistics Canada. 2022. "Religion by visible minority and generation status: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts." October 26, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.25318/9810034201-eng>.
- Strickmann, Michel, and Bernard Faure. 2005. *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy: The Written Oracle in East Asia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Stupperich, Gesa. 2019. "Ordering the Age: Terms of Political Discourse in the Imperial Statecraft Compendia (1827–1903)." PhD diss. Heidelberg University.

- Su, Wenfeng. 2017. 苏文峰. *Dayang bi'an de changhe* 大洋彼岸的长河 [The long river across the ocean]. Torrance: Overseas Campus Ministries.
- Suleski, Ronald. 2018. *Daily Life for the Common People of China, 1850 to 1950: understanding Chaoben culture*. Leiden: Brill.
- Sun, Anna. 2020. "Turning Ghosts into Ancestors in Contemporary Urban China." *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*: 49-59.
- Sun, Jiang. 2011. "Yangjiao or the "Other"? Christianity and Chinese society in the second half of the nineteenth century." *Frontiers of History in China* 6, no. 1: 53-73.
- Sun, Zexi. 2018. "Translating the Christian Moral Message: Reading Liang Fa's Good Words to Admonish the Age in the Tradition of Morality Books." *Studies in World Christianity* 24, no. 2: 98-113.
- Svašek, Maruška. 2023. "Ethnography as creative improvisation: Exploring methods in (post) pandemic times." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 13, no. 1: 101-127.
- Swenson, Ali. "Retread Scare: Trump and Other Republicans Evoke Another Era by Calling Democrats 'Communists.'" PBS. Last modified June 19, 2023. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/retread-scare-trump-and-other-republicans-evoke-another-era-by-calling-democrats-communists>.
- Swope, Kenneth M. 2014. *The military collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203795439>
- Tan, Chee-Beng. 2018. *Chinese religion in Malaysia: temples and communities*. Leiden: Brill.
- Tao, Yu. 2019. "Protest and religion: Christianity in the People's Republic of China." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. September 30, 2019. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-685>.
- Taormina, Robert J., and Jennifer H. Gao. 2010. "A research model for Guanxi behavior: Antecedents, measures, and outcomes of Chinese social networking." *Social Science Research* 39, no. 6: 1195-1212.
- Thompson, Damian. 2005. *Waiting for Antichrist: Charisma and Apocalypse in a Pentecostal Church*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Tie, Yi, and Yongxian Luo. 2023. "The 'Heart' Is the Mind: the 'Heart'- 'Mind' Interaction in Chinese." Brill's Studies in Language, Cognition and Culture: 453-479.
- Timmermans, Stefan, and Iddo Tavory. 2012. "Theory construction in qualitative research: From grounded theory to abductive analysis." *Sociological theory* 30, no. 3: 167-186.
- Tong, Joy K. C. 2013. "Christian ethics and business life: an ethnographic account of overseas Chinese Christian entrepreneurs in China's economic transition." In *Christianity in Contemporary China: socio-cultural perspectives*, edited by Francis Khok Gee Lim, 169-182. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Tong, Joy K.C., and Fenggang Yang. 2017. "The femininity of Chinese Christianity: A study of a Chinese charismatic church and its female leadership." In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 329-344. Leiden: Brill.

- Truzzi, Marcello. 1974. *Verstehen: Subjective Understanding in the Social Sciences*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co.
- Tsai, Yen-zen. 2017. "Glossolalia and Church Identity: The Role of Sound in the Making of a Chinese Pentecostal-Charismatic Church." In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 137-157. Leiden: Brill.
- Tse, Justin K. H. 2021. "'Fraught' Chineseness: 'Chinese Christians' in the Vancouver Sun." In *Ecclesial Diversity in Chinese Christianity*, 183-207. Cham: Springer International Publishing, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73069-7\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-73069-7_9).
- Tse, Justin K. H. 2024. *Sheets of Scattered Sand: Cantonese Protestants and the Secular Dream of the Pacific Rim*. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Tseng, Timothy, and James Chuck, ed. 2009. *The 2008 Report: Bay Area Chinese Churches Research Project, Phase II*. Castro Valley: The Institute of the Study of Asian American Christianity.
- Tseng, Timothy. 1994. "Ministry at arms' length: Asian Americans in the racial ideology of American mainline Protestants, 1882-1952." PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary.
- Tseng, Timothy. 2006. "Protestantism in twentieth-century Chinese America: The impact of transnationalism on the Chinese diaspora." *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 13, no. 1-2: 121-148. <https://doi.org/10.1163/187656106793645196>
- Turner, John G. 2009. *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The renewal of evangelicalism in postwar America*. USA: University of North Carolina Press. [https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807889107\\_turner](https://doi.org/10.5149/9780807889107_turner)
- U.S. Department of State. 2024. "2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Singapore." <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/singapore/>.
- United States. 2023. Department of Homeland Security. *2022 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Homeland Security Statistics.
- Van der Laan, Cornelis. 2010. "Historical approaches." In *Studying global Pentecostalism: Theories and methods*, edited by Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André F. Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan, 202-217. California: University of California Press.
- Venuti, Lawrence. 2012. *Translation changes everything: Theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Walder, Andrew G. 1988. *Communist neo-traditionalism: Work and authority in Chinese industry*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Walls, Andrew. 1996. *The missionary movement in Christian history: studies in the transmission of faith*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Wagner, C. Peter. 2011. *Spiritual Warfare Strategy: Confronting Spiritual Powers*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers.
- Wang, Ge, Wei Zhang, and Runxi Zeng. 2019. "WeChat use intensity and social support: The moderating effect of motivators for WeChat use." *Computers in Human Behavior* 91: 244-251.

- Wang, Gungwu. 1993. "Greater China and the Chinese overseas." *The China Quarterly* 136: 926-948.
- Wang, Yining. 2022. "'Cross Is Fix': Christianity and Christian Community as Vehicles for Overcoming Settlement Crises of Chinese Immigrant Families." *Religions (Basel, Switzerland)* 13, no. 2: 119. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13020119>.
- Wangmo Dhompa, Tsering. 2018. "From the Margins of Exile: Democracy and Dissent within the Tibetan Diaspora." PhD diss., University of California Santa Cruz.
- Warnke, Georgia. 2013. *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, tradition and reason*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Weber, Max. 1997. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Wei, Liming. 2010. *Chinese Festivals: Traditions, Customs and Rituals*. Second edition. Beijing: China Intercontinental Press.
- Weller, Robert P. 1987. *Unities and Diversities in Chinese Religion*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- White, Chris. 2017. *Sacred Webs the Social Lives and Networks of Minnan Protestants, 1840s-1920s*. Leiden: Brill.
- White, Chris. 2018. "The Haicang Voice: Modernity, Cultural Continuity and the Spirit World in a 1920s Chinese Church." In *Protestantism in Xiamen*, 103–39. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing AG. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89471-3\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89471-3_5).
- Whitehead, Andrew L., and Samuel L. Perry. 2020. *Taking America Back for God: Christian nationalism in the United States*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.  
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=2358842>.
- Wickeri, Philip L., and Ruiwen Chen. 2015. "Contextualization and the Chinese Anglican Parish: A Case Study of St. Mary's Church, Hong Kong (1912–41)". In *Christian Encounters with Chinese Culture*, edited by Philip L. Wickeri, 135-152. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Wickeri, Philip L., and Yik-fai Tam. 2011. "The Religious Life of Ethnic Minority Communities." In *Chinese religious life*, edited by David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri, 50-66. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wim, Chandra. 2022. "Reconfiguring Asian Theology from the Ground Up: Watchman Nee and John Sung on Scriptural Interpretation." PhD diss., University of Toronto.
- Wimber, John, and Kevin Springer. 2013. *Power Evangelism*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Wimmer, Andreas. 2008. "The making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries: A multilevel process theory." *American journal of sociology* 113, no. 4: 970-1022.
- Wolf, Arthur P. 1974a. "Introduction." In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, edited by Arthur P. Wolf, 1-18. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Wolf, Arthur P. 1974b. "Gods, ghosts, and ancestors." In *Religion and Ritual in Chinese society*, edited by Arthur P. Wolf, 131-182. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

- Wong, Janelle S., S. Karthick Ramakrishnan, Taeku Lee, Jane Junn, and Janelle Wong. 2011. *Asian American political participation: Emerging constituents and their political identities*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Wong, Janelle. 2008. *Democracy's promise: Immigrants and American civic institutions*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.135048>
- Wong, Maria S., Paige Worthy, Joey Fung, and Eva C-H. Chen. 2017. "A qualitative analysis of the experience of female Chinese American church leaders: Associations with gender role, culture, and work-family balance." *Pastoral psychology* 66: 657-674.
- Wu, Jeanne. 2016. *Mission through Diaspora: The Case of the Chinese Church in the USA*. Cumbria, UK: Langham Monographs.
- Wu, Jiang. 2015. "The Chinese Buddhist canon through the ages: essential categories and critical issues in the study of a textual tradition." In *Spreading Buddha's Word in East Asia: The Formation and Transformation of the Chinese Buddhist Canon*, edited by Jiang Wu and Lucille Chia, 15-45. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Xie, Ailei. 2016. *Family strategies, guanxi, and school success in Rural China*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Xu, Kaibin, and Yangzi Li. 2014. "Exploring Guanxi from a Gender Perspective: Urban Chinese Women's Practices of Guanxi." *Gender, Place & Culture* 22 (6): 833–50. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2014.917279.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 1996. *The Flow of Gifts: Reciprocity and Social Networks in a Chinese Village*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Yan, Yunxiang. 2006. "The Mode of Differential Associations and the Status Perception in Chinese Culture." *Journal of Sociological Research* 4: 201–45.
- Yang, Valentina Lin. 2024. Building Communities through Rituals: Glimpses into the Life of Chinese Christian Communities in the 17th Century. *Religions*; 15(4):444.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040444>
- Yang, Fenggang, and Anning Hu. 2012. "Mapping Chinese folk religion in mainland China and Taiwan." *Journal for the scientific study of religion* 51, no. 3: 505-521.
- Yang, Fenggang, and Joseph B. Tamney. 2006. "Exploring mass conversion to Christianity among the Chinese: An introduction." *Sociology of Religion*: 125-129.
- Yang, Fenggang, Joy KC Tong, and Allan H. Anderson. 2017. "Pentecostals and Charismatics among Chinese Christians: An Introduction." In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 1-14. Leiden: Brill.
- Yang, Fenggang. 1998. "Chinese Conversion to Evangelical Christianity: The Importance of Social and Cultural Contexts." *Sociology of Religion* 59, no. 3: 237–57. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711910>.
- Yang, Fenggang. 1999. *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*. University Park, PA: Penn State University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9780271031231>.
- Yang, Fenggang. 2001. "Religious Diversity Among the Chinese in America." *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* 8: 71.

- Yang, Fenggang. 2004. "Gender and generation in a Chinese Christian church." *Asian American religions: The making and remaking of borders and boundaries*: 205-222.
- Yang, Jui-sung. 2016. *Body, ritual and identity: a new interpretation of the early Qing Confucian Yan Yuan (1635-1704)*. Leiden: Brill.  
<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004318731>
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui, ed. 1999. *Spaces of their own: Women's public sphere in transnational China*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 2015. "Shamanism and spirit possession in Chinese modernity: Some preliminary reflections on a gendered religiosity of the body." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 2, no. 1: 51-86.
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 2016. *Gifts, favors, and banquets: The art of social relationships in China*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501713057>
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 2020a. "Women in Chinese Religions." In *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Religion*, 2506–9. Cham: Springer International Publishing.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24348-7\\_9023](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-24348-7_9023).
- Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 2020b. *Re-enchanting modernity: ritual economy and society in Wenzhou, China*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Yang, Shu-Yuan. 2011. "Cultural Performance and the Reconstruction of Tradition among the Bunun of Taiwan." *Oceania* 81, no. 3: 316–30.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.2011.tb00111.x>.
- Yanow, Dvora, and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, eds. 2006. *Interpretation and method: Empirical research methods and the interpretive turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Yanow, Dvora. 2014. "Interpretive analysis and comparative research." In *Comparative policy studies: Conceptual and methodological challenges*, 131-159. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Yeh, Shu-ling, and Ying-Cheng Chang. 2021. "Deepening a Sense of Being Taiwanese: Conversion and Cultural Continuity among the Austronesian-Speaking Amis Catholics." *Social Sciences and Missions* 34, no. 3–4: 366–90.  
<https://doi.org/10.1163/18748945-bja10035>.
- Yeung, Gustav KK. 2011. "Constructing sacred space under the forces of the market: A study of an 'upper-floor' Protestant church in Hong Kong." *Culture and Religion* 12, no. 4: 401-418.
- Yih, Caroline. 2024. "Forgiveness, power, and gender in a Chinese Context." *Transformation* 1, no. 13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02653788241271885>.
- Yip, Francis Ching-Wah. 1999. "Protestant Christianity and popular religion in China: a case of syncretism?" *Ching Feng* 42, no. 3-4: 130-175.
- Yoo, Wonji. 2021. "Neither laziness nor workaholicism: The Protestant ethic and economic prosperity among young urban Christians in contemporary China." *Social Compass* 68, no. 3: 447-463.
- Youssef, Mirrae. 2022. "Exploring melismatic singing and the effects of emotional expression in contemporary music." PhD diss., Macquarie University.

- Yu, Songqing. 2011. "Women in The Secret Popular Religions Of The Ming And Qing Dynasties." In *Popular Religion and Shamanism*, edited by Xisha Ma and Huiying Meng, 315-338. Leiden: Brill.
- Yue, Yongyi. 2014. "Holding temple festivals at home of doing-gooders: Temple festivals and rural religion in contemporary China." *Cambridge Journal of China Studies* 9, no. 1: 48-87.
- Yun, Wang. 2020. *Clouds Over Qingcheng Mountain: A Practice Guide to Daoist Health Cultivation*. London: Singing Dragon.
- Zengerle, Jason. 2018. "How the Trump administration is remaking the courts." *New York Times Magazine* 22.
- Zhang, Chi. 2018. "WeChatting American politics: Misinformation, polarization, and immigrant Chinese media." <https://doi.org/10.7916/D8FB6KCR>
- Zhang, L. S. X. B., Simon XB Zhao, and Jie P. Tian. 2003. "Self-help in housing and chengzhongcun in China's urbanization." *International journal of urban and regional research* 27, no. 4: 912-937.
- Zhang, Li. 2009. "Contesting urban space: Development of Chengzhongcun in China's transitional cities." In *China in an Era of Transition: Understanding Contemporary State and Society Actors*, 103-125. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Zhang, Yanchao. 2021. "Women and the Cult of Mazu: Goddess Worship and Women's Agency in Late Ming and Qing China." *Women's Studies* 50, no. 5: 452-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.2021.1878171>.
- Zhao, Yaohui. 1999. "Leaving the countryside: rural-to-urban migration decisions in China." *American Economic Review* 89, no. 2: 281-286.
- Zhou, Lihong, and Miguel Baptista Nunes. 2013. "Doing qualitative research in Chinese contexts: Lessons learned from conducting interviews in a Chinese healthcare environment." *Library Hi Tech* 31, no. 3: 419-434.
- Zhou, Min, and Hong Liu. 2017. "Immigrant Entrepreneurship and Diasporic Development: The Case of New Chinese Migrants in the USA." In *Contemporary Chinese Diasporas*, 403-423. Singapore: Springer Singapore. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5595-9\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-5595-9_18).
- Zhou, Min, Yen-Fen Tseng, and Rebecca Y. Kim. 2009. "Suburbanization and New Trends in Community Development." In *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, Ethnicity, and Community Transformation*, edited by Min Zhou, 77-98. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Zhou, Min. 2009. *Contemporary Chinese America: Immigration, ethnicity, and community transformation*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Zhou, Taomo. 2019. *Migration in the time of revolution: China, Indonesia, and the Cold War*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Zhu, Rachel Xiaohong. 2017. "The Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Mainland China." In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan Anderson, 264-285. Leiden: Brill.
- Zimmerman-Liu, Teresa. 2017. "The Reconfiguration of Guanxi in a Twentieth-Century Indigenous Chinese Protestant Group." *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 4, no. 1: 59-86.

## Appendix A – Participant Demographics

<b>Pseudonym (Gender, Age Range)</b>	<b>Country of birth / Approximate Years in the U.S.</b>	<b>Church attendance<sup>158</sup></b>	<b>Ling'en? / Conversion to ling'en from evangelicalism</b>
Chu (F, 55+)	Taiwan / 10	VOH/GCCI	Yes / Yes
Wang (M, 36-54)	Mainland China / 10	GCCI	Yes / Yes
Hu (M, 55+)	Mainland China / 30	GCCI	No / No
Ting (F, 36-54)	Taiwan / 15	GCCI	Yes / Yes
Bao (M, 36-54)	Mainland China / 15	GCCI	Yes / Yes
Ch'en (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 30	GCCI	Yes / Yes
Fang (F, 36-54)	Taiwan / 10	ARC	Yes / Yes
Wan (F, 36-54)	Taiwan / 10	ARC	Yes / Yes
Pan (F, 55+)	Taiwan / 40	ARC	Yes / Yes
Ceng (F, 55+)	Taiwan / 30	ARC	Yes / Yes
Ch'uan (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 15	ARC	Yes / Yes
Li (F, 36-54)	Taiwan / 20		Yes / Yes
Yang (F, 36-54)	Taiwan / 5	VOH	Yes / No
Wu (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 15	VOH	Yes / Yes
Mao (M, 55+)	Mainland China / 5	VOH	Yes / Yes
Tai (F, 36-54)	Mainland China / 5	VOH	Yes / No
Su (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 30	VOH	Yes / Yes
Kwok (M, 55+)	Hong Kong / 30	VOH	Yes / Yes
Seng (M, 36-54)	Mainland China / 15		Yes / Yes
K'ao (F, 55+)	Taiwan / 30	GCCI	Yes / Yes
Zhang (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 40	GCCI	No / No
Tse (M, 55+)	Hong Kong / 30		No / No
Mak (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 30		No / No
Fu (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 40		No / No
Miao (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 40	ARC	Yes / Yes
Hui (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 40	GCCI	No / No
Min (M, 36-54)	Taiwan / 20	ARC	Yes / Yes
Zhao (M, 55+)	Taiwan / 30	GCCI	Yes / Yes
Chan (M, 55+)	Hong Kong / 30		No / No

<sup>158</sup> Blank means that at the time of interview, their primary church in attendance was not one of the three fieldsites of this study but instead one of the many non-ling'en churches in SGV.

## Appendix B – Character List

anmu 安牧 ordination  
bagua 八卦 eight trigrams divination  
baibai 拜拜 worship  
bajie shengfei 白姐圣妃 Holy consort white sister  
banxian 半仙 demigod  
baoda 报答 repay, reciprocate  
baoshou 保守 conservative  
bei guifu 被鬼附 possessed by a ghost  
bei ling'en fanzhan 被灵恩反转 to be radically altered by ling'en  
bei shengling chongman 被圣灵充满 to be filled by the Holy Spirit  
bei shengling fanzhan 被圣灵反转 to be radically altered by the Holy Spirit  
bei shengling gengxin 被圣灵更新 to be renewed by the Holy Spirit  
bei xieling zhanran 被邪灵沾染 to be infected by evil spirit(s)  
benshengren 本省人 ethnic Hoklo or Hakka Taiwanese  
biaoqingbao 表情包 emoticons  
bu chengshu 不成熟 not mature  
bu gou ling'en 不够灵恩 not ling'en enough  
bu qu jiaohui le 不去教会了 no longer goes to church  
bu shi hen ling'en 不是很灵恩 not very ling'en  
bu shi shende zhiyi 不是神的旨意 not God's will  
bu tai ling'en 不太灵恩 not really ling'en  
bu xinzhu le 不信主了 no longer believes in the Lord  
caolian 操练 train  
cha 查 study

chajingban 查经班 Bible study group  
chao ziran 超自然 supernatural  
chayan 查验 verify  
cheng 成 to become, to complete  
chengdu 程度 degree  
chengnian zhurixue 成年主日学 Adult Sunday School  
chengshu 成熟 mature  
chengxian 成仙 to become immortal  
chengzheng 成长 to grow  
chengzhongcun 城中村 slums, lit. village within the city  
choudi 仇敌 enemy (refers to Satan, the devil)  
chuandao 传道 evangelist  
chuantong jiaohui 传统教会 traditional church  
chuantong jidutu 传统基督徒 traditional Christian  
chuantong 传统 traditional  
chujia 出家 leaving home (also, to become a monk)  
chumo 触摸 touch  
chuxin zaojiu 初信造就 building up new believers  
Da daojia lingjie 大道家令戒 Precepts and commands of great Daoism  
dailing 带领 lead  
daizhe nengli de budao 带着能力的布道 preaching or evangelism that is accompanied with power  
dajiating 大家庭 big family  
dao 道 way, road, path  
Daode Jing 道德经 Tao Te Ching, Classic of the Way and Virtue, Daoist text  
daogao 祷告 prayer

daozang 道藏 repository of the Way  
dazangjing 大藏經 Buddhist canons  
dejiu 得救 to receive salvation  
dejun xingdao 得君行道 bringing dao to the world with the blessing of the sovereign  
di 帝 Lord  
dianliu 电流 flowing electric current  
dixiong jiemei 弟兄姐妹 brother and sister (Christian)  
dixiong 弟兄 brother (Christian)  
du shengjing 读圣经 read Bible  
duishen you xinxin 对神有信心 having faith in God  
en 恩 grace, gift  
enci 恩赐 ling'en gifts  
fadian 发电 flowing electric current  
fadou 发抖 trembling  
fan fangyan 翻方言 translate tongues  
fan'geshuo 樊哥说 Brother Fan speaks  
fandui ling'en 反对灵恩 oppose ling'en  
fangxia 放下 set down  
fangyan daogao 方言祷告 glossolalia  
fanzhuan 反转 to reverse, to inverse  
fashi 法师 one who has mastered the Buddhist sutras  
fenbian nengli 分辨能力 ability to discern  
fengkuang 疯狂 crazy  
fengqin 风琴 organ (instrument)  
fengshui 风水 Feng Shui (Chinese geomancy)

fenxiang 分享 sharing  
fude zhengshen 福德正神 Earth God of Wealth and Merit  
fuqian 肤浅 shallow  
fushi de difang 服侍的地方 place to serve  
fushi 服事 serve  
fuyin pai 福音派 evangelical sect  
gai xinyang 改信仰 to change faith/belief  
gai zongjiao 改宗教 to change religious belief  
gaibian 改变 change  
gandong 感动 to be moved  
gangmu 纲目 outline  
ganqing 感情 affection, affective bond (non-familial)  
ganwu 感悟 perceive, perception  
ganxiang 感想 thought, impression  
ganxing 感性 emotionality  
gao guanxi 搞关系 to intentionally create social connections  
gen fumu de guanxi buhao 跟父母的关系不好 poor guanxi with his parents  
gen haizi de guanxi buhao 跟孩子的关系不好 poor guanxi with children  
gen qizi de guanxi buhao 跟妻子的关系不好 poor guanxi with wife  
gen shen qinmi de guanxi 跟神亲密的关系 intimate guanxi with God  
geng ling'en 更灵恩 more ling'en  
genghao de 更好的 better  
gengxin 更新 to renew, to be renewed  
gongfa 功法 qigong methods  
gongfu 功夫 Kungfu

gongji 攻击 attack  
gua 卦 oracle roller  
guanxi dedaole huifu 关系得到了恢复 guanxi was being restored  
guanxiwang 关系网 guanxi network  
guanxixue 关系学 guanxi studies  
guanxi 关系 social connectedness  
gui 鬼 ghost  
guishen 鬼神 ghosts and gods  
hagang 哈刚 Hacienda Heights  
hanzhong 汉中 Hanzhong  
hehu shengjing 合乎圣经 conform to the Bible  
hei'an de quanshi 黑暗的诠释 dark powers  
Heibei Wuchang 黑白无常 Black and White Impermanence  
hexie shehui 和谐社会 harmonious society  
hexie 和谐 harmony, relational harmony  
hongbao 红包 red packet (usually filled with cash)  
honghong huohuo 红红火火 social vibrancy  
honghuo 红火 red-hot sociality  
huanxing 唤醒 to wake up  
huaqiao 华侨 Chinese abroad (Chinese nationals who temporarily reside abroad)  
huaren jidutu chajing ziliao wangzhan 华人基督徒查经资料网站 Bible study resource website for Chinese Christians  
huaren 华人 Chinese immigrant (origins in China but are politically oriented to their adopted countries)  
huashu 化书 Book of Transformations  
huayi 华裔 Chinese immigrant well integrated into adopted countries and only distantly and ethnically connected to China

huayu de fushi 话语的服侍 to serve in the Word  
huiyuan 会员 membership  
hunshenqi jipi geda 浑身起鸡皮疙瘩 goosebumps all over her body  
huode lijie 获得理解 to gain understanding  
huopo 活泼 lively  
huzhao 呼召 to call  
jia xinwen 假新闻 fake news  
jiachou buke waiyang 家丑不可外扬 family shame should not be spread to the outside  
jiangyuan 讲员 speaker  
jianli yige qinmi de guanxi 建立一个亲密的关系 establish an intimate relationship  
jianyi qidaofa 简易祈祷法 A Short and Easy Method of Prayer  
jianzheng 见证 testimony  
jiaobao 骄傲 to be proud, prideful  
jiaodao 教导 teaching  
jiaogui 交鬼 involvement with evil spirits  
jiaohui fenlie 教会分裂 to split apart a church  
jiaoshi 教师 teacher  
jiating jiaohui 家庭教会 house church  
jiazhang 家长 parent  
jiazu xieshu 家族邪术 ancestral heretical practices  
jiazu zhouzu 家族咒诅 ancestral curse  
jiazu 家族 family, clan, ancestor  
jichu mentu 基础门训 fundamentals of discipleship  
jidian ling'en 极端灵恩 radical ling'en  
jidian 极端 extreme, radical

jidutu wenzhai jiejing xilie 基督徒文摘解经系列 Christian Digest Bible Commentary

jie yimeng 解异梦 to interpret dreams

jiejie 姐姐 elder sister

jiejing/shijing 解经/释经 to interpret

jieshi 解释 to explain, to expound, to interpret

jiezhe shige, shengling gandong le wo 借着诗歌, 圣灵感动了我 By means of worship singing, the Holy Spirit moved (gandong) me

jifang 乩方 talisman

jijiu 祭酒 libationers

jing 经 scripture

jingbai zanmei 敬拜赞美 worship and praise

jingli de zhuangbei 经历的装备 the equipping of experiences

jinglidaoshen de tongzai 经历到神的同在 to experience together with God

jingshi zhiyong 经世致用 to order the world and extend utility

jingshi 经世 to manage or govern the country, society, or world

jinru dao lingli 进入到灵里 into the Spirit

jinshi 禁食 to fast

jintian mushi de jiangdao rangwo jingli le shengling de gandong 今天牧师的讲道让我经历了圣灵的感动 The pastor's sermon today allowed me to experience the moving (gandong) of the Holy Spirit

jiuyue chajing 旧约查经 Old Testament Bible study

kai tianyan 开天眼 to open the Third Eye

kaikou daogao jingbai 开口祷告敬拜 to open the mouth, pray, and worship

kanduan 砍断 to cut

kangju 抗拒 to resist

kanjian 看见 insight

kanxi 看戏 to watch a play, to watch passively  
kaozhe shengling 靠着圣灵 to depend on the Holy Spirit  
ketang 课堂 classroom  
kongde 空的 empty  
kunan 苦难 suffering  
kunbang 捆绑 to be bound up  
kuzao 枯燥 dry  
la guanxi 拉关系 to try to establish a social connection with someone  
laidaoshen de mianqian 来到神的面前 to come before God  
laiwang 来往 the back and forth of favors and gifts  
laizi shen, laizi ziji huo laizi sadan 来自神，来自自己，或来自撒旦 from God, from the self, or from Satan  
laodi 老弟 younger brother  
laolao 姥姥 maternal grandmother  
laoshi 老师 teacher  
laoxiang 老乡 from the same town or village  
lengdan 冷淡 cold and indifferent  
liangxin 良心 conscience  
lianjie 链接 to connect  
Liezi 列子 The Writings of Master Lie, Daoist text  
liliang 力量 power  
ling 灵; lingyan 灵验; lingying 灵应; lingli 灵力 magical efficacy, magical power  
ling'en hua 灵恩化 the transformation of a non-ling'en institution towards ling'en  
ling'en pai 灵恩派 Charismatics  
lingji 灵乩 diviner of the spirit  
lingjie 灵界 spiritual world

lingjue 灵觉 spiritual detection  
lingming riliang 灵命日粮 Daily Bread for Spiritual Lives  
lingshou 领受 to receive (often, the Holy Spirit)  
lingting shen 聆听神 to listen to God  
lingwu 灵舞 spirit dancing  
lingxing 灵性 spirituality, spiritual experience  
lingxiu 灵修 spiritual cultivation  
lingyi jiejing 灵意解经 spiritual exegesis  
lingying 灵婴 ghost fetus  
lishang wanglai 礼尚往来 to go back and forth  
lixing 理性 rationality  
liyi 利益 personal benefit or profit  
liyi 礼仪 liturgy  
lizheng 例证 sermon illustration  
li 礼 ritual  
maoguishen 毛鬼神 hairy ghost gods  
meiguo 美国 United States  
meihaode guanxi 美好的关系 a beautiful and good relationship  
meiri lingliang 每日灵粮 Our Daily Bread, a publication dedicated to Christian spiritual growth  
meiyou gandong 没有感动 Not moved  
menshen 门神 door god  
mentu xunlian 门徒训练 discipleship training  
mianzi 面子 face  
mingli xue 命理学 mingli divination  
mixin 迷信 superstition

modao 默祷 silent prayer  
mogui 魔鬼 the devil  
moxiang jingwen 默想经文 to meditate on Scripture  
mudaoyou 慕道友 seeker  
muqu 牧区 shepherding zone  
mushi 牧师 ordained minister  
na shitan rende 那试探人的 the one who tempts people  
nainai 奶奶 paternal grandmother  
naobu fayan 脑部发炎 inflammation in the brain  
naohai zhong 脑海中 in our minds  
neibuhua 内部化 internalization  
neisheng waiwang 内圣外王 inner sageliness, outer kingliness  
neixin pingan 内心平安 peace in the heart  
neizai shenghuo 内在生活 inner life, teachings by Jiang Xiuqin  
neizai shengming de jianzao 内在生命的建造 Construction of the Inner Life  
nian shengjing 念圣经 to read the Bible out loud  
nijiu fuchi wo/women 你就扶持我/我们 then you support me/us  
nijiu tuozhu le wo/women 你就托住了我/我们 then you held me/us up  
nūzhong hui 女众会 female mass meeting  
paichusuo 派出所 police station  
peide peide nishi peide, rongyao gui wo zhu 配的配的你是配的, 荣耀归我主 You Are Worthy, Glory to you, Lord  
peilinghui 培灵会 spiritual cultivation meeting  
pengyouquan 朋友圈 Friend's Circle  
ping'an xile 平安喜乐 peace and joy  
pingni yixing 凭祢意行 Have Thine Own Way, Lord

pokou 破口 tear  
pudugong 普渡公 Flaming-Mouth Ghost King  
puren 仆人 servant  
putaoyuan yundong 葡萄园运动 Vineyard Movement  
qi 气 life breath, vital essence  
qian 签 divination sticks  
qiangyang 抢羊 snatching sheep  
qige shantou 七个山头 Seven Mountain  
qingwei de 轻微的 light  
qinmi de guanxi 亲密的关系 intimate social relations  
qinqing 亲情 affective ties (familial)  
qinyulu jingbai 琴与炉敬拜 Harp and Bowl worship  
qinyulu ziyou jingbai 琴与炉自由敬拜 harp and bowl freely worship  
qiye baye 七爷八爷 Seventh and Eighth Masters  
quanran de shifang 全然的释放 complete release  
quanshenma 全身麻 feeling numb and tingling throughout the body  
quanshi liangyan 劝世良言 Good Words to Admonish the Age  
qumu 区牧 zone pastors  
renao 热闹 social vibrancy  
rende 认得 to recognize  
renduermai 任督二脉 two energy channels in the body related to qigong  
renji guanxi 人际关系 Social connectedness or social relations with people  
renjian fojiao 人间佛教 Humanistic Buddhism  
renqing 人情 reciprocity  
rensheng fojiao 人生佛教 Humanistic Buddhism

renyuren 人与人 human-with-human

renyushen 人与神 human-with-God

reqing 热情 passion

sadan 撒旦 Satan

sanjiao 三教 The Three Teachings (Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism)

shanshu 善书 Good Books

shen gandong wo quzuo 神感动我去做... God has moved me to do something

shen geilewo yige gandong 神给了我一个感动 God gave me an instance of being moved

shen hui baoda wo 神会报答我 God will repay me

shen xin ling 身心灵 Body, heart, spirit

shende ernü 神的儿女 God's sons and daughters (children)

shende huayu 神的话语 God's Words

shengguo 胜过 to be victorious over

shengjing bofangqi 圣经播放器 audio Bible players

shengjing xunlian 圣经训练 Bible training

shengjing 圣经 Bible

shengling chongman 圣灵充满 to be filled by the Holy Spirit

shengling de engao gaomo ni 圣灵的恩膏膏抹你 may the anointing of the Holy Spirit anoint you

shengling hui dui women de liangxin shuohua 圣灵会对我们的良心说话 Holy Spirit speaks to our conscience

shengling jiao women xiangqi shengjing zhong de hua 圣灵叫我们想起圣经中的话 Holy Spirit helps believers to think of words from the Bible

shengling jiezhe butong fangshi xiang women shuohua 圣灵藉不同方式向我们说话 Holy Spirit uses different methods to speak to us

shengling zhiye 圣灵之夜 Night of the Holy Spirit

shengming 生命 life, Christian life  
shengnü 圣女 sage women  
shenji zaixian 神迹再现 Miracle Reappears  
shenti de buwei 身体的部位 parts of the body  
shenti ganjue qingsongle yixie 身体感觉轻松了一些 body feel a bit lighter/relaxed  
shenxian 神仙 immortal  
shenxuesheng 神学生 seminarian  
shenxueyuan 神学院 seminary  
sheshuo 社说 Social News, a journal in Jiangsu of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century  
shesui 拾穗 historical-grammatical issues in the biblical text  
shifang 释放 to release  
shimu 师母 pastor's wife  
shiqu jiu'en 失去救恩 to lose salvation  
shouxiang mianxiang 手相面相 physiognomy (hand and face reading)  
shuling chengshudu 属灵成熟度 degree of spiritual maturity  
shuling de xiazi 属灵的瞎子 spiritually blind  
shuling shijie 属灵世界 spiritual world  
shuling zhengzhan 属灵争战 spiritual warfare  
shuling 属灵 spiritual  
shulinghua 属灵化 to spiritualize  
shuo fangyan 说方言 to speak in tongues, glossolalia  
shuo jianzheng 说见证 to give a testimony  
shuo xinlihua 说心里话 to speak the truth (lit. to speak words in the heart)  
shuo yuyan 说预言 speak prophecy  
shushen de 属神的 belonging to God

shushu ayi 叔叔阿姨 uncle and aunty  
shuyu mogui 属于魔鬼 belonging to the devil  
sishu wujing 四书五经 The Five Classics and Four Books  
suanming 算命 fortune-telling  
tai qingxuhua 太情绪化 too emotional  
taijiquan 太极拳 Tai chi, an ancient form of Chinese martial art  
taishang ganying pian 太上感应篇 Tractate of the Most High One on Actions and Consequences  
taishijie 太世界 too worldly  
tanjiezi 瘫羯子 paralysis monsters  
taolun 讨论 to discuss  
teshu jiangyuan 特殊讲员 special speaker  
teshu juhui 特殊聚会 special gathering  
tianmi 甜蜜 sweet and happy  
tianshi 天师 Celestial Master  
tianshidao 天师道 Way of the Celestial Masters  
tianzhang 天章 celestial writ  
tiao dashen 跳大绳 dancing the great deity/god  
ting yesu de shengyin 听耶稣的声音 hear the voice of Jesus  
tong 同 sameness  
tonggong 同工 coworker (church)  
Tonghui 痛悔 regret  
tongku 痛苦 pain  
tongren 同人 sameness in humanity  
tongsheng fangyan daogao 同声方言祷告 tongue prayer in unison  
tongshi 同事 coworker

tongxiang 同乡 from the same town or village  
tongxue 同学 classmate  
tou yangqilai 头养起来 head tilted slight upward  
tounao de zhishi 头脑的知识 head knowledge  
tounaoli de shen 头脑里的神 God that exists in the head  
touyang 偷羊 stealing sheep  
tuanqi fudao 团契辅导 fellowship mentor  
tuanqi 团契 fellowship  
tuixiuhui 退修会 church retreat gatherings  
tupo 突破 to breakthrough  
tu 土 unrefined, uncouth  
waishengren 外省人 mainlanders, migrants who arrived in Taiwan from mainland China following 1949  
wanglai 往来  
wanquan shifang 完全释放  
weidajia daogao fushi 为大家祷告服侍  
weixin 微信  
wenhua dageming 文化大革命  
wenhua jidutu 文化基督徒  
wokandao youxieren limian you jupa youshang jusang 我看到有些人里面有惧怕，忧伤，沮丧  
women 我们 we  
wozai tianguo dedao jiangshang 我在天国得到奖赏 I have earned my reward in the kingdom of Heaven  
wuran 污染 to infect  
wusheng laomu 無生老母 Eternal Venerable Mother

wushu 武术 Kung Fu  
wuwei 无味 flavorless  
wuxing de daogao 悟性的祷告 prayer based on intuition  
wuxing 悟性 power of understanding, comprehension and intuition  
wuxunjie pai 五旬节派 Pentecostalism  
wuxunjie 五旬节 Pentecost  
xiang ling'en kaifang 向灵恩开放 open to ling'en  
xiangfa 想法 thought  
xianggao de yuping 香膏的玉瓶 Alabaster Jar  
xiangxin 相信 to believe  
xianzhi 先知 prophet (Christian)  
xiao jiating 小家庭 little family  
xiao xiongdi 小兄弟 little brother (Christian)  
xiaofa jidu 效法基督 The Imitation of Christ  
xiaogui 小鬼 little ghost  
xiaozu moshi 小组模式 small group model  
xibao xiaozu 细胞小组 cell group  
xie'e shili 邪恶势力 force of evil  
xie'e 邪恶 evil  
xieling 邪灵 evil spirit  
xieshu qingdan 邪術清單 occult checklist  
xieshu 邪术 witchcraft  
xin wang ai 信望爱 faith, hope, love  
xin yimin 新移民 new Chinese migrants  
xin 心 heart

xinde fangxiang 新的方向 new direction  
xinde jiaren 新的家人 new family member  
xinli fahun 心里发昏 to feel faint in the heart  
xinli ganjue dao 心里感觉到 to feel in the heart  
xinli tingdao 心里听到 to hear in the heart  
xinli you pingan 心里有平安 to have peace in the heart  
xinxi 信息 sermon  
xinxin 信心 faith  
xinyue chajing 新约查经 New Testament Bible study  
xuanjiaoshi 宣教士 evangelist  
xuesheng 学生 student  
xuexi zhishi 学习知识 learning knowledge  
xunlian zhongxin 训练中心 training center  
xunlian 训练 to train  
yangjiao 洋教 foreign religion  
yasuiqian 压岁钱 lucky money  
yiduan 异端 heresy  
yiguandao 一贯道 Consistent Way, a syncretistic Chinese religious sect  
yijiao 异教 heretical teaching or sect  
yijing 易经 I Ching, Daoist text  
yimeng 异梦 charismatic dream  
yinan yinü fuqi 一男一女夫妻 one man, one woman, husband-wife  
yincang 隐藏 to hide  
yindao 引导 guidance  
yinghui 营会 camp gathering

yingling 婴灵 fetus ghost  
yinta huozhe 因祂活着 Because He Lives  
yinyang 阴阳 Yin and Yang  
yinzheng 印证 evidence  
yiqi 义气 righteousness  
yishi zhuanjia 仪式专家 ritual specialist  
yishi 仪式 ritual  
yiwen 译文 translation  
yixiang 异象 vision  
yizhi shifang 医治释放 healing and deliverance  
youdian ling'en 有点灵恩 slightly ling'en  
youdian 有点 a little  
younge shouru 有个收入 to have an income  
yuanqin buru jinlin 远亲不如近邻 faraway kin cannot compare with close neighbours, a Chinese saying  
yuanzhang 院长 dean  
yubeixin 预备心 to prepare the heart  
yujiانشen yinghui 遇见神营会 Encounter God retreat  
yujuan yesu 遇见耶稣 encounter Jesus  
yushen xiangyu 与神相遇 meet with God  
yushen yuehui 与神约会 appointment with God  
yuyan 预言 prophecy  
zai lingli de xunlian 在灵里的训练 training in the spirit  
zaiguowai 在国外 out of the country  
zaipei 栽培 to cultivate  
zhai 债 debt

zhan 占 prognostication  
zhanbu 占卜 prognostication  
zhanglao 长老 elder  
zhanran 沾染 pollutants  
zhao guanxi 找关系 to use social connections to do something; to pull strings  
zhelu zoubutong 这路走不通 this road leads to a dead end  
zhengtong daozaang 正统道藏 Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign Period  
zhenshi 真实 authentic  
zhenzhu naicha 珍珠奶茶 boba tea  
zhidao 知道 to know  
zhongdu ling'en 重度灵恩 heavy ling'en  
zhongdu 重度 heavy  
zhongguo 中国 China  
zhonghua daozaang 中华道藏 Taoist Canon of China  
zhongwen xuexiao 中文学校 Chinese language school  
zhongxiao dao 忠孝道 Way of Loyalty and Filial Piety  
zhu, wo/women jingbai ni 主，我/我们敬拜你 Lord, I/we worship you  
zhu, wo/women toukao 主，我/我们投靠 Lord, I /we take refuge  
zhu, wo/women yangwang 主，我/我们仰望 Lord, I/we look up  
zhuabuzhu paizi 抓不住拍子 cannot capture the tempo correctly  
zhuangbei xunlian 装备训练 to equip and practice  
zhuangzi 莊子 Zhuangzi, ancient Daoist text  
zhufu 祝福 to bless  
zhuiqiu 追求 to pursue  
zhujie 注解 commentary

zhuli mushi 助理牧师 assistant pastor

zhuliu meiti 主流媒体 mainstream media

zhuren 主任 director

zhuri jingbai 主日敬拜 Lord's Day worship

zhurixue 主日学 Sunday school

zhuti chajing 主题查经 Topical Bible study

zhuzi baijia 诸子百家 Hundred School of Thoughts

ziji 自己 self

zimei 姊妹 sisters (Christian)

zimian jiejing 字面解经 literal interpretation

ziran 自然 natural

ziwei doushu 紫微斗数 Purple Star Astrology

zou houmen 走后门 to go through the backdoor, to use shortcuts to achieve one's goals

zoudao 走祷 prayer walking

zuiba zhangkai yidian 嘴巴张开一点 mouth slightly opened

## Appendix C – People and Organizations

aixiuyuan 爱修园 Agape Renewal Center

Bian Yanjie 边燕杰 Bian Yanjie, Chinese American sociologist

Chen Feili 陈腓利 Reverend Philip Chen, former senior pastor of GCCI

Chen Jiazheng 陈嘉正 Reverend Brian Chen, current senior pastor of GCCI

Chen Zhonghui 陈仲辉 Reverend Ernest Chan, founding pastor of ARC

Daoji 道济 Ji Gong (1130-1209), Chan Buddhist monk

falun dafa 法轮大法 Falungong

Fan Hongtai 樊鸿台 Reverend Hung Tai Fan, current pastor of ARC

foguang xishan xilaisi 佛光山西來寺 Fo Guang Shan Hsi Lai Temple

Guan Denian 管德年 Reverend Kenneth Kwan, founding and current pastor of VOH

guoji dashiming jiaohui 国际大使命教会 Great Commission Church International

hagang zhonghua lianhe jidu jiaohui 哈刚中华联合基督教会 Hacienda Chinese United Church of Christ

Hong Xiuquan 洪秀全 Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), Chinese religious leader and revolutionary who led the Taiping Rebellion

Huang Jiale 黄迦勒 Reverend Caleb Huang

Jia Yuming 賈玉銘 Jia Yuming (1880-1964), Chinese theologian

Jiang Wu 吴疆 Jiang Wu, Chinese American religious scholar

Jiang Xiuqin 江秀琴 Reverend Grace Chiang, founding and current pastor of FRCC

jidu fule zhijia 基督福乐之家 Vineyard of Hope

Laozi 老子 Lao Tzu (6<sup>th</sup> century BCE), philosopher of Chinese Daoism

Li Gong 李焘 Gong Li (1659-1733), philosopher of early Qing and founder of the Yan-Li School

Liang Fa 梁发 Liang Fa (1789-1855), Chinese evangelist

lingliangtang 灵粮堂 Bread of Life Church

linshui furen 臨水夫人 Lady of Linshui, also Chen Jinggu, a Chinese goddess

luofu jiaohui 洛福教会 Evangelical Formosan Church Los Angeles

luoshanji fuyin jiaohui 洛杉矶福音教会 Los Angeles Evangelical Church

luoshanji taiyu fuyin jiaohui 洛杉矶台语福音教会 Los Angeles Taiwanese Evangelical Church

Ma Xiangbo 马相伯 Ma Xiangbo (1840-1939), Chinese educator and Jesuit priest

Mazu 妈祖 Mazu, Chinese goddess of the sea

mingzhou shuangcheng huaren jidu tuanqi 明州双城华人基督徒团契 Minnesota Twin Cities Chinese Christian Fellowship

muzhu xianfeng jiaohui 慕主先锋教会 Forerunner Christian Church

Ni Tuosheng 倪柝声 Watchman Nee (1903-1972), Chinese church leader and Christian teacher

niuyue zhongguo jidutu tuanqi 纽约中国基督徒团契 New York Chinese Christian Group

qiuyu shengyue jiaohui 秋雨圣约教会 Early Rain Covenant Church

ruoge jiaohui 若歌教会 Rutgers Community Christian Church

shengminghe muzhe lingxiu xueyuan 生命河牧者领袖学院 River of Life Pastoral Leadership Institute

Su Wenfeng 苏文峰 Reverend Su Wenfeng, Chinese American pastor and author

taifu jidu jiaohui 台福基督教会 Evangelical Formosan Church

taiwan jidu zhanglao jiaohui 台湾基督长老教会 Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Taixu 太虚 Taixu (1890-1947), Buddhist thinker, activist, and reformer

Wang Mingdao 王明道 Wang Mingdao (1900-1991), Chinese Protestant pastor and evangelist

Xie Ailei 谢爱磊 Xie Ailei, Chinese scholar of education

Xingyun 星云 Hsing Yun (1927-2023) Chinese Buddhist monk and teacher based in Taiwan

Xu Xun 许逊 Xu Xun (265-374), Daoist priest during the Jin

Xu Zongshi 许宗实 Reverend Fred Hsu, former pastor of RCCC

Yan Yuan 颜元 Yan Yuan (1635-1704) Chinese Confucian scholar of the Qing

Yan Yunxiang 阎云翔 Yunxiang Yan, Chinese American anthropologist

Yang Fenggang 杨凤岗 Fenggang Yang, Chinese American sociologist

Yang Keqing 杨克勤 K.K. Yeo, Chinese American New Testament scholar

Yan-Li xuepai 颜李学派 School of Yan-Li, philosophical movement during the Qing

Yu Yingshi 余英时 Yu Ying-shih Chinese American historian and sinologist

zanmei zhiquan 赞美之泉 Stream of Praise, California based Christian worship group

Zeng Yanfen 曾熾芬 Yen-Fen Tseng, Taiwanese sociologist

Zhang Daoling 张道陵 Zhang Ling (34-156), Chinese religious leader and founder of the Celestial Masters sect

Zhang Jue 張角 Zhang Jue (?-184), Chinese military leader of the Yellow Turban Rebellion of the Eastern Han

zhengyi 正一 The Orthodox Unity, a Chinese Daoist movement founded by Zhang Ling

Zhou Min 周敏 Min Zhou, Chinese American sociologist

Zhou Yifang 周逸方 Reverend Robert Chou, co-founding pastor of VOH

Zhu Xi 朱熹 Zhu Xi (1130-1200), Chinese philosopher and politician of the Southern Song and influential in the development of Neo-Confucianism

Zitong 梓潼 Divine Lord of Zitong, also known as the Divine Lord of Wenchang