

Re-enchanting China:

Private Religiosities in the Media Field in Beijing

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1. Introduction: The field of investigation

Post-socialist China is riddled by a variety of growing religious groups whose relationship to the atheist state range from cooperation to direct persecution. Officially, the government sanctions the existence of five religions - Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Confucianism and Christianity in the form of Protestantism and Catholicism. As long as they follow state guidelines for acceptable religious behavior, these denominations are not only tolerated in public space, but are increasingly encouraged by the government which has started to see them as beneficial to social stability. The Chinese government also recognizes that doing so benefits its own popularity (Mei-Hui Yang, 2008, p. 28). These religious movements have spread among all levels of society, and their popularity is generally attributed to the ideological and moral vacuum which exists in present day China.

At the opposite end of this 'encouragement – persecution' continuum we find movements which are in open conflict with the state, such as the much debated and persecuted Falun Gong and heterodox Christian movements such as the 'Little Flock of Watchman Nee' and its offspring 'Eastern Lightning' all of which have been labeled 'evil cults' by the Chinese government¹. These movements are growing among China's rural population, and especially among those who have been left out of China's recent rapid development - the peasants, workers and the new floating migrant worker population. This part of the population has also experienced an increase in material standards albeit to a much lesser extent than the urban middle and upper classes, but the erosion of the institutions of the Mao era has meant a loss of access to a stable and secure income, health care, housing and education. In addition, they have also lost more intangible things such as moral and ideological footing. The heterodox religious movements provide renewed access to these social and economic resources, and fill up the institutional and moral vacuum (ibid, p. 29)

In between these extreme positions of state encouragement and persecution we find other emergent religious groups that have gained popularity in the coastal cities among parts of the upper and middle classes. This population segment generally believes in one of the five state-

¹ The term was coined, after a foreign consultancy/advertisement agency had revealed the fact, that the term 'anti-patriotic, or anti-revolutionary' would not have much international appeal. Whereas 'evil cult' could more easily be associated with an enemy of the people by a Western audience, which makes the active extermination campaign which the government has instigated against them more acceptable (Penny, 2008, p. 140)

approved religions, but choose to practice in private in a precarious balancing act between legal and illegal. The driving force of *these* religious movements is not clear at all. The overall circumstances of their constituencies have improved in Post-Socialist China (PSC), and they have the option of joining the legal religious communities, so why risk incurring the heavy hand of state reprisal? This thesis seeks to investigate the motives for such behavior.

More specifically, the aim of this thesis is to investigate why some young adults connected with the private media field in Beijing choose to join two particular private religious movements: The worship of a living Tibetan Buddha, and the underground protestant housechurch movement.

The thesis investigates why these particular groups and individuals have chosen these particular brands of religion. It does so by looking at what they use this new-found religiosity for; by investigating how the groups think of themselves in relation to the surrounding society, and by examining the social and moral models on which these movements are being built.

The thesis is based on fieldwork among several groups of young urbanites who have recently converted to non-state-sanctioned religions.

One group is part of a rising elite in the growing field of private media and movie businesses in Beijing. They are proselytizing each other into a congregation which worships a living Buddha, Tulku or Lama, of Tibetan origin². The other groups consist mainly of students from various universities in Beijing who are proselytizing each other into the city's growing underground housechurch movement.

2. Methodology

2.1 Fieldwork did me – The course of events and the character and extent of the fieldwork

I am a product of a late modern society, with all its relativistic post-modern lack of direction and identity. For this reason, I decided that I would do fieldwork in a society which was going through what Jonathan Friedman has labeled 'a period of modernity'. I wanted to experience the

² Living Buddhas inside the PRC are something of a gray area in the CCP policy towards religious groups. This is due to the fact that Buddhism is well thought of and part of Chinese self-understanding, whereas anything relating to Tibet is politically a sore spot. But some of the living Buddhas have gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate that they are not anti-CCP, and so they are tolerated. The Bureau of religious affairs has ordered Living Buddhas residing outside of China to seek official permission before reincarnating inside the PRC. (Wong, 2010, New York Times 01/2010)

collective optimism which according to the theory, goes with it. (Friedman, 2007). I did not find collective optimism in China. Instead I found people inventing new meaning and morals in its absence. At the outset of my investigation, China had, and still has the highest economic growth rate in the world. This suggested to me that it was a good candidate for a society in the midst of such a period. As I sought information about this rising world power, it came to my attention that the Chinese society³ is undergoing one of the most rapid changes in human history, and that these changes have been significantly under-investigated by anthropologists due to the near impossibility of conducting fieldwork in China until 20 or so years ago and the restrictions on research which still exist. Here then was a chance to contribute something to filling out a blind-spot in anthropological literature.

I decided to make the relation between the ongoing cultural changes in China and ensuing changes to the religious field the overarching theme of this thesis. After settling upon this topic, I also decided to increase my chances of doing fieldwork in China with a modicum of success and started studying Mandarin at a language school in Copenhagen.

My original plan was to do fieldwork within one of the heterodox Christian movements gathering force in the rural parts of China. As I would find out first hand, however, the restrictions on research into politically sensitive topics are still a very limiting factor today. The New York Times had done an article on these groups, but the academic literature on the subject turned out to be almost non-existent. I contacted several universities in China, and one Nordic research center based in China, but the academics I got in touch with, inside and outside China, could, or would, tell me nothing.

And so, off to Shanghai I went, in the hope that gathering knowledge and contacts would prove to be possible once I was inside China.

I stayed for three months with a family in Shanghai, and during this time I improved my Chinese and sought out a number of academic experts in the fields of anthropology, sociology and religious studies in order to seek their advice on how to approach doing fieldwork in a heterodox Christian movement. As mentioned the Chinese state has outlawed these movements, labeled them 'evil cults' and actively seeks to destroy them – without much luck, since their rhizomatic structure makes them hard to up-root. The state is intent on containing the heterodox movements and has staged a number of propaganda campaigns aimed at curtailing their popularity, and thus

³ If we can indeed speak of such a thing.

the pace at which they spread. (Penny, 2008, p. 116) Any form of contact with these groups has been made illegal, and the offender could potentially be severely punished.

For a foreign student, the repercussions would most likely amount to nothing more than a swift departure from the Peoples Republic of China (PRC). Nonetheless, these circumstances made my attempts to establish academic contacts in China difficult. Everywhere I was politely rejected, sometimes with the friendly advice that it was better to stay out of such things, or a push in some other, less perilous direction. One professor even went so far as to suggest, 'Why don't you study something more Chinese?' The fact that according to independent observers (Fenggang Yang), these movements together have something in the neighborhood of one hundred million members – all of whom are Chinese - did not seem to legitimize them as Chinese. Seeing no other way, I did, however, take the professor's advice. I changed the topic, and started focusing on urban elites converting to traditional Chinese religions. Luckily I got access to such a Buddhist group, and managed to do a month of fieldwork within it. After that contact ended, I happened to come across another group of people who had recently become religious - This time university students who had become adherents of protestant housechurch congregations in Beijing. I stayed in the periphery of these groups for three months, visiting bible study groups and congregations and doing interviews whenever possible. I was puzzled by the remarkable differences in the ways the two case groups related to and utilized their religiosities⁴, and this puzzlement became the cardinal questions of the thesis, which are as follows:

2.2 Cardinal Question

Why is the ongoing shift in religious practice in the case groups taking place, and why have they chosen to join private rather than state sanctioned religious groups?

Sub questions:

What do they use their newfound religiosities for?

How can we describe them in the terms of the anthropology of religion?

⁴ In line with the authors in 'Chinese Religiosities – Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation (Mei-Hui Yang, 2008) I use the term 'religiosities, rather than religions, because the term implies a contextual process, not a predefined entity.

How do they perceive themselves and the surrounding society?

How do these perceptions affect the strategies they employ?

China as a cultural setting, and the two case groups, each presented their set of methodological and ethical issues. The following is an attempt to give an account of them and the methods I employed in solving them.

2.3 Doing fieldwork in post-Socialist China

China is considered a difficult place to do anthropological fieldwork, and rightly so. Until the late 1980's, Chinese citizens were not allowed to speak with foreigners, and visiting researchers who had managed to obtain research permits were appointed an official guide and only allowed to visit selected areas. This isolationist policy has ended, but what Maifair Mei-Hui Yang, and others have termed the 'culture of suspicion' (Meihui-Yang, 1994, p.15) lingers on. It originates from the widespread social paranoia during the Cultural Revolution, which caused a general breakdown of trust relations. The current attitude of the average Chinese person is nowhere near as distrustful towards strangers and nosy people, such as anthropologists, as one reads in the anthropological literature from the 1980's, but in my experience one needs to cultivate a great deal of mutual trust and understanding with a Beijing resident before that person will consent to be part of an interview where it is possible to ask personal questions which go beyond what Ots has termed 'culturally and socially valid styles of public discourse' (Ots, 1994, p. 133), or as it is also known: polite conversation. Informal chats work much better.

In Beijing, there is still a very real fear of state surveillance. I was told that each neighborhood has a committee of housewives and others with time on their hands, whose job it is to keep a watchful eye out for dissident behavior. It is called 'The Residents' Committee' and functions as the lowest level of government organization. It exists in every urban district in China. For decades their job was to spread propaganda and spy on suspicious neighbors. Now they also take care of some welfare tasks, as well as approving or disapproving applications of various kinds according to the perceived adherence of the applicant to the laws of the regime. Several of my informers voiced the opinion that the state was capable of surveillance of every single person in Beijing (see Appendix interview with Yi Mei Mei on government surveillance). Add to this the

face-concerns pertinent to the culture, which in my experience necessitate a degree of politeness between acquaintances and even friends, which I found somewhat limiting, and which made asking *in the right way* a big concern. The obvious language barriers of my limited Chinese speaking ability added to the gravity of this issue. All together there were serious difficulties involved in interviewing or even talking with the members of the case groups who didn't speak English, and at times I felt that I had bitten off a bigger bite than I could chew.

It was only towards the end of my fieldwork that I got the hang of understanding when a consent to help establish a contact or to be interviewed was meant sincerely or merely given to save my face. Luckily I quickly made friends with people who could and would help me establish the necessary contacts. As explained by Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang In her seminal work 'Gifts, Favors, And Banquets -The art of social relationships in China' (Meihui-Yang, 1994) that's how it works in China. Even in official business deals with written contracts. A personal trust relation needs to be established, and this is done through mutual acquaintances. Someone trusted must vouch for a new connection.

Likewise, promises of anonymity do not seem to be of much comfort or value to potential informants. Only mutual trust does the trick, and even then, it is a matter of knowing the polite limits to what one can and cannot ask.

Finding the field

In the following section I will describe in more detail how I came across the two case groups, and the extent of the fieldwork that I did amongst them.

2.4 Studying up – Fieldwork among the V.I.P.

2.4.1 Gaining Access

I managed to befriend a successful young woman who had earned a great deal of money as a model, and now runs an up-and-coming movie and advertisement company and attends the most prestigious film school in China. Let us call her Lin Chen. (To ensure anonymity, I will use the filial terms that I came to know each person by, or for lack of that, a common Chinese name.) She is a member of an elite network of young adults (late twenties to early thirties) connected to the film school and the media and movie industry in Beijing. She recently converted to a type of

Tibetan Buddhism characterized by the worship of a living Buddha of the Vajrayana school. Lin Chen invited me to spend the Chinese New Year celebrations with her and her family in Beijing and Shenyang. We met in the Southern capital of China – Kunming, and because Shenyang is far up north, I originally declined her offer because I lacked the financial means to carry it through. She then offered to pay a return ticket for me, first class as it turned out, and the next day we were off.

2.4.2 The character and extent of the fieldwork

I stayed with her a month or so, during which time I got acquainted with some of her network of contacts, family, and friends. Like most successful contemporary urban Chinese, she has a vast and varied network. Most nights were spent going to clubs, restaurants, spas, and shopping avenues with her friends and family. In Shenyang, this activity was supplemented with visits to the entire family in their businesses and homes, and they would pay return visits to her parents' home where we resided during the holiday. From the beginning I had told Lin Chen that I was writing my master's thesis and that I was going to use the experiences I shared with her as fieldwork for it.

We went to a couple of Buddhist temples together and took part in a number of rituals connected with the New Year there, but since the living Buddha was in Hong Kong at the time tending to the religious needs of his followers there, we never went to any religious functions of the group itself. Lin Chen had been proselytized by one of her best friends – another model - with whom she had some business and investment arrangements. She, in turn had likewise been proselytized by another person in the same network of personal and professional friends. In fact, most of Lin Chen's closer acquaintances and friends – not the family- had started worshipping the living Buddha, and would often wear necklaces with a picture of him at social events⁵. Many of them had altars at home where they lit candles and recited prayers which also functioned as magical spells. We spent a lot of time talking about the congregation, what goes on in it, and what their relationship with the living Buddha was like.

Since my interest was not in understanding the religion in itself, but in why and how this network utilizes it, I simply included all the aspects of their lives that I took part in into the fieldwork. This was also the only option open to me, since I was rarely in control of what kind of activity

⁵ To ensure to anonymity of the group I will not name the Living Buddha.

was undertaken and generally followed Lin Chen in her daily doings, some of which were intended for my entertainment, but the vast majority of which were normal New Year holiday activities for the group. By adopting this approach, it became clear to me that these recent converts were not particularly pious, and certainly not in the way one often experiences recently religious people to be. Most of them had, in fact, always believed in Buddhism in a detached sort of way. Many of their parents had been Buddhists in much the same way, secretly so during the Cultural Revolution. So what could the purpose of this increase in religious activity be? From talking to, and observing them, it was apparent to me that what this highly upwardly mobile group of people wanted and revered was to increase and secure their already remarkable success. I would argue that was exactly what they used this new-found religiosity for.

After the New Year Holidays, Lin Chen went to the United States with some friends from the network to shop, gamble, and probably make contacts in the movie business⁶. That put an end to our time together and to that part of my fieldwork.

The fieldwork I did in this case group consisted mainly of participant observation. I managed to get two of the group members to consent to be interviewed in a one-on-one basis, and I often had private conversations with Lin Chen and her close friend Didi Hui. Apart from these exceptions, though, the main part of the ethnographic material consists of taking part in and observing the group's behavior and conversation in various social settings. These settings would invariably be service or retail-oriented. The group mainly got together in upscale nightclubs, spas, restaurants and other service settings. A typical day in Beijing would consist of getting up after twelve sometime, eating the food which the maid had brought and prepared⁷. Then shopping, beautification or both - I once waited six hours while Lin Chen had her hair extensions fixed - or showing me around town. Dinner at a restaurant, or none at all, would be followed by a visit to the VIP section of one of the most high-class nightclubs in Beijing.

Around closing time, the group would move on to a restaurant. In Beijing, such a trip would end there – each group member going to their respective homes. But in Shenyang we would either go to a spa, where the group members bathe, refresh themselves, get foot massages and take a nap in the resting section, or rent a hotel room and sleep, take drugs and chat there. On one occasion,

⁶ She later told me, that they won so much money in Las Vegas, that it more than covered their traveling expenses. Maybe those good luck spells should be considered.

⁷ The maid took care of all the household chores such as cleaning, shopping, washing clothes and the doing the dishes.

this was followed directly by shopping excursions in nearby shopping malls. We had been to a local drug dealer's flat that Didi Hui knew, to get a stronger drug which they had all taken, and they couldn't sleep or go home because its effect lasted on. The reason for the difference between the partying praxis of Beijing and Shenyang was that in principle, such behavior is not compatible with the values of filial piety to which all of the group members wanted to appear to adhere. Thus the group members, who all stayed at their parents' homes during the holiday, could not go home smelly and intoxicated.

The fact that the fieldwork took place in part during the New Year holiday may have accentuated the frequency of the group's party-related activities greatly. In Shenyang, much the same took place, except that the days were filled with New Year traditions, family visits and excursions to all of the extended family. If someone in the family had opened a new store or redecorated their flat during the past year, the whole family would come to see these improvements. The New Year seems to function as a time for the family to measure its gains and losses of the previous year. During the big, common feast, held on the actual New Year's Eve, and which, unlike the other meals, was held in a restaurant, several family members gave emotional talks about their own lives in the past year.

During the month I spent with Lin Chen and her friends, I took part in ten or so family visits and excursions, ten to fifteen of the nights that I have described, and a daily variety of other service or retail encounters. Apart from that, I lived in her own and her parent's home during the whole period. As mentioned, I tried, but did not manage to get more than two interviews. The reasons for this will be discussed below.

During the fieldwork I gradually became aware of a common theme in most of the group activities and conversations, namely status. I repeatedly found myself having conversations with group members about the status of the people who were members of the group, the people they knew, and the places where they congregated. What struck me about it was the unambiguous or absolute sense in which the status evaluations were seen as significant.

Didi Hui is the sales manager of the second-most prestigious nightclub in Beijing, and he repeatedly explained the hierarchy of the Beijing nightclub scene to me. Lin Chen would always make sure that I was aware of the status of her various friends. I would be told that the friend we were presently partying with was a famous movie-star, a model, the best tennis coach in Beijing and so on. Shopping malls, saunas, restaurants and hairdressers were likewise evaluated

according to their various merits as status-confirming entities. The groups' preference for one place rather than the other was directly linked to the degree to which servants and other employees acted deferentially towards them. Even individual establishments like restaurants and hairdressers turned out to have VIP sections with better seats, more pampering, and more skilled staff. Likewise, the sauna which the group considered to be the very best in Shenyang was also the one in which the status hierarchy was most fiercely enacted. From the décor with its lavish amounts of marble and gold stucco, to the subservient attitude of the reception staff and the multitude of servants inside who handed out bathing supplies, filled fruit bowls and gave foot massages, or the parking lot guard, dressed in a military parade uniform, who stood to attention and saluted our car sharply as we exited the parking lot – everything in this place was aimed at establishing its customers as being on top of the social hierarchy.

2.4.3 My position

My original position had been one of guest – a position I had acquired perhaps because of being western, which is in itself trendy and status affirming within the Beijing fashion and media field. When I returned to Beijing, in hope of continuing the fieldwork in Lin Chen's group, the rules of reciprocity made it impossible for me to continue to be a guest or hang around in it. That would entail paying the bill in my due turn, something I was incapable of, since they spent a lot of money in their get-togethers. Besides, now that the holidays were over, Lin Chen was too busy with her business and school to have me around constantly. I tried to transform my role from that of guest and friend towards that of researcher by moving out of her flat and inviting group members out for meals individually with the intention of interviewing them. This turned out to be nearly impossible. My requests were met with polite but vague promises, but it seemed as if my desire to study them was not acceptable and I waited in vain for their promises to be realized until it dawned on me that this was their way of protecting my face while refusing my request. I theorize that their refusal or unwillingness was due to the fact that many of the group members are often in the public eye due to their varying degrees of fame, and therefore have a lot to lose if their "face" is damaged in some way. I managed to get an interview with Didi Hui with whom I had a good personal connection, and I had previously conducted two formal interviews with Lin Chen. Aside from these, I rely solely on the numerous informal conversations and the month long (or so) continuous participant observation which I did in the group.

Another difficulty in talking to these members of what we might call the ‘pop-media elite’ was that they had a tendency to think in deferential terms about everything, including the questions I would ask them. Thus a question such as, “Why do you have so many pictures of your teacher in your office?” would tend to be understood as an evaluative and potentially derogative statement on my behalf, not as a matter of gaining understanding as I had intended. I had to be very careful that the questions I posed would not offend their position as receivers of deference, and also that I did not fall too much out of character as a status affirming social connection to them.

This facet of studying up was a cornerstone in maintaining my presence in the group. The self-presentation I gave to the group had to be one that bore similitude to their own. I did not have to lie in any way as to my status, occupation, and so on, but my manner or self-presentation had to adhere to theirs. In this sense, my fieldwork in this group is a part of what Fabian and Hastrup have termed ‘the shift from informative to performative ethnography’ in which,

‘...the kind of ethnography where the ethnographer determines the questions and notes down the answers, is being replaced by a kind of ethnographic communication where the ethnographer does not call the tune but plays along.’ (Hastrup 1995, p. 82)

Another factor was, that the world view around which their group is built is much more morally demanding than the lives that they actually lead, and this gap between the etic and the emic is not articulated. Thus, it is not impossible to lavish oneself with consumer goods, take drugs, have extramarital sex, all the while being a devout Buddhist. What this meant in practice for my fieldwork was that, while I could befriend and spend time with these people and ask questions within accepted limits during our get-togethers, most of them would not have accepted a request for a formal interview. There were a few exceptions, the ones who felt most connected to me agreed to be interviewed.

2.5 Studying the secret – Fieldwork in an underground movement – gaining access, my position and interacting with true believers

Again, by pure chance, I was befriended by another student, whom I shall call Yi Mei Mei. Yi Mei Mei studied at the same prestigious movie school in Beijing as Lin Chen. Being in her early twenties, she is younger than the individuals in Lin Chen's network and not as rich or successful as them. I do not intend to establish precise criteria for membership of specific socio-economic classes in Beijing, but measured by family wealth and educational merit she belongs to

approximately the same segment as Lin Chen and her network - her parents own a small factory in another province and she has traveled in Europe several times – something most Chinese only dream about. Yet, Yi Mei Mei's ambitions and her attitude towards society and its hegemonic practices were very different from theirs. She was a lot more critical and anti-establishment. We became good friends, and I moved into her apartment. Her friends were an entirely different kind of people, and, like herself, some of them were attracted to the emerging underground house-church movement. Lin Chen and Yi Mei Mei met once while I was there and there was disbelief in Lin Chen's eyes when I told her that this was a new friend of mine. Her acute sense of class distinction had a hard time coping with me, her status-affirming European friend, being friends with a girl who so obviously didn't adhere to the dress or behavioral codes that she herself obeyed religiously. As I got to know Yi Mei Mei and her friends, I was invited to come along to meetings and gatherings, and so, once again, I decided to let Bob Simpson's insight that 'You don't do fieldwork, fieldwork does you,' (Simpson, 2006) be my guide and I started doing interviews and taping meetings.

2.5.1 My position

With regard to my relation to the Christians, I should point out that I was rarely asked directly if I was Christian or not. The fact that I was Western and interested in Christianity seemed to require no further explanation. When asked what I was doing in China, I would reply that I was studying religious revival and that that was the reason for my interest in their movement. These groups are highly focused on converting non-believers and my own reasons for being there were largely ignored in favor of the interpretation that it was God's will that I had come – that without knowing it, I was there to be saved.

So even though the gatherings were not supposed to be publicly known and though I was initially a stranger whom they knew through a non-group member, the mistrust one might expect was not present. House-church members perceive it as God's will that the house-church movement exists and grows. And as will become apparent in the analysis, the house-church cosmology dictates that it is God's will that the movement will eventually convert all of China. Everything is interpreted as being part of that plan. Thus the presence of a Westerner, perceived as an original Christian and someone from the lesser or uncorrupted West, in the group was seen as further evidence that God's plan was unfolding. Also, in some of the groups, there had previously been

from time to time a few Western Christians.

Thus, the cosmology of the house-church movement, which will be examined further in the analysis, structured my presence and role in it. One aspect of interacting with true believers is that it is very easy to get them to talk about their convictions, and also about their own lives. They tend to be very honest and straightforward. They tend to get right to the point, as they see it.

2.5.2 The character and extent of fieldwork

It turned out to be easier to get interviews with the Christians, but like with the Buddhists, the informal chats - the discussions I had with church members after prayer sessions were far more informative and emotionally engaged. In all, I went to eight prayer meetings and one Easter celebration where several prayer groups and congregations joined together in a cabaret style celebration. I conducted five interviews with members of the house-churches, two of which were with church leaders. Besides this, I lived for two months together with Yi Mei Mei. She had previously been briefly involved in the movement, but since the particular housechurch that she had attended had begun to register the names and identification numbers of their adherents, she had been too afraid of the motives for such behavior, and of potential state-repercussions to continue going there. She did, however, know a lot of student members who were part of other housechurch groups, and a bit about the workings of these groups.

The members of the housechurches sought radically different things than the Buddhist group. The twin values of riches and respectability that I had come to take for granted as goals for all Chinese youth were not motivators in their religious practice. In fact, these values were seen by housechurch members to be central reasons for their pre-conversion unhappiness.

The housechurches generally consist of people from all walks of life; the groups I went to had disproportionately large portions of university students. The group meetings were intensely emotional, and religiously and morally very zealous. They read and practiced a very literal interpretation of the Bible and the world outside the groups was portrayed as a place in the midst's of a battle between God and Satan- but soon to be saved by God's grace before the emerging apocalypse. Chinese society itself was depicted as a disrupted space riddled by turmoil and devoid of meaning.

I started to ask myself how it could be that these two groups of young adults, despite similarity in

social standing, could be attracted to such vastly divergent ideals, which was how the main question of this thesis was formed.

2.6 Outline of the thesis

The first chapter of the analysis, ‘Power versus Purity,’ starts by providing background information about the re-emergence of a religious field in the reform period, and about the relation between the state and the religious field. It then discusses the questions of why the religious revival is taking place in the case groups. For this purpose, the empirical material is analyzed utilizing a theoretical concept coined by anthropologist Amy Hanser to describe the condition of contemporary China – ‘the emerging structure of entitlement’. With the aid of terms from Pierre Bourdieu’s field analysis and his theoretical work on distinction, the chapter then examines what has motivated the case groups to choose these particular religiosities. And what they use them for. This analysis also explains why they have chosen private religiosities rather than public state-sanctioned ones.

In the second chapter of the analysis entitled ‘the relation between Subjectivity, Enchantment and Cosmology’ the thesis first discusses how we can characterize the case groups in the terms of the anthropology of religion. By comparing the empirical material with fieldwork carried out by anthropologist Richard Madsen in Buddhist movements in Taiwan. The thesis rejects the notion that the two religiosities in this study can be labeled ‘rational-ethical’.

The thesis then sets out to find out what we can then characterize them as. In pursuit of this question, the chapter first examines the Imperial-Confucian cosmology, and the dialectic of the hermeneutic and the transformative model inherent in it. With the aid of terms from anthropologist Maifair Meihui Yang’s study of guanxi, the thesis then links the hermeneutic model with what Meihui-Yang terms guanxi-subjectivity. Through an analysis of the Vajrayana Buddhist group’s praxis in the religious, clubbing and service interaction fields it is then argued, that this group is inscribed in what it terms ‘the hierarchical-relational model’, and that, rather than utilizing terms from the anthropology of religion, this group is best characterized as a guanxi-network, with an inherent guanxi-subjectivity.

The analysis then shifts to the housechurch case group. Through an examination of the empirical material, it is shown that this group cannot be seen as a guanxi network, that guanxi-subjectivity,

and the hierarchical social and moral model which it presupposes, is exactly what the housechurch is opposed to. Through an analysis which combines the theoretical perspective of anthropologists Thomas Ots, and David Lindenfeld with an examination of the empirical material, it is concluded that the housechurch can be characterized as a social movement in a pre-stage of millenarianism. A comparison between the cosmologies of Maoism and the housechurch reveal them to be remarkably similar. It is argued that the housechurch is attempting to re-create the enchantment of the Mao cult. Furthermore, it is argued that the housechurch and Maoism are both examples of social movements which utilize the transformative model inherent in the Imperial-Confucian cosmology in their effort to re-establish harmony.

Finally the thesis compares the strategies the two case groups have for re-capturing the enchantment, which is understood as life-force within the cosmology.

3. Distinction: Power versus Purity

3.1. The state and the religious revival

To start of the analysis of why the case groups have become religious, it is necessary to have an understanding of the general religious revival that has been taking place in China since the start of the reform period. Since the thesis seeks to find out why the case groups have chosen private religious groups rather than public, state sanctioned ones, the section focuses on the relation between the religious field and the Chinese state.

Religious freedom was officially reinstated in 1978. At the time the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), expected only a small minority of elderly people to make use of this new right.

Therefore, the abundance of religious communities, new and old, which came into existence, grew and captured the allegiance of parts of the population, including the young generations whom CCP had assumed to be thoroughly atheist, came as an unpleasant surprise for the party. For this reason, the current religious field has been what Comaroff & Comaroff (1991) term ‘a long conversation’ between the religious communities which seek to expand upon the newfound

freedom of belief, and the state which seeks to manage the character and content of the religious movements and to circumscribe and harness their social puissance. (Dunch, 2008, p.155)

This has resulted in a gradual relaxation of the restrictions against religions in China. Until 2003, the official explanation was that, “religions will, in time, become superfluous and 'extinguish' themselves' - but China has not reached that stage yet.” (Pan,1999, p. 8)

But in fact the exact opposite is taking place. The sheer growth in the amount of believers in all the five state approved religions has been astounding.

‘Whereas in 1985 the official line had been that there were ’ more than 20 million’ believers in the five religions, by 1988 the Religious Affairs Bureau was giving the number as more than 100 million, a figure that did not include members of sectarian groups or new religious movements, members of the unregistered Protestant or Catholic churches, or the untold millions more engaged in popular religious practices’ That overall number remained unchanged in official sources until early 2007, when researchers at East China Normal University raised eyebrows with a much higher estimate of 300 million religious adherents, or around 25 percent of the total Chinese population’ (Dunch, 2008, p. 169)

Due to this dramatic growth, the state has found it wise to soften its view of religion. From being a temporary phenomena bound to disappear with the ripening of socialism, the official line is now that certain kinds of religion are compatible with socialism, and will be allowed to continue to exist indefinitely, as long as they contribute to the harmony of society and adapt to socialism. The definition of adapting to socialism can be said to be equal with being seen to be on the right side of a set of dichotomies employed in state discourse on religion. As the state sees it religions can be categorized into superstition/religion and heterodox/orthodox. This discourse is increasingly utilized by the state to manage and coerce actors on the religious field, who can, as seen most famously in the case of Falun Gong, go from one side of the dichotomy to the other in very short order. Thus, the recognition that some religious movements are adaptable to socialism,

‘...also provided an expedient way to distinguish the permitted from the sectarian and other religious elements so worrisome to the Party, which were *ipso facto* unadapted to socialism.’ (Dunch, 2008, p. 172)

For the religious movements, the possibility of being adaptable to socialism was then at once a possibility for becoming state sanctioned orthodoxy, *and* a strong coercion to eliminate the parts of their theology which were frowned upon by the Party.

According to Pál Nýiri, the Chinese Communist Party seeks to expand capitalism, consumerism and the rise of a new middle class with a modern urban lifestyle – without losing control of the processes through which the modern Chinese subject comes into being. (Nýiri, 2010, p. 4) At the same time one must bear in mind that the Chinese government is itself adapting to the new reality. The government of Deng Xiaoping had an agreement with the Chinese people on the lines of: ‘We will give you economic growth and in return you must accept having no influence’, but with the rise of the middleclass the administration has slowly had to re-negotiating this agreement, because the use of social control has becomes less culturally acceptable, for this class whose favor the government depends on for its legitimacy as ruler of the nation. Thus, enforcing the atheist aspect of its modernizing ideology through coercion is counterproductive to the means by which it is trying to reach its goals. This process of partial retraction of the state from the lives of the individuals, has made it harder for the state to control the population, and has created a growing space for non state entities such as private religious movements. This fact is highly problematic for the Chinese state for two reasons. Firstly because it is very conscious about not letting social movements which are capable of attracting mass support grow to challenge its own hegemony. And secondly because it is very much, what Zygmunt Bauman has termed, a 'gardening state' (Baumann, 1987) which denotes a state which employs a high level of social engineering and surveillance. Thus, accepting the fact that a significant part of their citizens are now religious in one shape or another has not so much been a choice as a necessity for the CCP.

To mitigate this loss of social control, the CCP has put more emphasis on controlling all aspects and arenas of public life, such as the educational institutions, the media, arts and public spaces in themselves, which are frequently used to spread the image of CCP as the propagator and protector of a harmonious society. As Nýiri writes, ‘the use of cultural control becomes more central to the mechanics of power.’(Nýiri, 2010, p. 4)

The growth of the religious movements makes them important social arenas which could foster rival social projects. Therefore the CCP has made sure that it’s cultural control is enforced inside them. This is done by incorporating the religious movements into the state bureaucracy, thus turning a potential threat into something which can be monitored and administered.

‘As far as the Chinese government is concerned, ‘religion’ is primarily an administrative category, and in these official terms China has only five religions –

Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Protestant Christianity, and Roman Catholic Christianity – each of which has its own state-run association that administers its places of worship, its clerics, its publications, and so on. Other religious or spiritual activity fall outside the governments category of ‘religion’ and are consigned to the categories of ‘superstition’ (typically feudal superstition) or ‘heterodox teachings’ (or evil cults).’ (Penny, 2008, p. 143)

Besides from being associated and registered with one of the five official religions and their state-run association, religious congregations which wish to be accepted as such must live up to the demand that they be compatible with citizenship in socialist society under CCP rule, as interpreted by CCP. As previously mentioned, the government measures this compatibility by use of the superstition/religion or heterodoxy/orthodoxy dichotomies. This again rests on the modernizing ideology, which in the shape of various political reform movements has sought to eradicate what it sees as un-rationality, superstition and backwardness since the nineteenth century.

The official requirements for being placed within the ‘compatible with socialism religion’ rather than the incompatible superstition/evil cult category are threefold. Religious congregations have to be patriotic; they have to work for the good of the general public, and they must be disconnected from foreign influence. The CCP has created a national patriotic association for each religion, which all congregations have to join. The purpose of these associations is to monitor the congregations, making sure that they stay loyal to the regime and that the beliefs and activities stay within acceptable, state defined limits.

Returning to the metaphor proposed by Commarof and Commarof, we can say that ‘the long conversation’ between the state and the religious communities is uneven, because it takes place on discursive ground laid out a-priori by the state, which makes the religious associations somewhat of a double edged sword for members.

‘The religious associations occupied an ambiguous space from the outset, as autonomous voluntary associations representing their religious constituencies, on the one hand, and as organizational structures for religious life sanctioned by the state and accountable to it, on the other.’ (Dunch, 2008, p.163)

Because of their role as arbiters of political control, the religious associations cannot fulfill the religious needs of the people. This has created a breach for a wide variety of nonofficial religious

movements that have entered the religious field and are in some cases spreading with great vitality. (Ji, 2008, p. 258)

This puts the state in a dilemma: enforcing political control through the religious organizations is in fact resulting in a loss of control over the religious lives of the population. If the state wishes to support the dwindling hegemony of its religious institutions, it has to give them more autonomy and lessen its demand for religions to be in some sense secularized. Either way, the state loses control of the religious lives of the population (Ji, 2008, p. 258). The states totalizing strategy within the religious field has become de-functional. In relation to the private religious movements the state has been reduced to a strategy of putting out fires. The long list of religious groups that have been labeled evil cults and banned is a testament to this fact, and extreme cases, such as the eradication of Falun Gong are examples of the extent to which the state is failing to manage the religious field.

The treatment which religious groups that choose to remain un-affiliated with the religious associations get, vary a lot depending on the local administrations attitude towards them. In Beijing they are generally tolerated as long as they keep to themselves, away from public space and refrain from challenging or criticizing the CCP. The two religious groups which are dealt with in this thesis are examples of groups of people who have become religious in the last couple of years and who have chosen to join private un-affiliated religious groups. In the following they will be presented, first with the aim of coming to an understanding of why they have become religious, and why they have chosen these private religiosities in particular.

3.2 The Buddhist case group

I will begin by describe the congregation which my case group is a part of and its activities. The congregation is centered on the worship of a Tibetan Lama, thought to be a reincarnation of an enlightened teacher - a Buddha. Since this is not a study of the particulars of this religious conviction in and of themselves, and to protect the anonymity of my informants, I will not name the Living Buddha. Suffice it to say that he is a spiritual teacher within the Tibetan Vajrayana tradition, also known as the 'Diamond Vehicle', esoteric or tantric Buddhism, and Lamaism. This tradition differs from other Buddhist traditions in its focus on the esoteric bond between the spiritual teacher and his students. According to the tradition, true understanding can only be

obtained through this bond and not, for example, by reading a book or engaging in a contemplative or meditative practice on one's own. Like in other Buddhist traditions, the general aim or motivation for practicing Vajrayana Buddhism is to become a Buddha, but Vajrayana claims to be more effective at accumulating good karma than the other traditions - a kind of expressway to enlightenment. The claim is that the esoteric bond between teacher and student is a superior method of transmitting understanding, which my informants equated with intelligence and luck, especially business luck. True to this conviction, the religious practices are mainly rituals in which the teacher instructs and initiates the student in the tantric practices and mantras appropriate for his current spiritual level, followed by daily practice of these for a due course of time, and then initiation into the next level.

This Lama has congregations in several major cities in China and also in Taiwan. In Beijing, where the segment of the congregation which I studied lives, the congregation consists of approximately 200 people of middle to upper class. The individuals I met are all educated professionals, private entrepreneurs or high-profile individuals connected to the media industry in Beijing, such as models, actors, photographers, coaches or directors. Moreover they are all highly ambitious and industrious people in the upstart or well underway in successful careers within this field. The religious functions of the congregation take place in the home of the living Buddha. This is where the initiation into the group takes place and where initiated members may visit him for further guidance in their spiritual development or to seek his assistance in solving personal problems or making life choices. These functions take place in smaller groups which convene at the Buddha's house for prayer sittings and instructional sermons. Sometimes the congregation meets in public places, such as parks or on riverbanks, to set loose flocks of fish or birds, in order to increase the good karma, and thus intelligence and luck of the group members. The Living Buddha is also available to his followers for telephone consultations. The members of the congregation which I visited had altars in their homes which ranged in size from a single picture of the living Buddha surrounded by candles or incense sticks to large shrines, with multiple pictures of the living Buddha and his spiritual lineage, as well as Buddha statues. Unlike the Christian house-churches which are also part of this study, the Buddhist congregation is not secret. It is not, however, open to the general public, and it is also not particularly interested in

expanding in size. To become a member, one needs to be introduced to the Living Buddha by a friend:

B: So how did you get to know the teacher?

Mary: A friend took me – you met her in the club, X, the tall model.

B: Oh, right – I thought she was your business partner?

M: She invest in my movie company, but also is my friend.

B: So how did it happen?

M: She tell me, come along to meet this teacher, and tell me he is good guy. (Appendix: Mary interview, p.2)

B: (About Mary) Was she the one who said, come with me to meet this teacher?

D: Yes, we went together.

B: So who got Mary involved, was it a friend from the movie world?

D: Yes, I think so. (Appendix, Didi Hui interview, p. 2-3)

The initiation takes place in the following way:

B: You also have him as your teacher right?

D: Yes. I believe in him. He 'baptized' me. (the basic ritual of 'taking refuge 'in the Dharma the Sangha and the Buddha)

B: How does that take place?

D: First he put some water on my head while he was chanting. Then he cut off some of his hair and gave it to me. Then I had to recite a sutra of faith, which goes like this:

Namob jinway, Namob jaya, Namob sangaya. (I take refuge in the Buddha, the sangha, and the three jewels)

After initiation, the student set out on a path of spiritual development, envisioned as a spiritual staircase:

D: Now I have to recite this sutra 100,000 times. Then I will reach the next level.

B: What happens when you reach the next level?

D: Then I will become luckier and smarter. Also it will increase my faith.

B: Ok, so err...what happens in the group, I mean, besides from what changes inside you, what happens?

D: Then I will recite the next level sutra, and the Lama will teach me the words for the next level sutra, and the rules.

B: Rules?

D: Like, you cannot do something.

B: So what is the Living Buddha like?

D: He is very powerful. (Appendix, Didi Hui interview, p.2-3)

This, the perceived magico-religious potency of the teacher, is underlined by members of the congregation with stories in which he used his power to predict the future to counsel them in business endeavors of various kinds.

There are no formal rules for who can be a member of the congregation, and when asked, group members will tell you that the only requirement for joining the congregation is that you believe that the teacher is an enlightened Buddha, and that you accept him as your spiritual teacher. Nonetheless, proselytizing takes place by word of mouth, and group members only bring business contacts connected to the private media field in Beijing to meet the teacher. The members often wear necklaces with pictures of the Lama in social settings unrelated to the religious practice or the congregation.

3.3. The Christian case group

The housechurch congregations that I visited are all protestant Christian. They consisted mainly of people connected to the universities of Beijing in various ways, like students, teachers and their families. The meetings took place in private apartments or larger rental spaces like conference halls.

A church leader that I interviewed summarized what goes on in the housechurches in the following way:

Me: So first you have a sermon...

L: And then we study and confirm, so after you heard the message, what err, what did he do! In the days since we have seen you...you know we have to face our problems every day, so faith in God can solve them, so what is your work of God's words, because Bible says, Gods words have their own power, so when we have problems, how does he help you, how does he use his word to help, so what changed...yeah and also after they heard today's message they talked about so this is the work God give me... so they share their umm thought after listen to message, and then they share their prayer their feeling of the prayer together.

Yi Mei Mei who had previously been a peripheral housechurch member gave the following summary of what goes on at the meetings:

B: So, you have to share?

T: You have to share you know about what you are listening, what you learn and what his

word work on you.

B: Ok, so what will people say, do they talk about their problems in life?

T: Yeah, some talk about their problems, like my friend, she always talk about what she learned from today...

B: Like what?

T: Like one chapter, like two or three pages, then the priest will read it for you, and the priest will say, ok, today's topic is...blah; blah; blah. And, you can see from the Bible, that blah; blah.

B: like what?

T: Like the, like the...shit like the forgiveness!

B: (laughing)

T: Do you have a Bible? Or like this I'm the God, I'm the only way to the truth. I am Jesus, I am God. But the main thing is, when you are Christian, you have someone to share, to tell you problems to the other people, then they will tell you what you are going to do. And like, every weekend you go there and share your thinking, and ah, also, there is a lot of people they believe that, and they talk to you every day, and a lot and a lot and a lot,

B: So it's a community?

T: Community!!

The members of the housechurch movement gave very similar reasons for having joined the movement. Most of the members of the congregation, that I talked with had existential or emotional problems of one sort or another before converting, ranging from states of anxiety, stress and depression to onset addictions and more severe mental illnesses:

L: Like what, em, I used to be er, proper word, seven years ago I have a lot of history of, er, people become gloomy and often suicide, how do you say, they often use it in hospital

B: Depressed?

L: Yeah, yeah, depressed. So at that time I meet God, and I'm healed.

B: Ok...

L: I have a lot of history...,every night I used to cry, and err my head is so dark, and I think I'm going to die in the dark. (Appendix, Local church leader interview, p. 5)

When asked why they had those problems, members point to the recent development in China, emphasizing what they see as moral decay, meaninglessness, greed and selfishness, lack of trust, addictions and the breakdown of filial ethics as the problems which made them feel empty and worthless:

B: So it's mainly young people who are Christians in China?

M2: Yes, because manage real life and keep faithful is difficult, is hard to handle the eh, nowadays most young people always go to disco, go out, drink and they always losing control. They very sad, and they can't find something to support. They don't believe the family, they don't believe the friends, and they just can't find themselves, actually, because not real. Just something like dream. If they famous star, one day they rich, but

nothing in their heart, not kind. They just, eh, compare – I'm richer than you! I have power or something. People have become ugly. Very ugly. And then more people don't believe each other.

B: Trust you mean?

M2: What's trust?...yeah, I don't believe him, err faith...ah, yes, trust. For example, before three years, I like her (referring to a character in the show). I don't know anything about God, I don't know anything, it's just me! And actually I think life is empty, nothing... I don't like to study, I just always play, always come to bar, I think nothing is very special to me. So, so, it's empty. So I think nothing deserved. I don't like my family, I always flirt with boys. So one day some guys tell me about their spiritual way to know the freedom, and they become better, so I think these three years I travel a lot..... Some, err, how can I say that, like my father, he is very successful in the recent years, always work, but now have something sick. Many problems will appear, very difficult to life, can't find something in his heart. He don't believe anything. I'm his daughter, but he don't believe me... And so many rich and famous people are the same. On the outside they are rich and famous, but inside the family it is bad. They alone. People can't live with them. So many, many families have this problem. So the young people will become so wild...nothing can control them. They have money and power, and they think 'I just do what I want, you can't change my mind, you can't say no.' They can't find real life values. (Easter celebration interview p, 1-3)

It is obvious that the members see the housechurch movement as an alternative to what they see as a meaningless and empty existence in present day China. In many ways their choice of religious affiliation is a counter reaction to the dominance of a narrative about the good life, which the Buddhist case group is living.

At this point we will stop examining the case groups individually in order to do a comparative discussion of the question of why the two groups have become religious. For the comparison, we need an understanding of the societal development that China has been going through during the last thirty or so years. The comparative discussion, therefore, begins with a historical introduction and theoretical explanation of China's current social state.

3.4 Emerging structure of entitlement

Deng Xiaoping announced 'The Great Opening Up' in 1979, effectively ending the country's isolationist policy, and thus began the dismantling of the market economy and the social and ideological institutions that went with it. During this period, the country has shifted from a state-socialist system to what can most usefully be understood as a technocratic oligarchy with a state controlled capitalist economy. This change in the economic, ideological and social organization

of the country has precipitated one of the fastest economic growth rates in human history, raising the Chinese nation from general poverty to something akin to economic super-powerdom.

This has caused massive upheavals in the social fabric of the country. New elites have come into existence along with a growing comfortably salaried middleclass and small-scale private entrepreneurs. While the material circumstances, of the urban working class and the rural population has generally gone up, or remained the same when new expenses such as schooling, hospital and housing are taken into account, their social standing has plummeted in comparison with the rising middleclass. Also, a new group of migrant workers, around 250,000,000 people, has come into existence which now constitutes the lowest level of the societal hierarchy. (Hanser, 2008, p. 3) Thus, from being one of the most economically, and arguably socially, flat or equal mass societies only 20-30 years ago, China now has one of the widest gaps between rich and poor in the world.

In her work 'Service Encounters,' the anthropologist Amy Hanser shows how 'relations among these [new]disparate groups are understood and enacted through a framework of cultural distinctions that interpret – and legitimate- inequality as difference' (Hanser, 2008, p. 3).

More specifically, she investigates how the growing inequality in China is enacted and naturalized in service settings of various kinds. She argues that a new 'structure of entitlement' is being constructed through the marking of social distinctions. The term 'structure of entitlement' refers to the socio-cultural convictions which cause or enable dominant groups to feel entitled to, and take possession of disproportionately large amounts of the resources and positions of power of the society as a whole. The structure of entitlement is enacted, and thus constructed, through everyday social-interactions in all the arenas of society, be it work, leisure or as in Hanser's fieldwork service encounters in warehouses. Chinese society is changing so rapidly that the social hierarchy is continuously changing. The structure of entitlement is still in the making. Therefore, social groups vying for a position at the top of the hierarchy engage in distinction work which naturalizes their claim to power, whereas downwardly mobile social groups and segments of the dominant strata which oppose the societal development attempt to resist the creation of this new paradigm.

This part of the analysis explores the religious choices of the two case groups as examples of this kind of distinction work. With the aid of terms borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis, it examines how membership of the two religious groups must be understood as acts of self-positioning within the religious field. This understanding is then instrumental in our understanding of why the case groups have become religious. We will see how this act of becoming religious constitutes two opposing distinction strategies, which are both reactions to the emergence of the structure of entitlement. Let us begin with the Buddhist case group.

Elite positioning in the field of Buddhism – VIP Religion

The terms *positioning* and *distinction work* stem from the larger theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's field analysis, which explains taste-acts and preferences as self and group-positioning within a social field. In his seminal work, 'Distinction, a social critique of the judgment of taste,' Bourdieu depicts how the taste judgments and choices of the social classes of 1960's France simultaneously constructed and legitimated the existing social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1979). Choosing to worship a Living Tibetan Buddha serves a similar purpose for the Vajrayana case group, because of this particular religious groups' position within the religious field.

To understand what Bourdieu means by a 'field', we must first understand the most important of his terms, 'habitus.' Bourdieu coined the term in an effort to bridge the division between the functionalist and the structuralist understanding of the individual as either entirely self-determined, or as entirely determined by objective social structures. Instead of this division, Bourdieu put forth a theory of dispositional practice, according to which the individual is predisposed to act in certain ways by the socialization and education it has received – its habitus.

“Simply put, *habitus* focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being. It captures how we can carry within us our history, how we bring this history into our present circumstances, and how we then make choices to act in certain ways and not other.” (Maton, 2008, p. 52)

Acting according to habitus is in turn an act of navigation within a social field, and is always enacted in accordance with the rules or logic of this particular social field. A field is a relatively autonomous sector of society, like sport, theater or, in this case, religion, which utilizes a discourse and logic unique to that particular sector, and by means of which the actors in the field position themselves.

In 'Distinction,' Bourdieu depicts how patterns of cultural consumption and the corresponding taste assertions closely follow social origin, like one's father's occupation, and educational merit. As he so eloquently puts it:

'Taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier. Social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed.' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6)

As the preface in 'Distinction' points out, similar patterns inscribed with different culturally and historically specific signifiers will most likely be found in any hierarchical society. (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 6) But what happens when the hierarchy is in the making? In that case the objective classifications, the logic of the fields have not yet been determined, but are themselves objects for struggle between rival social groups. Under such circumstances, social groups strive to be the ones that determine what is and is not deemed superior, beautiful and status affirming. Within this analytical framework, we can attempt to examine what motivates Lin Chen and her group's interest in the Living Buddha. The assumption here is that religious choices are comparable to, or at least can be analyzed in the same manner as, other types of cultural consumption and non-verbal narrations of lifestyle dispositions.

As mentioned, the group consists of models, actors, directors, owners of movie or advertising companies, or people who make their living by knowing and being known by this class of people, such as tennis coaches and bar-managers. As such, they are all actors in a field which we will call the media field, and more broadly the field of 'fame'. In this context the word 'fame' can usefully be understood in much the same way as the Weberian⁸ term 'charisma'. The more charisma you have, the better equipped you are to accumulate economic and cultural capital. As described by Norbert Elias in 'The Civilizing Process: The history of manners,' (1969) peripheral social groups emulate the behavior and consumption of the power-elite, who on the other hand manage to stay central in the power structure, by continuously redefining what is and isn't considered honorary consumption. In complex societies, this takes place within separate fields. Thus, in order to gain general, recognized elite status, one must attempt to gain distinction within

⁸ Weber applies the term charisma to, "a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities." These are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (Weber, 1922).

several social fields. After this section on the religious distinction work of the group, the analysis will continue with an examination of the group's praxis within the clubbing and service-interactions field, in order to substantiate the analysis.

One of the most efficient methods for creating distinction is to do, have or consume something which rival social groups are not doing, having or consuming. This puts the group in a central position, from which the group can define what specific actions, items or relationships are considered honorary consumption and thus grant favorable distinction. Within the international media field, it has become fashionable to be spiritual. It was a trend started by international superstars like Madonna at the turn of the century and emulated by others media-savvy icons like Paris Hilton, all of whom are thought to be connected to Kabbalah, and who have been seen wearing red strings around their left wrists. In Kabbalah, the red string is a protective amulet, often given by a spiritual teacher to his student, and thought to have the ability to transfer the magico/religious power of the holy teacher to its bearer. The connection to a holy teacher is both thought to serve as protection from envious and destructive forces, and as a way of reaching ones full potential. A powerful spiritual teacher is, of course, something thought to be very exclusive, expensive, and mysterious. Definitely not something the average person can aspire to have. Therefore, it serves the purpose of setting a trend which separates the true elite from the peripheral groups, in a way that far transcends the more easily emulated consumption of status goods. This makes religion a very efficient social tool for creating distinction.

Trendsetters in Beijing, like Lin Chen and her group, emulate the international media and fashion elite with meticulous precision and zealotry. She and her group have both the social, economic, and cultural capital to carry out this emulation with a very high degree of success within the fields of personal expression available in Beijing. Thus, all major aspects of life, such as choice of education, living space, social connections, hobbies, or major purchases, are evaluated and chosen for their emulative, and thus status affirming properties. Even issues like marriage and procreation are modeled according to the dictates of the pop culture elite. Lin Chen, for example, told me that she very seriously considered adopting an orphan, just like a lot of celebrities, such as Angelina Jolie and Madonna, have done. Her furniture and clothing were also precisely chosen for their similitude to the latest and trendiest in various fashion magazines. According to several of my informants, rich and powerful people and groups in China tend to be

Buddhists if they are religious. Of the religions which are allowed in China, Buddhism and Daoism are the two most associated with magico/religious potency. It is also a definite media favorite and may have adherents in the top echelons of the CCP. It gets promoted by the government through events such as the ‘World Forum of Buddhism’, held in 2006 in Hangzhou, which was the first major international religious conference in China since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. The government actively promotes Buddhism and, to an even greater degree, Confucianism. The reason for this may be, that, unlike Christianity⁹ and Daoism in the shape of the Chi Gong movements, Buddhism has not been used in any historically anti-hegemonic social movements or rebellions. Together with Confucianism, it is as close to being the official orthodoxy in China as one can get in an officially atheist country.

The government and media favoritism has made Buddhism a favorite of the social elite in China. Lin Chen and her group seek to establish themselves as part of this elite, which explains the choice of Buddhism within the context of the wider religious field. On the other hand, Buddhism has gained massive popularity in recent years. On days of religious importance, the public temples are crowded to the brim with people praying and offering incense. The massive anti-religious propaganda campaigns during recent decades, which were part of the effort to modernize China, condemned the many popular folk beliefs and spiritualities as backwards, un-modern superstition. The educated urban resident tends to think of such practices as low class - something peasants and migrant workers do (Easter Celebration interview p. 103). In many cases it is hard to separate Buddhism, (and even more so Daoism), as it is generally practiced, from these practices. Thus Buddhism as it is practiced by the general population also has these negative connotations of being low-class and backwards. The public state-sanctioned temples are by many seen as places where people come, out of a wish for personal gain, rather than for spiritual motives.

‘People go to temple, they say, “Please let me get into the good school or get a nice boyfriend.” They don’t go there just because they want to pray Buddha.’ (Appendix, Interpreter interview, p. 2)

‘They just ask more money. They go to temple, say please give me good luck, lots of money.’ (Appendix, Easter celebration interview, p. 2)

⁹ Christianity was the official religion of the Taiping Tebellion – a rebellion which contributed greatly to the weakening and eventual toppling of the Qing Empire.

This kind of religious practice is not only believed to be superstitious and fueled by selfish motives, it is also seen as ineffective in achieving the particular objective of the practice – the boyfriend or the job. These negative discourses, and the fact that it is so widely popular and available, makes regular Mahayana Buddhism, unattractive for the group's effort to distinguish itself.

The choice of Vajrayana Buddhism with its emphasis on the spiritual connection and esoteric transfer of power from the holy teacher to the student through secret rituals ameliorates the problem of negative magico-religious potency. Having a personal relationship with a Living Buddha, who is also at your disposal for issues outside of the spiritual field, like doubts about business endeavors, is seen as extremely effective, and certainly far more so than standing in line to pray to a statue in a common temple. Also, the congregation of the lama is not open to the public. Religious functions take place as private events that you need to get invited to, like an exclusive club where your name has to be on the list. Furthermore, you need to be able to spend a lot more on donations to be a part of this sangha¹⁰, than the few renminbi¹¹ needed for incense sticks. This makes it very exclusive, and therefore makes membership highly status affirming. Another contributing factor to the elite status affirming exclusiveness of this particular religious group is the fact that the Living Buddha propagates a Tibetan version of Buddhism, which makes him stand out from the un-spiritual and inefficient image in some ways connoted by general Mahayana Buddhism. In contrast to this somewhat tainted image, Tibetan Buddhism is, according to my informants, seen by the Han-Chinese population of Beijing as more mystical and authentic, and thus imbued with more magico/religious power. Also, the actors in the field of media and fame are familiar with the values which the world outside of China attributes to Tibetan Buddhism, values like benevolence, kindness, and authenticity. All these factors explain the choice of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism in the shape of the worship of a Living Buddha.

As previously explained an act of distinction only functions and exists as such if it is observed and recognized by others within a social context. Thus, not only is it important that the signifiers connected with the religious group are potent and status affirming, and that its placement in the religious field is exclusive and thus affirmative of elite status, the bond to the group also needs to be communicated to people outside the group to be recognized.

¹⁰ The Buddhist term for a religious community.

¹¹ Literally translated: 'The Peoples Currency', the official Chinese currency.

Therefore group members often wear necklaces, made of red string, with a picture of the lama in them. They are worn at all kinds of social gatherings, but especially in nightclubs and at family gatherings. Lin Chen explained the function of these necklaces to be one of protection and of affection for the teacher. The necklaces are emblematic of group membership, and their function is linked to the social function or purpose of the group itself. It serves a similar purpose as the Kabbalah red string bracelets worn by the super-elite of the international media and fashion world, granting a similar kind of distinction within Beijing's media field¹². It also creates a feeling of being part of a group which is aided by a superior spiritual force, and it communicates this membership to other social groups, which explains and naturalizes the group's social superiority. This is the case both as an internal self-understanding within the group – that their success is aided and protected by magical means, and as perceived by other social groups. This, in turn, adds charisma to the group, and thus aids in its effort to amass the various forms of capital. Finally, the protective power of the bond with the teacher has the function of mitigating the anxiety which is felt by many Chinese because of the element of unpredictability which the emerging structure of entitlement has introduced into the lives of Beijing citizens.

This point will be elaborated further in the analysis of the housechurch movement, since it is much more important, one might say the main social fact, in that context. Being Buddhists is only one part of the group's effort to construct and occupy an elite position and identity for itself. As mentioned in the methodology, it was not possible for me to conduct fieldwork within the actual congregation and my knowledge about it is based on conversations with group members which took place in other arenas, in which this distinction game is also played out. The claim that the group's religiosity is part of a larger strategy to gain elite distinction will be elaborated on and substantiated further in the part of the analysis entitled 'The relation between Subjectivity, Enchantment and Cosmology,' which, among other things, examines the Buddhist group's praxis within the field of clubbing and more broadly, service interactions.

¹² I am aware that the color red is thought to be lucky in China, and that it is also widely used in Buddhist ritual objects. Whether or not the color red was chosen for its similarity or because of its meaning in a Chinese cultural context is of minor importance in comparison to the totality of the group's adoption of the practice.

3.5 Summary of the analysis of the Buddhist case groups' choice of religious affiliation

The Buddhist case group has become religious in an effort to distinguish itself favorably in the emerging structure of entitlement. They have chosen to worship the Living Buddha because this particular religiosity is highly status affirming. This is due to its resemblance to the spiritual practices carried out by the international media elite; to its perceived magico-religious superiority, and to its exclusiveness in the field of Buddhism. In short, it is the Beijing version of a VIP religion.

3.6 Underground Christianity as distinction praxis:

This section examines why the members of the Christian case group have made the choice to become Christian, and, more specifically, to join the housechurch movement. Why is Christianity preferable to the other options in the religious field, and why put oneself at greater risk by worshipping outside of the state sanctioned churches?

In the same manner as the Buddhist case group, this question will be analyzed applying field analysis, the empirical data, and the available literature on the topic. The housechurch movement's position within the Christian field will be analyzed, with an emphasis on its relation to the state sanctioned churches. This topic requires an understanding of the evolution of the relationship between the Chinese state and the growing Christian field in China.

3.7 The Christian field

The housechurch movement in Beijing can only be understood in the context of the larger Christian field in China in general. Like most things in China, Christianity is a highly diverse phenomenon. In the countryside, where roughly two-thirds of the population lives, underground Christian movements are gaining strength. It is estimated that at least a tenth of the Chinese population now self-identifies as Christian. The great bulk of these new Christians are rural residents who are usually proselytized by their own close kin into movements whose doctrines seem heretical, or at least very heterodox, from a traditional Protestant or Catholic standpoint. For example, belief in an imminent apocalypse, the rebirth of Jesus in the shape of a 35-year-old female peasant from the Northeast, demon possession and exorcism, speaking in tongues, possession by the Holy Spirit, and the ever-present manipulations of Satan, are denominators

which to various extents are characteristic for these movements. The government has banned a range of these movements

Christianity is also on the rise in the large towns. The official churches, where the content of sermons is supervised and censored by the state, are filled to the brim on any given Sunday. In fact it is estimated by jubilant Christians in and outside of China, that:

“Today, on any given Sunday there are almost certainly more Protestants in church in China than in all of Europe.” (Bays, 2003, p.488)

That, however, may be only the tip of the iceberg. Since they do not register or gather in publicly know locations, numbers are hard to substantiate. The greater majority of urban members of Christian movements congregate in secret, semi-legitimate house churches, which exist outside of state control. Ye Xiaowen, who was director of Chinas Religious Affairs Bureau until 2009, estimated that up to 130 million Chinese self-identified as Christian in one shape or the other (Moll, 2008, p. 2). This estimate was given in 2008, and the number has without a doubt risen dramatically since then. Here is how Yi Mei Mei has experienced this growth:

‘You don’t know how fast this thing is growing – damn fast! One year ago, only three of my friends are Christian, now only two of my best friends are no. Everybody else join. It’s crazy.’ (Appendix, Yi Mei Mei, follow-up interview, 2012)

What we are seeing here may be a mass-conversion within the specific socio-economic group of middle-class youth in Beijing.

According to the literature on the field, the mayor part of the house churches preaches an orthodox though very literal version of Christianity, and the heterodox doctrines which are found in the sect-like rural Christian movements are not prominent in the urban house church movement. Again one should bear in mind that it is a highly diverse movement. Thus the congregation that I did the main part of the fieldwork in, which I have called ‘Local Church’ believes in demon possessions and an approaching apocalypse, and uses exorcism. I would not characterize it as sect-like, but rather as a ‘by the letter’ reading of all parts of the Bible. As the prayer leader put it, ‘I believe everything it says in the Bible.’ (Appendix, Easter celebration interview, p. 4)

As mentioned in the beginning of the analysis, the Chinese state is cautious of anything resembling an autonomous civil society, and the housechurch movement has a strong ability to spread allegiance to it self— a fact that will be discussed later on in the discussion of how the case groups became religious. The urban housechurches, therefore, balance on the edge of government retribution. In some cities they are persecuted, but in Beijing this is generally not the case. Unlike the more heterodox Christian movements in the rural parts of China, the urban housechurch movement has not, as yet, been labeled an ‘evil cult.’ Being a member of the movement still incurs the major risk of temporary disappearance, jail time, or fines, since these sanctions have been known to be enforced by the state. And since the movement is technically illegal, there is no telling if or when a critical level has been reached in the fight between state circumscription and the movement’s wish to live out and spread its vision of a spiritual life.

So, how can we explain that so many young middle or upper-class Christians choose to jeopardize their lives by joining underground house-churches, when others from the same segment choose to frequent the state sanctioned churches? This is explained by the housechurch movements’ position in the religious field in Beijing, and what it offers proselytes.

3.8 The state and the Christian field

The official Protestant church has been able to cast itself as being more rational and modern than the other state approved religious groups, because of its perceived links to the rational West and the rise of capitalism and modernity within it. Also, Protestants are not thought of as using their religion as an instrument of personal gain, which is the way the traditional Chinese religions are commonly perceived and, indeed, practiced. This makes Protestantism attractive to the case group members, because they, as we have seen, are highly critical towards the emergence of the structure of entitlement, which explains the choice of Protestant Christianity in the first case. As we shall see in later discussions, there is a deeper more unconscious reason for this choice which has to do with the connection between the social and moral model of Maoism, and the one employed in the Protestant housechurches. This un-selfish and modern position within the religious field also protects Protestantism from part of the state-circumscription and persecution against religions in general. However, its position is vulnerable to accusations of imperialism and anti-patriotism due to its historical connection to colonialism and missionary proselytisation. The

state has demanded that all Christian congregations live up to three criteria which have become known as ‘the three selves.’ To be accepted as properly patriotic, Christian congregations must appear to be ‘Self governing; self-supporting, and self-propagating.’ (Dunch, p. 164) In other words, the regime will accept Protestant congregations as long as they are not part of cross-national religious organizations, are un-influenced by non-Chinese religious organizations, and are economically self-reproducing. In an effort to, at least publicly, live up to these three requirements, the Protestant association adopted the name ‘the Three-Self Patriotic Movement’ (TSPM), also known as ‘the China Christian Council’ (CCC).

The majority of Chinese Protestants have a very literal view of the Bible. This is a problem for the Party. In 2001, the head of the national Religious Affairs Bureau, Ye Xiaowen, in a rarely seen open declaration of coercion, declared that ‘adaptation to socialism meant altering the conservative theological orientation of Chinese Protestants.’ (Dunch, 2008, p. 172) This spawned a theological reconstruction movement in the leadership of TSPM/CCC, the aim of which was to drive Chinese Protestants in the direction of a more ecclesiastic and humanist version of Christianity. The common members of the movement see this theological reconstruction movement as further means of the states conscription of their spirituality. Within the social science literature on the field, this is generally thought to be the main reason why tens of millions of Chinese Protestants choose not to register with the state and to stay un-affiliated with the TSPM/CCC (Dunch, 2008, p. 176). In the next chapter, I put forth a theory that there is a deeper reason for this choice which has to do with the cosmology and the social and moral models embedded in it that informs the movement. To reiterate, they choose the possibility of potential severe repercussions from the state (penalties range from short-term confinement or fines to prison sentences of fifteen years or more (Dunch, 2008, p. 177), over compromising the content of their conviction. This begs the question of what it is about the un-adulterated spirituality that is so important?

3.9 Reducing anxiety and ambivalence through the creation of a pure identity space

According to Ryan Dunch, the underground Protestants are generally the most apolitical in their religious outlook. He states that the reason why they refuse to register with the state or corporate with the TSPM/CCC is that they see these as political entities and that the church must remain

totally separate from the state (Dunch, p. 177). This is not main reason I was given by housechurch members:

B: Why is it, that you cannot get a real church? Or why is it that normal churches are accepted but you are not?

L: Um, because, well, the state churches, they have a church, right? But they do not talk about Satan. They do not talk about spiritual things. All the things that conflict with physical idea [ideology of modernity and science] they are removed. So that's not the Bible. Bible talk about spiritual things. In the Bible it says that when people who really believe in God gather, this place will be a holy place. So this IS church. So if people gather but they do not talk about the real word of God, how can that be called a church? A lot of people go to the churches, but they do not hear any word about Satan, and Satan is very dangerous. Also, they do not confirm and they do not talk about spiritual things. That is not Bible. Government they do not know this, they only think about – oh, you cannot talk about there is a God, this is not good, it is their knowledge, their limitation, so they cannot know this. They will only allow a church that cannot talk about the real things, you know, so we do not go there.

B: How can the government control what the priests talk about?

L: Because the priest is a type of person with a very tight relationship with the government. That's why this church appeared, because we want to do the real thing, tell the truth. (Appendix, Housechurch leader interview, p. 8)

We see from this quote, that the housechurch thinks of itself as different from official churches on three levels. The housechurch is spiritual and real, as opposed to the official church, which is material and fake. The housechurch confirms, and the official church does not. Confirmation is their expression for the part of the housechurch meetings where members share their feelings and worries, and where they talk about how they can feel that God and the word of God is helping them solve these problems. During confirmation other members offer advice and support. The group often prays together for a member or for someone that the member is worried about. In other words, the housechurch not only provides a symbolic framework for dealing with emotional trouble, it also gives emotional support through the creation of relational ties. This, in turn, gives members a new sense of belonging and of self-worth. The self worth is also aided by the third characteristic which the housechurch thinks of as making it different from the official church, namely that they talk about Satan, and the official church does not.

In the housechurch, the world is portrayed as being in the midst of the end day battle between God and Satan. All of the societal problems which they stated as reasons for joining the housechurch are explained as the work of Satan and his minions. Thus, when people do or feel

self destructive things, it is because they are being manipulated by demons, or even possessed by them:

L: So in the Bible, already in the Bible it's revealed the secret of Satan. No book says very clearly about Satan's work, but in the Bible it says very clear about Satan, how he cheat people, and separate people from God, he try to cheat people or you know use the demon to, err... control peoples mind and use demon for, especially in China's countryside, they are demoned by Satan.

B: Possession, or possessed?

L: Yes they are possessed, and they can use voice and heal and people start to believe in them, and they try to do some, you know kind of if a person invite people to their home and they pray to HIS God, like Satan, and then people will also do it. This kind of thing is very common in country side ... in America and also in China now there is activity of Satan, there is a group called Satan church, they worship Satan very boldly, very directly, sometimes they kill people, you can find out about this on the internet. So it is really a very complex, err...

B: Complex? You mean like a war?

L: The spiritual, yeah . (Appendix, Housechurch leader interview, p. 4)

Members see themselves as having been possessed or under the influence of the demonic forces and as being able to drive these forces out of themselves and others with their faith:

L: So when we are casting the demons we are saying in the name of Jesus Christ, the demon will go. So we do this, we do not go [and say] in the name of power in the name of miracles, because Satan is not afraid. I can make the same thing too! So in our church, we know a lot of people who have some problem, and sometime they will be possessed. And when we go to them we only use one name, Christ. That's why I can confirm, you know, because I follow to this field, and...At first I was shocked, that ah! It's true!

B: What happened?

L: She was working out in this field, and er possessed..

B: How do you know, I mean...

L: A girl speaks like a man, and this man he said, you know dirty word to us, and he laugh at us, and say [speaking in a distorted, high-pitched voice] 'How can you believe?' I know you cannot see. I know this one is not so faithful, and that man is running, because not so faithful. He know everything, because possessed by Satan. And then we would gather and pray, in the name of Jesus Christ – he's gone. That's why I can confirm, you know I, I cannot be faithful until now, because some years I have too much things, and now I become stronger, it's true, I'm happy it's true.

B: This happens a lot?

L: Several times.

B: How can you tell when someone is possessed?

L: Sometimes in people's lives, they are ugly, sometimes they want to fight, so, what happened?

B: They are possessed?

L: No not possessed, but some kind of spirit is coming into you, so what I'm saying is possessed is only an extreme stage. For example, we want to study hard, we want to work well, but somebody anyway will go to the internet to do a lot of you know useless things, so I do something I do not want to do, how, how is that happen? This is Satan influence.

He let people not believe that he exists, that's the trick.
B: But how can you tell if someone is possessed or not?
L: Usually what we saw, you know, his voice changed, and ah, just out of his mind.
(Appendix, Local Church leader interview, p. 7)

All the religious beliefs and, in some respects, traditions of the world outside of the housechurch or perhaps outside of 'real' Christianity, are seen as having been created by Satan to lure people away from God:

Me: I see a lot of people in Beijing burning spirit money on spirit money day..
Church member:...umm...yeah.
Me: ...Having fires on the street.
Leader: Actually that's kind of a ghost culture.
Me: What?
Leader: Ghost culture, it's, we are just worship Satan, it is Satan's way of controlling all the people who don't have God's word. So we don't do that now....
Me: So you think all the things that people do that belong to the traditional culture..
Leader: Not traditional the Bible says, you did not worship your Gods, it was Satan, only two, demons and holy spirit so, so actually, in China we have a lot of history of worshipping Satan, but we don't know it. We consider it as culture, but in culture there were a lot of tricks, so for Chinese it's very hard to believe in God, but God really do it.
(Appendix, Easter celebration interview, p. 6)

'So what does Christ mean? Christ means three things, first of all he is the one who will sacrifice himself for us, second, he will remove Satan, and third he build the road for us to meet God.' (Appendix, Local Church leader interview, p. 6)

We see that the third self understanding is, that the housechurch functions as protection against, and removal of the Satanic forces, whereas the official churches do not. The housechurch sees itself as the real and spiritually efficient superior of the fake, unreal and inefficient official church, which only tries to make people feel good:

'I agree with you that in human life, in human existence, there is something that is something called emptiness; this emptiness is called emptiness of spirit. This make people want something, and some people find religion, but Gospel is not religion, I mean gospel is not only religion, religion means people do something to feel good. But God gives us something that can carry us, something that is real. In China it is true, some Christians they are just having a religious kind of life, I agree with you, but what God want to give us is a real thing that can meet us.' (Appendix, Local Church leader interview, p. 8)

3.10 Why have they become religious, and why have they chosen the housechurch movement in particular?

In the analysis of the housechurch so far, we have seen that becoming religious is a reaction to a state of emotional despair which converts understand as being caused by the emergence of the

structure of entitlement. Protestantism is chosen within the field of religion, because it is the religion which most clearly positions itself as an alternative to the emerging structure of entitlement.

Within the Protestant field there is the choice between the state-sanctioned churches and the housechurches. In the housechurches, converts are given a symbolic framework that makes it possible to understand the emotional turmoil they are experiencing. The group also sets out behavioral guidelines and community support for coping with these feelings. The symbolic framework and the community support has a strong ambivalence and anxiety reducing effect, because it is built on a strict dichotomy, which identifies these problems with a concrete spiritual force, and which separates and protects converts from this force. The housechurch provides people with a clearly defined alternative identity-space. People are drawn to this alternative identity-space, in part because it draws a clear group boundary, by which a solid and meaningful group identity can be built. From an anthropological perspective, the content of orthodox Christianity is no more implicitly meaningful than any other religion or ideology. But the literal version of Protestantism, which is propagated in the housechurches, is capable of creating dogma through what Mary Douglas has termed 'restricted code', which is capable of supporting strong emotional ties because of its unambiguous nature (Douglas, 1970). This is one reason for the fervor with which these born-again Christians believe in it. It is also what gives converts a feeling of having finally found something real. The ecclesiastic version of Protestantism which is propagated in the state-churches is not capable of creating the kind of community feeling and support that the housechurch does. The housechurches are therefore seen as the real and spiritually efficient superior, of the fake, inefficient state-sanctioned churches.

3.11 Summing up the question of why the case groups have become religious

This comparative summary only seeks to answer the first part of the cardinal question. The many points which are related to the cosmologies of the case groups, and which have been touched upon in the review of the empirical material, will be elaborated and concluded upon in the next part of the analysis, which deals with the cosmologies and social and moral models which the groups utilize.

In the analysis so far it has been shown to be the case that the Buddhist case group has become religious as part of an effort to gain elite status in the emerging structure of entitlement. It has also been illustrated that the choice of the congregation of the Living Buddha was motivated by the position of this religious group within the field of Buddhism, which enhances its status affirming qualities within the field of fashion as well as in the overall emerging structure of entitlement. Finally it was shown that the particular religious group was chosen because of its perceived ability to ensure success and give protection by magico/religious means. It was suggested that this magico-religious efficiency also serves the purpose of reducing anxiety.

In the case of the housechurch congregations, it has been shown, that group members have become religious in an attempt to ameliorate the perceived disruptive consequences of the emerging structure of entitlement. It has also been shown that Protestantism was chosen because of its position as a moral and unselfish alternative to the other available religions. Finally it has been shown that group members have chosen the housechurches rather than the official churches, because of the housechurches' position within the Christian field, in which it is perceived as being the real and spiritually efficient superior of the fake and spiritually in-efficient official state-sanctioned churches.

Thus we can conclude that both case groups have become religious as reactions to the emergence of the structure of entitlement, but that one group utilizes their newfound religiosity to do well within it, whereas the other group utilizes it to protect itself from and create an alternative to this very process.

4. The relation between Subjectivity, Enchantment and Cosmology

Having explored the question of why the case groups have become religious, and what they use their newfound religiosities for, we will turn to the question of their nature. This chapter seeks to answer the questions: How do they think of themselves, and the society that surrounds them? And how can we characterize and place these religious groups within the theories of the anthropology of religion?

Within the anthropological literature on the topic of religious revival in China, there is a tendency to assume that there is a causal connection between China's rapid modernization and this modern revival of religions. This is connected to a tendency to think of religious groups in modern societies as being what Max Weber has termed the 'rational-ethical type' (Weber, 1905). This is illustrated by the American sociologist Richard Madsen's article, 'Religious Renaissance and Taiwan's Modern Middle Classes' (Madsen, 2008, p.295-322). Madsen has done fieldwork in growing Buddhist organizations in Taiwan, whose adherents come from the growing middle class of educated professionals. In his article, he points out that the Buddhist organizations that cater to the middle classes in Taiwan are moving towards the rational-ethical type of religion, defined as a religion in which ritual and magic have been replaced by the cultivation of the inner ethical world of each individual and by humanist–philanthropist actions in the outer world. Also, the rational-ethical religion attempts to turn absolute truths and concrete rules into general guidelines or principles for conduct. The organizations Madsen studied generally describe their faith as 'religionless':

'Instead of taking these beliefs as solid, literal representations of a world beyond the one of ordinary experience, they see the beliefs as symbolic expressions of the challenges of common human life.' (Madsen, p. 305)

Madsen argues that the reason for this shift is the process of modernization itself, as well as the 'globalization of culture.' (Madsen, p. 298)

This point is of interest since I found the opposite to be true of the religious congregations which I studied in Beijing, whose adherents also come from the growing middle- and upper-class of educated professionals, or students in the process of joining this segment. For the Buddhist case group, what is at stake is not something as ephemeral as the cultivation of an inner ethical world. For them, spirituality is a social tool with a specific purpose in the physical world, and the inner spiritual practices which do go on are aimed at the ritual transfer of magico-religious power from the Lama to the worshipper. The Lama does teach the group the moral rules of conduct inherent to Tibetan Buddhism, but congregants don't follow them, and their conversion stories invariably focus on the potency of the teacher rather than on a personal desire for moral guidance.

Initially, the Christian housechurch case group seems to fit the description of 'rational-ethical' somewhat better, since Protestantism arose as a move away from ritual, but as we have seen,

members do not think of their religiosity as a personal project; not even, in fact, as their own choice. In their conversion stories, it was God who revealed himself to them, and, as will be explored further on in this chapter, God now operates through them. God and Satan exist as real entities that operate in the world, not merely as a moral dichotomy for personal contemplation. Likewise, the Bible is not a moral guidebook but the ultimate truth about reality and must be read and followed to the letter.

Why then this difference between Madsen's findings and the case groups I studied? We could speculate that Madsen's assumptions about the correlation between modernization and the rational-ethical religious type, and about the homogenizing and, thus, rational-ethicalizing effects of globalization, are leading him to misinterpret his own empirical findings because of what has elsewhere been called 'the old problem of the hammer' - that when you have a hammer, everything looks like a nail. Thus, if you expect to find rational-ethical because of the a-priori assumption of the existence of homogenization and the effects of modernization in the religious field, then you will.¹³ Let us assume though that Madsen is right that his case groups are moving towards the 'rational-ethical type' and ask then what the reason is for this difference in the religious urges between the professional, educated middle-classes in Taiwan and in Beijing. These are, of course, wide generalizations and the answer is to some extent simply that this segment contains many and varied social groups whose religiosities, or lack of, vary according to socio-economic and historical-cultural parameters. The socio-economic station of the groups is more or less the same. What, then, is the main historical- cultural difference between the educated middle-class of Taiwan and that of Beijing, which has led at least these case groups to make such strikingly different choices in the religious field? The most prominent difference is probably that the population of Taiwan has not had as traumatic and tumultuous a recent history as the population in Beijing. As the following analysis will show, this traumatic past has caused a widespread state of disenchantment, which is a central cause of the specific character of the religious urges of my case groups. And as will become apparent, this past also provides the building blocks of the cosmologies and the social and moral models which they live by.

¹³ For more on this debate see for example Jonathan Friedman's article: 'Being in the World: Globalization and Localization' (Friedman 1990 in 'Theory, Culture & Society 7: 311-28)

4.1 A brief history of subjectivity and enchantment in modern China

It is generally believed that China has undergone rapid change since the ‘Great Opening Up’ in 1979 which was led by Deng Xiaoping, and the pace of the changes that have taken place in China over the last 30 years is arguably among the fastest in human history. One should, however, bear in mind that this period of rapid change stretches back to the fall of the Qing imperial order in 1912. Chinese institutions and the relationship between them and the individuals - the subjectivities - have been in turmoil ever since. I want to suggest, that this ongoing transformation has created a cyclical effect where the Chinese population moves from a state of enchantment with the ongoing state project to disenchantment with its perceived corruption in rapid order. This pattern has repeated itself three times during the 20th century alone. This has left the country in a state which China experts from an array of fields have characterized as a moral vacuum (Ots, p. 131).

Whether or not this is a correct assessment of contemporary Chinese society is the focus of an ongoing debate among China scholars. Some ethnographies support the notion of a moral vacuum (Ots, 1994) whereas other studies indicate the re-emergence of traditional values in which morality exists primarily within close relational bonds, but does not apply to the out-group world. (Oxfeld, 2010) (Meihui-Yang, 1994) Still other studies point to incidents such as the 100.000 youngsters who voluntarily and at their own expense traveled to Sichuan after the earthquake in 2008 to help the earthquake victims, or the cases of moral outrage at the extortion of good Samaritans as proof of the emergence of a discourse of universal morality which transcends personal relations (Yan, 2009). The diversity of these studies does not mean that some are wrong and others right. Rather it portrays contemporary China as the diverse multifaceted entity of ‘all under heaven’ that it is. The moral landscape of China is not moving in one direction, but in many. A common factor in all the cases, however, is that these different moralities, or lack of same, have come into being as retractions from the Maoist state project and the subjectivity which bound people to it. They are examples of the creation or re-creation of a social and moral universe in its absence. If we are to understand the character and cosmology of the housechurch and the Vajrayana Buddhists, we must attempt to understand them as social and moral projects within this context. Can we see these two groups as social and moral projects which relate to the loss of the imperial and Maoist social order? And if so, what are they attempting to replace them with? This then, is the question of rupture versus continuity: Are they

creating something new, or are they re-creating something old? In order to answer these questions we must necessarily first know the old. In the following I will therefore sketch the contours of the older models of Imperial China and the changes which Maoist China brought to it, especially as they relate to state-subject relations.

4.2 The Imperial-Confucian cosmology and its subjectivity – the hierarchical-relational model

The Imperial-Confucian cosmology is recognized as being the most deeply-rooted understanding which the Han-Chinese have of the universe – its cultural unconscious, the elementary optic through which the elements of the social universe are understood and ordered (Penny, 2008, p. 153) (Meihui-Yang, 2008, p. 36) (Palmer, 2008, p. 115). I propose to label it both ‘hierarchical,’ which refers to the overall structure of the social and moral model, and ‘relational,’ which refers to the subjectivity and notions of morality contained in it. The term I use for it is the ‘hierarchical-relational model. I also refer to it as the hermeneutic model in connection with what I term the Chinese dialectic which, as we will see consists of a hermeneutic and a transformative model. The term hermeneutic is intended to indicate a social and moral model which presupposes and exists within the hegemonic order, and does not try to change it. The hierarchical-relational model exists within the larger cosmological framework of the Imperial-Confucian cosmology. In the following I will portray this cosmology in order to analyze the beliefs of the two case groups in relation to it later on.

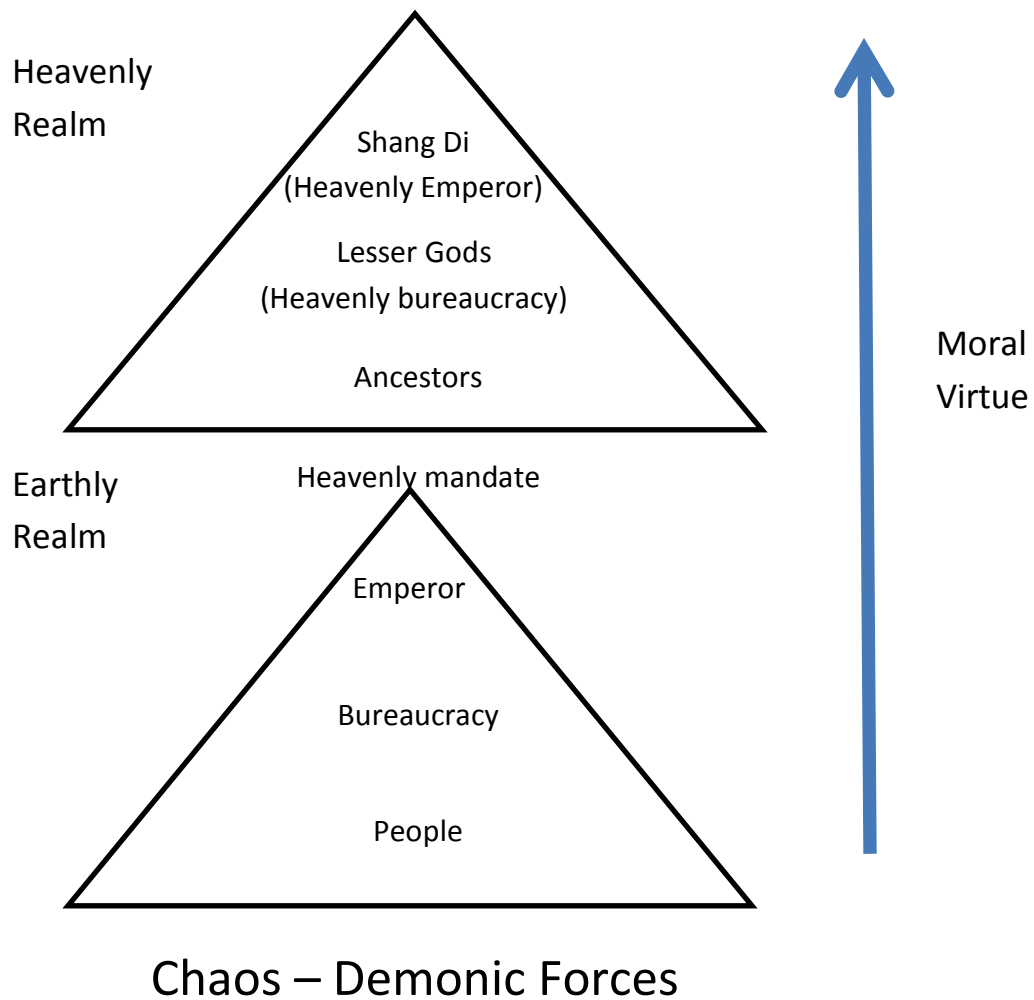
The Imperial-Confucian cosmology consists of the hierarchy of heaven, which contains the heavenly emperor, Shang Di, at the top, the lower Gods, who function as his heavenly bureaucracy below him, and, finally, the ancestors at the bottom. Beneath this heavenly hierarchy is the earthly hierarchy, which is a replication of the heavenly one. Thus, the emperor is at the top, beneath him the bureaucracy, and finally the people, who can additionally be divided into local hierarchies according to the dividing lines of clan, gender, and age. The two hierarchies are ordered according to a vertically increasing amount of moral virtue, so that the heavenly emperor is most virtuous of all and the earthly emperor is most virtuous in the realm of earth. In order to be harmonious, the earthly hierarchy must correlate with the heavenly one. As long as it does so, there is harmony and the life-force flows down from the heavenly emperor

through his bureaucracy and the ancestors to the emperor of the earthly realm. The emperor then distributes it downward to the bureaucracy and the people. This transfer of the life-force of society as a whole, from heaven to the emperor, is known as the 'Heavenly Mandate', and it is the emperor's duty to ensure this mandate through his own morally pure and virtuous character. The correlating harmonious hierarchies are surrounded by the forces of chaos. As long as the emperor is virtuous they are held at bay. This cosmology provides the basic understanding of the role of the state in China:

'The traditional paradigm of the state as protector of the orthodox order against the heretical and demonic forces of Chaos' (Palmer, p.134)

Should the emperor stray from his virtuous path, the mandate of heaven will be lost and the forces of chaos will invade, corrupt, and destroy the harmony of society. Also, on the individual level, the wellbeing of the self and the body are understood as being connected and dependent on the maintenance of the harmonious correlation between heaven and earth. The body is imagined as consisting of corresponding forces, known as viscera, which must be in balance. Strong emotions are seen as signs of imbalance in the viscera. Excessive emotions are seen as pathogenic and as threats to the harmony, not only of the person, but of the social body. Therefore, moral virtue is thought to be expressed by self-control and maintaining calm (Ots, 1994, p. 119). The opposite is also true. Thus, if one is dislodged from one's proper place in the harmonious hierarchy, this personal domain is susceptible to the invading forces of chaos. (Durare, 2008, p. 64) This means that not only societal disharmonies, such as disruption of the relational order, natural disasters, poverty, epidemic disease or war, are viewed as being caused by the emperor failing to obtain the Mandate of Heaven, but also personal feelings of displacement, alienation, and so forth, are potentially understood as having this same root cause. If the emperor loses the Mandate of Heaven, it is the duty of moral men to dethrone and replace him with a morally virtuous emperor and, thus, restore the harmonious hierarchy. For this reason, rebellions and fractional power struggles have always been, and still are, cast as attempts to purge the country of corruption. The topic is too large to pursue in an adequate manner here. For the current purpose, it will suffice to mention that recent movements such as the Taiping Rebellion, the Guomindang Nationalist movement, and Maoism have all been cast in this manner.

Below is an illustration of this cosmology:



The Imperial-Confucian state secured order and the inscription of its subjects into its hierarchical state project through a series of graduated levels and increasingly inclusive units of moral commitment, from the individual to family to kin group to community to province to empire. For most of the people, loyalty to the emperor in his court in the capital was only attained as a culmination of loyalties to various intervening figures of identification and authority: father and

mother, lineage elder, local official and so on (Meihui-Yang, 1994, p. 265). Not only state-subject relation but the entirety of the person was thought of as being the sum of its relational obligations and responsibilities. This is a relational order in which the individual has no inherent value outside of its relations to the social body, and in which the social order is itself only understood as an extension of this relational universe. Moral obligation is strongest towards members of the in-group, one's closest kin, one's lineage, one's community, and does not apply to people from the world outside of the in-group.

4.3 The Maoist order and its subjectivity – the egalitarian-universalist model ¹⁴

In accordance with the logic of the Imperial-Confucian cosmology, it was widespread disenchantment with the backwardness and corruption of the bureaucracy of the Qing empire which led to the demise of its dynastic rule in 1912 (E. Whitehead and J. Whitehead, 1998, p. 330). Because of the Japanese invasion and the ongoing civil war with the Communists, this state of disenchantment lasted throughout the Republican period (1912-1949 – also called the warlord era). It was not until the Communist Party attained victory in 1949, that the population was re-enchanted. Maoism united the country under the popular urge to modernize and to purge the country of corruption by replacing the hierarchical-relational order with an egalitarian classless society.

4.4 Chinese dialectics

The egalitarian collectivism of Maoism is generally thought of as something new, as a product of modernity, and as having radically changed China, not only on the institutional level but its cultural roots as well. For example, Mayfair Meihui Yang argues that the Maoist state cannot be seen as yet another empire because of the radical change which it brought to state-subject relations (Meihui-Yang, 1994, p. 263). That may have seemed to be the case in 1994 when she wrote it, but what we are seeing now is that, as she herself writes years later in the foreword to 'Chinese Religiosities – Afflictions of Modernity and State formation,

‘With the leadership of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao since 2002, a shift in party ideology

¹⁴ Again, the label 'egalitarian' refers to the social model and the term universalist refers to the subjectivity and morality contained in it.

from rapid growth of the 'socialist market economy' and the 'Four Modernizations' to the construction of a new 'harmonious society' has occurred, with subtle gestures towards a new state-Confucianism.' (Meihui-Yang, 2008, p. 28)

It would seem that the Maoist state is not so very different from the imperial one. At least, not in its self-understanding or the image it wants to give of itself to its population. I would argue that the assumption that the imperial model is buried in the past is wrong, as we can see a present shift from what was originally an egalitarian-universalist model back towards the hierarchical-relational model.

The egalitarian-universalist model has a history in China which is equally as long as the hierarchical-relational one. In fact, Confucius' primary proponent, his student Mencius, had an ongoing debate with his contemporary philosopher Motze, who founded the philosophical school Mohism. Mohism argued against the Confucian model. It claimed that the complicated rituals and many layers of bureaucracy were unnecessary; that the primary obligation should be to the state –seen as the embodiment of the collective, not of the family, and that moral obligation should be equally extended towards all members of society (Sievert, 1949). Far from being a footnote in the annals of Chinese history, a discourse which combines the urge to purge corruption and to install egalitarianism has been the foundation for numerous anti-hegemonic social movements.¹⁵ Again, the Taiping Rebellion provides us with an example. At least on the surface, the Taiping movement was egalitarian, as evidenced by the fact that women were emancipated. (Burning, p. 55) Incidentally, they were also Christian, which as we will see links the movement to egalitarianism.¹⁶ The hegemonic, hierarchical order has continuously labeled this egalitarian discourse heresy, and has legitimized its attempt to eradicate it as a fight against the disruptive forces of chaos. The first mention of this conflict between the hierarchical model and the egalitarian one is found in the analects of Confucious (Palmer, 2008, p. 115) Instead of seeing the egalitarian-universalist social project of Maoism as something new, caused by the onslaught of modernism, I posit that, at least the logic it utilized should be viewed as an inherent part of the Chinese cosmology, as the transformative logic in a Chinese dialectic in which hierarchy is challenged by egalitarianism.

¹⁵ Whether or not it originated in this particular philosophical school is a matter beyond the scope of this thesis and beside the point which is that there is historical precedence for the universalist-egalitarian model.

¹⁶ Again, the topic is much too extensive to explore in depth here. For more on this topic, see Ian Burming's 'Taming the Gods' from 2010 or 'Popular Religious Movements and Heterodox Sects in Chinese History' by Michael Sievert' from 1949.

It was during the Easter Han (25-220 C.E.) that a discourse specifically stigmatizing politically heterodox religious groups appeared for the first time, following the millenarian movement of Taipingdao (Way of Supreme Peace), whose leader, the charismatic healer, Zhang Jue, launched the Yellow Turban Rebellion in 184 C.E, which mobilized tens of thousands of fighters and, though crushed after bloody battles, durably weakened the reigning dynasty, which collapsed a few decades later. (Ibid, p. 116)

When, as in the case of the Maoist rebellion, the challenge is successful, a new empire is created. As we have also seen in the case of Maoism, the egalitarian social movement is slowly taken over by the bureaucracy. As evidenced by the current emerging structure of entitlement, the egalitarian social movement is slowly institutionalized and transformed into a hierarchical state¹⁷. (Burning, p. 55) The egalitarian-universalist social movements have all been characterized by millenarianism and by the centrality of a charismatic leader. (Burning, p. 56)

In keeping with this inherent dialectic pattern, Maoism put the blame for China's shameful condition on the top layers of the previous hierarchy, the 'black classes',¹⁸ and on capitalism, religion, and traditional culture. Each of these elements were systematically rooted out and eradicated. The Maoist state did not manage to, 'replace capitalism with a system in which the abuse of power disappeared,' (Kipnis, 2003, p. 279) but it was extremely successful in dominating and changing China's social fabric. Mao was worshiped like a God, quite literally. Every house and workplace had his picture or statue in it, and each individual had his own copy of the 'Quotations of Chairman Mao' (Mao Zhuxi Yulu), containing Mao's thoughts on how to revolutionize China. Whether from genuine belief or as a means to increase or protect their capital (in the meaning that Bourdieu attributed the term with), people went to great lengths to prove the fervor of their convictions. Some tattooed Mao's name on their skin; some even pinned badges with his countenance onto their skin (Meihui-Yang, 1994, p. 249). Public confessions of perceived sins were common, and each person had a daily obligation to kneel before Mao's portrait in the morning to tell Mao what they planned to do for the revolution during the day, and then follow this up with a similar ritual in the evening in which the person would scrutinize his own actions and thoughts of the day for bourgeois elements. These rituals were undertaken by almost everyone. In short, Maoism was not an ideology solely for a political elite. It managed to become a paradigmatic mode of thought in popular consciousness, which deeply affected the

¹⁷ For more on this general process from movement to institution, see Francesco Alberoni 'Movement and Institution from 1977.

¹⁸ I.e. the rich peasants, the landlords, the capitalists and the intellectual elite.

entire population. (Kipnis, 2003, p. 280) Private diaries from the time attest to the fact that Maoist institutions successfully shifted the self-identification of most of the population away from the filial networks – the relational order that had previously been the main social fact, axis or hegemonic social structure - and onto itself.

‘And perhaps no modern culture has seen a social body as tightly unified, uniform and state-saturated as that of the Mao cult of the Cultural Revolution.’(Meihui-Yang, 1994, p. 266)

According to Meihui-Yang, Mao and the Party replaced the parents of each individual, and became the father and mother of the nation, demanding and receiving filial piety. The Chinese citizen became a national subject, rather than a member of a clan, embedded in an empire (Meihui-Yang, 1994, p. 258).

‘Through the successive violent social restructurings in the 1950’s, the Communist state successfully penetrated the whole social fabric, from associations, local communities, and families, to one’s personal and private life.’ (Ji Zhi 2008, p. 237)

The Maoist state project dismantled the hierarchical-relational order and supplanted it with a totalizing mono-organization that incorporated all levels of the social body, down to the private thoughts of the individual. From being relationally connected to the social body, understanding themselves as determined by their place in the correlating hierarchies, and receiving the life-force through a series of intermediaries, people now saw themselves as being part of the-people-as one, united, and directly connected to the life-force in the worship of Mao and the Communist party.

‘The cult [of Mao] activated mechanisms that cut through the old layers of hierarchy which intervened between the emperor and the people. In Maoism, each individual was brought to an equal distance from the leader or state center’ (Yang, 1994, p. 248)

4.5 Disenchantment with the Maoist order

According to Meihui-Yang, this wave of enchantment peaked around 1968-1971 during The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution which lasted from 1966-1978. (Meihui-Yang, 1994, p. 274) By the end of it, most people had become sorely disillusioned. Socialist fervor and the feeling of unity were replaced with the paranoia of surveillance, which to some extent is still present in the lives of the Chinese today (See for example the ‘Interview with translator about

government surveillance' or 'Interview with Lin Chen about trust, strangers and surveillance' in the Appendix). Thus, a second wave of disenchantment swept the young nation during the 1980's, and, once again, people were left without a functioning social and moral model.

'The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution inflicted serious suffering on many Chinese...depression became a dominant state for many people' (Ots, 1994, p. 129)

Parts of the population, particularly youth and urbanites, found new meaning in the 1980's in the shape of a popular social movement which demanded a reformation of the Chinese state. It became known as 'The Democracy Wall Movement' and was associated with widespread fascination with cultural products and identities from outside China, perhaps most importantly with the concepts of individuality and universal rights. (Hanser, 2002)

As epitomized by the Tiananmen Square incident, in which student protesters faced off against the Chinese government with disastrous and fatal results, the democracy movement was crushed by the Chinese government and the individualist subjectivity has been redirected to purely non-political spheres, such as the enactment of a personal style of clothing. Disenchantment and, what can be described as an ontological vacuum or void, reemerged in Chinese society. In an interview, 'Yi Mei Mei' described it like this:

'I think the 1980's was the best time yet. People were trying new things, being themselves and believe things can change. Now people mostly just [act like]sheep. And try and keep their head down. If somebody stand up, they definitely gonna be shot.' (Appendix, Yi Mei Mei: interview on government surveillance)

The current situation, in which the Chinese population has, to some degree, become disenchanted with the collectivist social and moral project of the state, is described in the following way by anthropologist Thomas Ots:

'Forty Years of unsuccessful attempts to construct a 'new man of socialist moral' have curtailed many ancient traditions and ways of life without providing new directions' (Ots, p.131)

Meihui-Yang concurs:

'It would seem that the culture has yet to resolve the loss of a traditional order. The void inside still needs to be filled.' (Meihui-Yang, 1994 p. 176)

Having sketched the contours of the cosmology and two social and moral models contained in it - the hierarchical-relational model, and the egalitarian-universalist model - I will now return to the question of rupture versus continuity. To reiterate, the following section asks the question: can we see the religious urges of the case groups as attempts to create replacements for the lost collectivist social order? And if so, do their attempts to create a functioning model utilize the cosmology and the two social models, or do they constitute the creation of something new?

4.6 Post-Socialist subjectivity

According to Meihui-Yang, what happened after the decline of the Maoist subjectivity was that two subjectivities emerged or re-emerged. One was the individualist and humanist subjectivity which had been introduced by the May Fourth movement in the beginning of the century, and which had subsequently been co-opted and transformed into Mao-subjectivity. The individualist subjectivity is a direct challenge to and opposes the state discourse on collectivism and on 'love of country above self.' As a consequence, in a post-Tiananmen Square era, it cannot provide the foundation for social movements in contemporary China (Meihui-Yang, p. 276).

The other subjectivity which has re-emerged, and which according to Meihui Yang is the primary mode of social organization emerging from the waning collectivist state-model, is what she terms 'guanxi-subjectivity' which connotes the kind of subjectivity implicit in a social model based on guanxi-networking.

4.6 Guanxi-networking

The Chinese word 'guanxi' means 'a relationship' and can be applied to any kind of relationship. When applied to 'social relationships,' it means a relationship between people that is based on mutual benefit and interest. The members of a guanxi-relationship may ask favors of each other, with the implicit understanding that the favor will be returned sometime in the future. Individual guanxi-relations are connected to wider guanxi-networks, in which one's guanxi-partners make use of their guanxi-partners and so forth in infinitum, in order to grant a favor which one party of a guanxi-relationship has asked of the other. Virtually anything can be attained in this fashion. Examples might be to secure a certain outcome of a legal process, to procure a product or medical remedy which is hard to get, to land a desirable job and so on. It is hard to overestimate the importance of guanxi-networking in contemporary China.

‘Guanxixue [the art of guanxi-networking] involves the exchange of gifts, favors, and banquets; the cultivation of personal relationships and networks of mutual dependence; and the manufacturing of obligation and indebtedness.’ (Meihui-Yang, p. 6)

There is an ongoing debate among China scholars about whether guanxi-networking is becoming more or less important in contemporary China¹⁹, but no one would contest that guanxi-networking is ubiquitous. It is what Emil Dürkheim called ‘a social fact’ which, according to Meihui-Yang, derives from the very basis of Chinese culture, the kinship relations:

‘In China, the dominant ethics have derived not from the religious realm, but from kinship relations. The recent resurgence of the art of guanxi is the latest extension of kinship ethics.’ (Meihui-Yang, p. 299)

4.7 Guanxi-subjectivity

What I refer to as guanxi-subjectivity is a mode of subjectivity in which the individuals mutually constitute each other through gift giving and the exchange of favors. Guanxi persons are constituted by the sum of exchange relations in which they are embedded. Individuals are perceived as large or small depending on the relative proportion of gifts and favors given out or taken in. Guanxi-relations can have varying degrees of personal trust and appreciation, but must always at least appear to go beyond a mere impersonal exchange relationship. This is the case because the guanxi-relation relies on the ethics of indebtedness and obligation, which is also known as the ‘germer’ (friendship) ideology, rather than on formal rules. The germer ideology upholds loyalty and mutual obligation between friends as the characteristics of the moral person. It entails that, the closer the connection, the more obligated one is to observe the germer ethic (Meihui-Yang, p. 281-300).

In this system, relations to the social system as a whole are secondary, and they are not connected with moral obligation. Moral obligation is reserved for members of the in-group, and the ability to gauge relational distance therefore becomes a central ability in the guanxi-network social model, because it tells you who you can trust. In this social model, each person attempts to situate himself as the center of a network of useful connections and attempts to strengthen the most valuable relations, people who are gatekeepers of some kind, or who have access to such people through their network (Meihui-Yang, p. 295-300). It is easy to see the similarity between

¹⁹ See for example ‘Social Connections in China –Institutions, Culture, and the Changing Nature of Guanxi’ ed, Gold, Guthrie and Wank, 2002.

the way guanxi-relations are described today and the relational ethics and subjectivity embedded in the hierarchical-relational model. This guanxi-network social and moral model is, in effect, a re-envisioning of the kinship ethics found in the hierarchical-relational model.

Does this re-emerged social and moral model provide a satisfactory explanatory model for the case groups?

In the case of the Vajrayana Buddhists, it does. The following section returns to the empirical material in order to discuss, first, the Vajrayana Buddhists, and then, the Christian housechurch, in accordance with the models that have been delineated. First, the clubbing praxis of the group of Vajrayana Buddhists is discussed, comparing the clubbing praxis with the hierarchical-relational model and also linking the clubbing praxis to the main tenet of the previous chapter, that of status distinction.

4.8. Clubbing as distinction work

In the following it will be shown that the VIP lounges in nightclubs serve a central function in the distinction and guanxi-networking efforts of the Vajrayana Buddhist case group. It will also become apparent that the group praxis in these lounges firmly confirms its embeddedness in the hierarchical-relational model.

During my fieldwork in the VIP lounges of Beijing, I was often puzzled by how little actually took place inside the VIP lounges. On the main floor, people were mingling and dancing, but inside the VIP lounge, people mostly hung out on couches chatting and drinking, and often the people with the highest status did the least of all – simply sitting there, calmly, and only speaking when spoken to. We can explain this behavior within the hierarchical-relational moral model in which social superiority is equated with moral superiority and, thus, calmness and self-discipline. This point was made evident to me when I inquired with Didi Hui²⁰ about the seeming lack of activity or emotional excitement that I myself associate with partying:

B: But I was wondering about something. At all the parties we went to, even though you all had a lot to drink and a lot for the nose, you didn't really go crazy. Like in Denmark, if people drink a lot they often become more rowdy and noisy, but you guys were very calm and just sort of relaxed.

²⁰ Didi Hui works as a sales manager of one of the major nightclubs in Beijing and, therefore, knows the clubbing scene, as well as the rules of the social engineering that goes on in them, better than almost anybody else. His job is to know and be on good terms with important people, to offer them deals and services, and to get them to come to his club and bring their retinue of retainers with them. The job literally consists of going from one VIP section to the next and partying and hosting the various groups.

D: Chinese party differently, or Chinese people are like that, but, err, I think our parties have that too!

B: Right, but it's less than in Denmark. I'll give you one example: Like at all the discos we went to, there were those go-go dancers...

D: We have that too!

B: Right, that's..

D: At our disco it's a Western girl, that's very rare.

B: Right, and when I saw her I was like, wow, look at that, she is sexy! And I looked at her. But you guys were like ignoring it, or you didn't say anything about it.

T: Yeah of course, what you wanna say? Of course!

B: Why 'of course'?

T: Then you're... a very erotic person, low level person.

B: Ok.

T: Like somebody do very hard work, and earn very little money.

B: Ok, so if you get too excited about this stuff then you..?

T: Then it seems that you're a really cheap person. (Appendix, Didi interview, p. 4)

We see quite clearly from this exchange that the underlying moral model is the hierarchical one, in which status superiority is enacted through self-control and moral superiority, and that being a low-level person is equal to being in the grips of one's emotions and being someone who has to work hard for a living. As a result, the go-go dancers, who appear in almost all discos, often wearing next-to-nothing, are looked upon with a great deal of disinterested composure, or ignored entirely, by the case group. Neither drunkenness nor the taking of drugs significantly changes this behavior. According to the moral of the hierarchical model, one does not express lustful feelings. That would be showing unbridled 'qin' – which can be translated as base or animal emotions, which are associated with status inferiority and seen as a threat to the harmony of the social hierarchy. This is an important part of the distinction work, through which these elite youth establish the difference between themselves and the commoners. Thus, the morality of the hierarchical model is expressed in contemporary VIP clubbing behavior in Beijing. As explained in the section on guanxi-subjectivity, the ability to gauge relational distance is of utmost importance to the guanxi-networking which goes on in the VIP nightclubs in Beijing. Didi Hui, the disco sales manager knew better than most the intricate rules that govern these encounters. His job entails that night after night he socializes with a lot of very rich people and gets them to spend money in his club by being within their circle of trust, giving rebates, supplying recreational drugs and being cool.

'See these people, they are like God, from the moment they enter the gate, and go to a private room, from the moment these people step through the doors of a disco they are

like God, and they spend 40,000 RMB in one night. Think about these people's lives. Oh, I want to have that life!' (Appendix, Didi Hui interview, p. 8)

My interpreter described it this way: 'His eyes were shining, and you can see this hope, that one day he is going to be one of these guys.'

Within the Beijing clubbing field, or indeed within the contemporary guanxi-network based hierarchical-relational model, these people epitomize what everybody aspires to be. They are at the very top of the hierarchy, closest to the source of the life-force.

I asked Didi Hui if these people would accept him as a real friend.

'You have to know someone extremely well then, otherwise no way. You have to know exactly where you stand in this kind of relationship, and don't try to cross the line, or everybody will abandon you.' (Appendix, Didi Hui interview, p. 6)

In this context, Didi Hui and his friends must act deferentially towards social groups that have managed to naturalize their position as being higher than his own. His ability to create and maintain guanxi-relationships with members of the top echelons of the clubbing elite in Beijing enables Didi Hui to make a very comfortable living. This, however, is only possible through the careful gauging and enactment of his own status inferiority. Should he miscalculate the distance or attempt to act above his own status level, he will lose all his social-relations, which would circumvent his entire survival strategy. He and his friends then emulate the behavior of these high spenders in less extravagant terms, spending perhaps 3 to 4 thousand RMB in a night, the equivalent of roughly two months' salary for an urban construction worker. They also expect the people who serve and facilitate their clubbing to act deferentially towards them, and the group will not even convene in a setting which does not observe these social rules.

As became evident in interviews, there is general consensus among the various levels of patrons and the staff of the VIP clubs about the existence and importance of this social hierarchy within the club. This social fact also shapes the relations between clubs, which are seen as being placed within a status hierarchy as well. The individual clubs' placement in the hierarchy is determined by the collective status of its patrons, which again is relative to the amount of money these patrons spend in the club:

B: You know a lot of people through that club, huh?

D: Yeah, and they are not just anybody. I'm talking about bosses and powerful people.

B: Right, because it's one of the best nightclubs in Beijing, right?

D: Yeah, it's the second best nightclub right now. We used to be number one, but there is

one place that is regarded as even better than us now. In my club, people will spend 20,000 RMB in a private room in a night. (Appendix, Didi Hui interview, p.4)

Sometimes the parties extended into all-night visits to luxurious spas, where a myriad of waiters served us hand and foot. The most popular spas are the ones that have the most opulent interiors and the most subservient staff. From the lobby, where giant chandeliers hang surrounded by marble pillars and 'gold' stucco en masse, the whole place does its utmost to establish itself as the epitome of luxury. Once inside the actual facility, you are greeted by meek youth who help you acquire disposable underwear, a bathrobe, and plastic slippers, before you step further into this extravagant several-story maze. Inside the spa area, there are huge movie screens in the common pool area. Next to the lounge-chairs, already draped in fresh towels which are replaced by servants after use, are fruit bowls and little towels for the eyes. Next to the pool areas are private bathing cabins, filled with all kinds of creams, shampoos, disposable toothbrushes, and toiletries. Once the group gets tired of bathing, it retreats to the relaxation area, where each person gets a highly comfortable, remote controlled, reclining bed-chair with a movable touch-screen television with an array of movies and programs. In addition, there is a button which, if pressed, will summon a waiter whom they order drinks, food or foot-massages from. Sometimes members of the group would remark to me that a particular place was not as good as others in town. To me, the difference was almost invisible – upon questioning they would explain that in the ‘good places,’ the staff were of a higher class and the interior more beautiful. Having been told what to look for, I realized that the places the group deemed highest on the hierarchy were the places where the deferential treatment which the group receives from the staff was most rigorously enacted and enforced. In the parking lot of the sauna which Lin Chen pointed out to me as the best in town, a guard in a splendid uniform escorted us to our car and saluted us sharply as we drove away. The other spas did not extend the status ritual all the way to the parking lot.

4.8.1 Status by association

In China, VIP lounges are sectioned so that each group has its own area. Therefore, the higher the status of the others who are present in your crowd, the more status-affirming it becomes to be seen to be in the lounge, and, as such, status-by-association becomes a major motive for clubbing. On several occasions, my case group was unable to reserve a VIP lounge in a ‘good’ club and that automatically meant that we didn’t go out at all.

Another aspect of status through association which illustrates the careful status maneuvering and gauging which goes on in the VIP lounge, is illustrated by the way the group interacts with guests that are of higher status than themselves. At one club in Shenyang, the group got a visit from someone whom I was told was one of the most famous actors in China. As such, everyone naturally agreed that he was the most status affirming - through association relation there, and one would therefore assume that everyone would attempt to talk with him. But the exact opposite was true. He mostly sat in silence by himself, and was rarely talked with besides from initial polite conversation. I later realized that they behaved in this manner in order to avoid having to act deferentially towards him, which would have been harmful to the enactment of their own status-superiority. Therefore, the VIP crowd of lesser importance, who were themselves the access-granting and status-affirming connection in the VIP lounge for their own retinue of relations, simply utilized the presence of the status superior in the group to enhance their own status and socialized mainly with people of their own status level, so as not to be seen to act deferentially.

Being-In-Exclusivity

An interesting fact about the VIP lounges is that they always exist within the setting of a club which also contains a regular patron section. The reason for this is that the display of virtuous calmness, and thus status superiority, only functions as being status affirming and conveying exclusivity if observed as such by other social groups. In other words, being-in-exclusivity is not a state of being alone or un-noticed, but an overt expression of exclusion. For this reason, the VIP lounges I visited during my fieldwork were always placed so that they were visible to the main crowd, often positioned on a balcony above the main dance floor, instead of hidden away. By their simple presence in this setting, in which inclusion and exclusion are rigorously practiced through spatial distance, the group positions itself favorably in the game of acquiring social and cultural capital.

Thus when I asked Didi Hui (D) and Lin Chen (T) about why the group had never gone to a club named Propaganda, which is frequented mainly by a mix of foreign and Chinese university students, they replied in the follow manner:

D: I don't like this club... it's too messy. Everybody is crowded together, so there is no privacy, and the music is too loud. It's really a low level kind of club. When I go to a club

with friends, I want to spend the time with them, not talk to strangers.

T: Also, rich people don't like Propaganda for this reason. The place he wants is expensive, and more fancy. Like everything in Propaganda they do is so cheap, so ugly. Foreigners go there to make friends and blah blah blah. It's cheap place to get drunk.

D: The Chinese way to play is different.

T: In Propaganda, people will talk to you, like 'hey hey germer' (friend) this is no good.

B: Why not?

T: He is not used to it. And, no place to sit and all the foreigners together, mix together. In a good club, everybody can have a private room where you play with your friends. He's not into this way.

(Didi Interview, p. 5)

We see from this exchange that a low level club is one in which the status hierarchy is not observed. Everybody is mixed together, random people will talk to you and call you a friend, and there is no status-affirming space for the group to be-in-exclusivity. Also, the club is not frequented by people of high social worth, only foreigners and students.

4.8.2 Service interactions

The importance of the enactment of the status hierarchy is very clearly seen in the relationship between the serving staff and the clientele in the club, as well as in other venues of similar service interactions. As Goffman puts it, status rituals consist of un-reciprocated acts of deference:

‘Deference, is a symbolic act conveying “appreciation”... Rituals of deference are expressions of asymmetrical deference- where one side defers to the other, and deference is not reciprocated’ (Goffman, 1967, p. 55-56)

He goes on to explain that the purpose of status rituals is to guarantee that the status-inferior individual acts appropriately, and that the status-superior individual receives his due (Goffman, 1967, p. 56).

If a group spends enough money in a high-level club, or if the group has good guanxi-relations with the management of the club, the group will be allocated one or two servers for the evening. Status superiority is very clearly displayed towards serving staff. They wait at hand at the table, refill glasses, remove garbage, and perform other menial tasks. On one occasion a servant was given a beer²¹, but mostly they are not spoken to, except to be ordered around, mainly good-naturedly so, but occasionally with a sharp tone. They are summoned by the simple title of

²¹ He may have been given the beer by me, I don't recall exactly.

'Fuwuyuan' (servant/waiter) which is used universally in shops, restaurants, saunas and so on. There are exceptions, but they are usually dressed in somewhat ridiculous uniforms²². During a visit to a nightclub in Shenyang, a head bartender handed Didi Hui his business card, hoping perhaps to get a job in Beijing. He did so in a highly deferential manner and was very appreciative that a manager from a famous disco in Beijing would take his card. He was gay, very revealingly dressed, and had a crazy hairdo, by Chinese standards; still this apparent deviant engaged with perfect reverential behavior toward his status superiors. He presented his card in two hands, bowing slightly, and backed away from our table. The prize for the potential patronage of this status-superior, he seemed to think, was absolute acceptance and acknowledgment of his own social-inferiority.

4.8.3 Honorary consumption

Finally, another piece of the distinction work that takes place in the VIP sections is seen in the abundant fruit baskets and multiple alcoholic beverages which are placed artfully on the tables in the groups section by the serving staff. I became aware of this when I realized that these elaborate displays of snacks were often only picked at by the patrons, rather than actually consumed as a meal. This is because their main function is to be a ritual of honorary consumption of status goods, which in turn, grants distinction. This function disappears if the grandeur of the display is consumed entirely, or seen to be needed. Again, this shows that the group is inscribed in the hierarchical social model. By using, and sacrificing, power-related consumer goods in this ritual manner, and thus placing themselves high up in the hierarchy, the group seeks to solidify its connection with the source of power itself, in accordance with the prescripts of the hierarchical model.

4.9 Banquet protocol as guanxi-networking

The giving of banquets to socially valuable persons in a status-affirming setting is also a part of the general strategy of guanxi-networking. These feasts are always given by someone involved in a guanxi-network to others within the network. They are also given to valuable, access-granting,

²² I am unsure if this is on purpose, to demarcate their low status, make them visible to customers, remove sexual appeal, or perhaps it is just my personal opinion that the uniforms look ridiculous.

and status-affirming persons in order to incorporate them into one's guanxi-network. On several occasions, Yi Mei Mei brought a professional contact to a club-gathering of the group, but only on occasions when she herself was the host. Inviting someone from outside the group to the banquet which she offered to the group could be seen as part of her effort to position herself centrally in the group by being the entrance-granting gatekeeper to the group for new members. This is also part of the reason why she decided to temporarily include me in the group, as a part of her effort to create obligation and loyalty towards herself within her own guanxi-network, it was status affirming to be seen to have a western friend.

4.9.1 The 'germer' ideology in club etiquette

During my stay with my case group, I was told to call people by filial terms, and this also applied to Lin Chen's family, where I stayed during the New Year celebrations. I was instructed to call Lin Chen my 'little sister,' and to call her parents 'uncle' and 'aunt' (jiujiu/jiuma). The reason for this is that, in the relational model of which the germer ideology is the contemporary urban expression, the ethics of filial obligation provides a hierarchical metaphor for all other relations. A new trust-relation, such as the one created with a new friend and guest of the family, can therefore only be thought of in these terms. Relating through the filial metaphor also existed within the group. 'Didi Hui' means 'little brother Hui,' for example. This is not merely a polite convention but something which is intimately linked to the way in which the group thinks of itself and to the way that group members interact. Their interaction patterns follow the relational logic of the traditional hierarchical family. The manner of toasting is an example of the function of this logic. The person who perceives himself as being lower in the filial hierarchy due to age or other reasons, or who wants to be polite and 'give face,'²³ will bring his glass together with the status-superior's glass so that the edge of his own glass touches the superior's below the rim. There are appropriate distances to observe between rims. Someone a year younger will make the difference a couple of centimeters, whereas with greater age, or status imbalance, the distance may be considerably more marked and noticeable. Sometimes a mock battle erupts, as two people fight over who gets to toast lowest. The same behavior pattern can be observed with the lighting of cigarettes, where group members will physically try to grapple the lighter from one

²³ The concept of 'face' or 'mianzi' is an entire new discussion on its own which I will not go into. It can be roughly translated as social status, and is an integral part of guanxi-subjectivity, in which one's 'face' worth is relative to the gifts and favors one gives or receives.

another in order to achieve the subservient role, thus 'giving face,' and winning it for themselves through this act of politeness and show of 'renqing' (love of group above self).

4.9.2 Display of 'renqing' in club ethics

The term 'renqing' stems from the Imperial-Confucian ideology which placed great emphasis on filial piety. 'Renqing' is the feeling of love and gratitude that the individual feels towards those higher up in the filial hierarchy. It is also the feeling of obligation and responsibility that the individual feels towards those who fall below in the filial hierarchy. Together, these two constitute a feeling of love of the harmony of the group above one's own well-being. One could speculate that the contemporary urban 'germer' ideology is an extension of the filial ethics of the local communities, re-interpreted to encompass the many new and unpredictable social relationships that have arisen in the rapid shift to life in mass society. The 'germer' ideology is more loosely structured and more easily expandable than the traditional filial ethics. It exists between friends and acquaintances, not between family members. Again, the group drinking behavior provides an example. Group members always drink together and at the same time; never alone. To drink alone would be to violate the 'germer' code of ethics. Sometimes it is done in pairs. This is one person's way of giving face and thus gaining relational closeness with a specific other person. This is guanxi-networking at its most basic level. The courting person pours the drink for the person he wishes to court, and then either exclaims 'gambei,' in which case the courted person is obligated to empty the glass, or just raise the glass, in which case the amount is up to the individual. This provides an inbuilt thermostat which prevents the 'face' of either person from being damaged, which would be the case if the toast was refused, or if the toasted person should be unable to complete the toast.

Within a fairly tightly knit group which includes several close friends, such as my case group, this is not taken very seriously, though still enacted. With more arbitrarily connected persons or people from outside the group with whom one is attempting to create or maintain social relations, it is, however, a very serious matter, as it is considered insulting not to complete the toast. Didi Hui had a chronic sour stomach for this reason. With a job as the sales manager of a high level nightclub, he spent almost every evening creating and cultivating relationships between top customers and the nightclub, which ultimately entailed partying with them. This meant a lot of

toasting during a work-night. And since Didi Hui represented the 'face' of the nightclub, there was no way for him to turn down these toasts; in fact, if he wanted to keep these customers coming back, he had to initiate a great deal of toasts himself. This kind of praxis is not limited to nightclubs. For example, a case was reported by the media in Beijing in which a local-level official had died over the course of a guanxi-networking banquet with higher level government officials. This sparked a debate of whether or not this deceased official should be granted a medal posthumously, since he had died as a result of his determined service to the party. Another example of 'face'-saving in club ethics is how vomiting is dealt with. It is virtually ignored by the other members of the group. They will hand the person a napkin and offer a consolatory remark, but no one teases the person, nor do they necessarily tell him to go home. Nor would members of the staff dare to reproach a group for creating too much mess by vomiting and such. The staff has bags for vomit, similar to those found in airplanes. Another example of the workings of the 'germer' ethics is the way they dance. Group members do not dance as much as the regular club guests, and when they do, they always emulate each others' dancing. They would often try to emulate my dancing style and expected me to do the same. One man actually became visibly upset after I refused to keep on repeating this pattern and insisted on 'doing my own thing.'

On the basis of these examples of the workings of the 'germer' ideology in the various aspects of clubbing behavior, I conclude that the group is inscribed, not only in the hierarchical social model, which we have seen in its activities directed towards the out-group, but also in the relational moral model, presently known as the germer ideology, which is reserved for the in-group.

4.9.3 Summing up the clubbing praxis

The examination of the clubbing praxis of the group of Vajrayana Buddhists shows that the group can best be described as a guanxi-network consisting of guanxi-subjects. I argue that this should be understood as the contemporary version of the hierarchical-relational social and moral model. The relational aspect of this model has been shown to be present in the group's partying praxis in the following ways: The group observes courteous manners which carefully follow the internal hierarchical relations of the group. Emphasis is put on expression of heartfelt emotions towards in-group members, and on love of the group above oneself, which shows that the group

is inscribed in the 'germer ideology.' The 'germer ideology' is the contemporary urban version of the relational in-group ethics which are implicit in the relational social and moral model of the Imperial-Confucian cosmology.

The hierarchical aspect of the model is present in the group's partying praxis in the following ways: The group insists on gathering exclusively in social settings in which status rituals are enacted that grant it distinction. The controlled partying style shows that the group is inscribed in the hierarchical cosmology in which status superiority is equated with moral virtue and thus calmness and self-control. The ritual consumption of status goods further shows the importance of being seen as status-superiors, which supports the picture of the group's utilization of a hierarchical social model, as does the insistence on status demarcation through spatial exclusion/inclusion.

Furthermore it has been shown that the group utilizes clubbing as a means to expand and strengthen their guanxi-network, and that the individual group member utilizes clubbing praxis to gain a central position within the group, and to garner loyalty and obligation.

4.10 Guanxi and God

In this section, we return to the religious practices of the group. Previous discussions dealt with the ways in which the group utilizes this religiosity in its relations with the wider social body, the out-group. This section deals with how this religiosity is utilized in in-group relations.

The Vajrayana Buddhists think of the spiritual world, in which they have chosen to become involved, as a hierarchy. The structure and logic of this hierarchy is synonymous with that of the Imperial-Confucian cosmology. The Living Buddha is the intermediary at the top of the earthly realm, who receives life-force from the spiritual realm, which he then distributes down through the spiritual hierarchy to his believers through esoteric rituals. Upon entry into the group, each believer gets connected to the Living Buddha through a spiritual bond. The new believer is thus connected to the source of life-force, albeit at the bottom level of the spiritual hierarchy. With the initiation follows instructions in and spiritual empowerment of a mantra which must be recited 100,000 times. Without the empowerment, the mantra is useless, or at least nowhere near as potent, because it is not directly connected to the top of the hierarchy. Upon completion of the first level, the believer is then initiated into the next level of the hierarchy by a secret ritual

which must only be known by those already at that level. And so forth, until in principle, the believer is directly connected with the spiritual life-force in the same way as the Living Buddha. The members believe that advancing in the spiritual hierarchy makes them more intelligent, lucky, and powerful, and also, that it increases their moral virtue, which has been shown in the previous section to be equal to social status.

As mentioned, the sangha is, in principle, open to anyone who wishes to join, but in reality membership is exclusive. New members are recruited by other members according to their estimation of the capital holdings and social value the person holds for the proselytizer. This became clear to me when I noticed that my informants had gotten many of their business contacts and social allies into the lama worship, but none of their acquaintances of lower social status, such as family member, servants, or unsuccessful classmates. We can conclude that Lin Chen's proselytizing efforts are not motivated by religious fervor or a general wish to help those around her. So what is the motive? There are several, which I will illustrate through Lin Chen's actions within the sangha.

Lin Chen is very diligent in her effort to attain an ever-higher position within the spiritual levels of the Buddhist congregation. She has progressed rapidly and performs the required rituals on most days. She also strives to introduce and connect business contacts and potential status-affirming relations to the sangha. This is a strategy for expanding and strengthening her own guanxi-network. It is also a way for her to achieve a central and norm-defining position in the field of fame. It is also a strategy for becoming central and norm-defining within this guanxi-network which consists solely of useful social connections from the media field. By involving this type of people in a spiritual hierarchy, in which she herself is already placed on a high level, she utilizes her religion as a social positioning tool. For the people who come to believe in the Living Buddha, Lin Chen has a degree of symbolic capital that they do not. This is the religious equivalent of the honorary consumption which goes on in nightclubs. Through proactive proselytization, Lin Chen manages to become the progenitor of a course of action which her peers see as honorary, which, in turn, grants her distinction within the group. One must also take into account the belief that advancement in the spiritual hierarchy makes one more powerful, intelligent, and lucky, making Lin Chen a very desirable guanxi or business partner, because she has a closer connection to the source of life-force. Being in the top echelon of the sangha is Lin

Chen's magico-religious shortcut to success.

The closeness of the relationship with the Living Buddha also has implications for the inner psychological aspect and motivation for being a part of the spiritual hierarchy. Bearing in mind the workings of guanxi-relations, we can extend that logic to the relationship between the Living Buddha and the Believer. By believing in and worshipping the Living Buddha, the Believer extends his network all the way to the source of the life-force. This gives the Believer a sense of security and power. Furthermore, by donating money and going through the rituals, the Believer is, in a way, doing the Living Buddha a favor. Within the logic of guanxi-subjectivity, this obligates the Living Buddha to return the favor at some point in the future. In other words, this is Lin Chen, and the other believers' way of ensuring that God owes them a favor.

4.10.1 Summing up Guanxi and God

The above section 'Guanxi and God' points out the similarity between the Imperial-Confucian cosmology and the spiritual hierarchy which the sangha believes in. Furthermore, we see that the groups' religious practice is an extension of its guanxi-networking efforts, and that it also functions as a positioning tool or distinction game inside the group. Finally we see that advancement in the spiritual hierarchy has a psychological motivation. It is the individual believer's ways of making God owe her a favor.

4.11 The Housechurch: A Millenarian social movement?

In the chapter on distinction, it became clear that the housechurch is a reaction against the emergence of the structure of entitlement. Joining the housechurch is a way of mitigating the perceived destructive consequences of its emergence. This also applies to the hierarchical-relational model and its guanxi-subjectivity. In the housechurch the type of people who are engaged in the social positioning games of the emerging hierarchy are seen as morally decrepit and empty. 'People have become ugly, very ugly.' (Appendix, Easter-celebration interview, p. 2) Clearly, the housechurch cannot be thought of as a guanxi-network. We also previously saw that the housechurch does not fit the description 'rational-ethical'. How then can we characterize the housechurch? How do they see the world, or in other words what is the cosmology of the housechurch?

We have already seen that according to the housechurch the world is a battleground between the forces of God and Satan. In this battle both sides are attempting to gather as many souls as possible before the inevitable arrival of the apocalypse. All over the world people's spirits are being attacked by demonic forces:

L: I mean nowadays people, especially in China, people have no belief, so they think that we have only human body, so they live for the body, but something, something will happen to their spirit, so in China, all kinds of um, successful man and college students they will suicide. In China about two million people, each year suicide. And twenty percent of them succeed. Around 200,000, and many of them young people..So it is really a very complex, err...

B: Complex? You mean like a war?

L: The spiritual, yeah, Satan is very strong. Each year, you know this figure is not in China, but in the world, the top three ways of dying of young people from 15 to 24 is, number one is accidents, number two is cancer, and number three is suicide. So you can see that Satan has done more to destroy the younger generation, because if human younger generation is destroyed, there is no one to fight, so he is trying, because now is end age, so he is trying to grab more and more younger generation life. So you can see that in Japan and also in China that all over the world, the spiritual problem of the younger generation are becoming larger and larger. In China now, I'm a junior student teacher, And I can see that problem is coming earlier than us, I had my childhood, my parents did not understand me, I want person to understand me, that's my problem, but now the students of primary and junior school are grabbed by internet, by sex and sometimes by drugs. So Satan uses his power to attack the younger generation. Satan will try to grab more, so there is urgent need for the church. (Appendix, Local church interview p. 4-5)

We see that, according to the housechurch, God is focusing his efforts on the younger generations, because they are also the ones being attacked most severely by Satan. And this is the self-understanding of the housechurch: it is the instrument of God in this battle. Housechurch members are filled up by the Holy Spirit which acts through them. Because they house the Holy Spirit, true believers get the spiritual power to convert and save others:

'Most important is, the spirit will call us. So this is the training in, how to get spiritual power. Of course knowledge is power, and em, spiritual power is from your relationship with God.' (Appendix, Local church leader interview, p. 9)

'God feel the timing and then I begin, and then I begin to feel I'm not in the dark. And then when I get more spiritual power, and Then I confirm, and then God began to, you know add people, more and more and more, so he will judge..He know how many people you can guide. He know, and then everything happen.' (Appendix, Local church leader interview, p. 10)

As we have seen, a true believer can expel the demonic forces from a possessed person. Housechurch members also report feeling much happier than they did before getting saved. They generally feel uplifted and ecstatic, and it is common for new converts to start doing a lot better all over, once they really start to believe. For example, Yi Mei Mei told me that her previous best friend, who had become a true believer, had dramatically improved her grades and that everything seemed to be working out for her.

Housechurch members have an apocalyptic worldview. They will not commit to believing that the apocalypse is near in any specific terms, but the ones I talked about it with, believe it is coming²⁴:

B: Do you believe the end of the world is close?

PL2: I believe everything it says in the Bible.

B: But it doesn't say a time, but I know that a lot of Christians believe it will be soon...

PL2: I'm not sure, but we can see that there are some signs that happen. Signs occur as the Bible says. A lot of disasters and you know also disease. A lot of disease just happen, so that's written in the Bible. (Local church leader interview, p. 4)

These three characteristics, the belief that the world is in a crisis, the apocalyptic cosmology and the belief in supernatural powers point to a definition of the Housechurch in terms of the anthropology of religion. It is a millenarian movement, or at least a pre-stage to a millenarian movement²⁵.

As David Lindenfeld writes about the Taiping Rebellion:

'The Taiping exemplifies a widely recognized response to crisis situations, namely millenarianism, a belief that the crisis is a prelude to the imminent transformation of society and eradication of evil' (Lindenfeld, 2012, p. 197)

The third characteristic; belief in supernatural powers; is described by Thomas Ots in his article about 'the qigong craze in the 1980's' in the following manner:

²⁴ I should note here that it may be the case that the housechurch congregations I did fieldwork in may not be representative of the movement in its totality. The housechurch that I have called 'Local Church' was described to me by my main informant Yi Mei Mei, as more extreme in its views than the other housechurches. Yi Mei Meis' best friend became a true believer, and they consequently don't spend time together anymore. She is considering becoming a missionary full time, but even she won't go to 'Local Church' anymore because they have started registering the names and addresses of their members and also of fear of a government crackdown.

²⁵ According to Ots a social movement must have a charismatic leadership in the Weberian sense to be characterized as a millenarian movement (Ots, p. 132). The Housechurch movement is not in that way a connected movement, but rather an association of congregations which think of themselves as separate units.

‘Many practitioners of qigong expressed a longing for supraordinary abilities...These notions reveal some aspects of a millenarian movement in its early stage...In Chinese history the majority of millenarian movements...were intimately connected with the experience of different forms of leibly states, especially ecstasy and trance, which seem to have been connected to feelings of invincibility.’(Ots, p. 131)

I posit that this is comparable to the feeling of invincibility experienced by Housechurch members in their missionary activities: ‘God really is protecting us. We celebrate, we have a lot of things (missionary activities), only way is, God is protecting us.’ (Appendix Local Church leader interview, p. 8)

4.11.1 The secret – A Transformative social space

The following section examines the reasons for the Housechurch’s semi-secretive character. In the chapter on the relation between the state and the Christian field it was pointed out that the housechurch movement exists as an underground movement because of its rejection of state regulation. The millenarian character of the housechurch adds another aspect to our understanding of why the housechurch movement prefers to be a ‘public secret’ According to Højbjerg the purpose of what we could call a social secret, is not, as one would assume, to keep certain knowledge within a certain group. Rather, the secret should be understood as a way of acting, as a social tool:

’Det hemmelige udgør altså en måde at handle på. Det etablerer et bånd imellem alle dem som deler hemmeligheden, men diskriminerer I varierende omfang de uindviede....Set I det lys er det hemmelige ikke et socialt faktum af neutral karakter, men repræsenterer I stedet et effektivt middel til at påvirke de sociale relationer.’ (Højbjerg, p.300)

The secret is an efficient way to create a division in the social body, whereas, socially-speaking, the content of the secret can be regarded as irrelevant. In other words, the function of the secret is to structure the social in two groups, those who know and those who do not. This should not be taken to mean that the Housechurch wishes to create an exclusive club in the same way as the Vajrayana Buddhists. Far from it, the Housechurch is an expansionist social project which puts great effort into its missionary activities. Eventually, with the fruition of Gods plan, which is equal to the expansion of the housechurch movement, the housechurch will not have to be a secret anymore:

‘One day, if God give them grace, the people in the government churches will want to do the real thing. People have a desire for the truth. Sometime when the God time come to them, we will stay together and try to spread gospel. So gospel cannot stay with one person, so we will pray for them, because we are saved! So only now will we be like this [in secret] but one day God will do.’ (Appendix, Local church interview, p. 9)

As we see from the above quote, the secret creates a social space within which the ‘real truth’ can exist. We can infer that it is then also a social space in which the emotionally devastating circumstances of life in the emerging structure of entitlement are mitigated. Bearing in mind that the social and moral model contained in the emerging structure of entitlement is the hierarchical-relational one, it would seem logical if this model was rejected in the Housechurch. That is indeed the case, the Housechurch members repeatedly told me that in the Housechurch everyone is equal, that they were all children of God, and that the relation between God and the individual believer is far more important than social connections. In Housechurch discourse, the rich and the well-connected, who do not believe in the real spiritual God, are representatives of all that is wrong with society. The pursuit of riches and fame are invariably equated with meaninglessness, addiction, loneliness, greed, and is ultimately seen as the work of Satan, as illusions conjured up by him to lead people away from God.

The secret provides a social tool with which the Housechurch can expand into this corrupted hierarchical-relational social order, and purify and incorporate it into itself. In fact the Housechurch believes that it will manage to convert and save all of China. The prayer leader of Local Church formulated the vision into a concrete plan and strategy for how God and the Housechurch will make this happen:

B: So would you say that the housechurches are against the state?

L: No of course, how can we, I mean, we are doing the spiritual Bible right, so the enemy is Satan, of course, Satan will use the government to play us, but that made us pray more for our government. Pray more for the college student, because someday, a person, a college student, a person who understand gospel, will go into the government, and then, whole country will be saved. That’s the way.

B: That’s the plan?

L: It is plan! So you know the thing to be against the government, it is not God’s way, because the people in the government, they do not know the gospel, so how can they say! Like us if we do not know gospel. We will be person who will pray for them, and we will see. Being someone is more dangerous, you know it is safer to be like the others, but I pray and go on. (Appendix, Local church interview, p. 9)

The purpose of focusing on converting university students is not just to save as many individual young people from the corrupting hierarchy as possible. It is in fact a strategy for converting and saving all of China, including the government. The Housechurch is not a transformative social movement in the same way as the Maoists or the Taiping were. They are not political as such, since the spiritual terms with which they categorize the surrounding society are not concerned with concrete political issues or individual regimes. The world is portrayed in strictly biblical terms, not political. Thus it is not the state in itself, but what housechurch members see as a fake and dangerous reality, in the grips of demonic forces, that housechurch members wish to separate themselves from and transform.

For this branch of the housechurch movement, the state is a captive in the all pervading spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil. Though they do not intend to fight any battles in the physical realm, they do plan, or wish to convert or conquer the state in the spiritual realm from within. By freeing the government from the hidden influence of Satan, the housechurch will ensure the salvation of the entire nation. Thus, the housechurch is not against the state, it wants to expand into and thereby save and transform the state.

This begs the question of what the housechurch wants to transform the hierarchical-relational model that they are opposed to into. And for the purposes of this analysis, it also begs the question of how this fits into the Imperial-Confucian cosmology, which we have seen to be implicit in the religious endeavors of the group of Vajrayana Buddhists. A comparison between the housechurch and Maoism in its original egalitarian-universalist shape provides the answers to these questions.

4.11.2 Similarities between Maoism and housechurch

There are striking similarities between Maoism as expressed at the height of its day in the Mao Cult, and the Housechurch. In the section on Maoist subjectivity, it was pointed out that the Mao Cult successfully re-enchanted the dis-enchanted Chinese population. It managed to do this with unprecedented success, by creating a feeling of a direct bond between the individual and the source of life-force – Mao, which circumscribed what was seen as a corrupt regent and bureaucracy. As it was also pointed out the enchantment with Maoism was lost, and according to Meihui-Yang, Yang, and Ots, the population has yet to recover from this loss.

As Max Weber (1905) has pointed out, Protestantism dispensed with the intermediate hierarchies of clergy and saints. It emphasized the relationship between the individual and the transcendent realm beyond the monarch.’ (Meihui-Yang p. 299) This is especially true of the underground housechurches that exist specifically for the purpose of circumscribing the bureaucratic/hierarchical institution which the state has put in place to hinder unadulterated belief.

The weekly confirmations, in which housechurch members talk about how Gods words have changed their lives, closely resemble the political study groups, with their self-examinations and confessions, which existed in the Mao Cult. Like Maoism, the Housechurch creates a feeling of unity, purpose and righteousness in its believers, which can be said to be feelings contained in the broader term ‘enchantment’. Both groups attain this feeling through what Lindenfeld has termed ‘spiritual concentration’ (Lindenfeld, 2012) – which entails getting closer to God/Mao/the source of life force through increased activity in the group, and a retraction from social fields and connections that are in disagreement with the group.

This narrative about redemption or salvation through an increased connection with God was present in all the post-conversion stories I was told by recently saved converts. David Lindenfeld also points out that this concentration of spirituality is pan-historically connected to monotheistic millenarian movements, like the Taiping Rebellion (Lindenfeld, 2012), and we could add, Maoism and the housechurch movement.

‘You are my children and you should spread the gospel to those who do not hear about me. I think this is the order that he gave us, the way he give us... Actually, spreading his word is something we cannot do by ourselves, we cannot do it by ourselves, Holy spirit is needed.’ (Appendix, Local church leader interview, p. 7)

This quote illustrates the housechurch movement’s belief that its own expansion is the inevitable fruition of Gods plan. Again the resemblance to the Maoist belief in itself as a historically pre-determined imperative is striking.

The idea that the demonic forces of Satan have invaded and corrupted society, causing people to be mislead from the true path to happiness, and to suffer, and that the housechurch is able to save the people from these demonic forces, is likewise almost identical to the Maoist belief that

imperialist and bourgeois forces had invaded and corrupted society and caused the people to be misled/alienated from their true (class) interests, and to suffer, and that the Maoist movement could save the people from these forces. Furthermore, both the housechurch and the Maoist cosmology bear great resemblance to the egalitarian-universalist model contained in the Imperial-Confucian cosmology. In both cases the forces of Chaos have invaded and disrupted the harmony of both society and individuals, but will be repelled and purged by the replacement of the corrupt regent, with a moral regent.

The resemblance between Maoism, the housechurch, and the egalitarian-universalist pole of the Imperial-Confucian cosmology is also evidenced by the fact that all three emphasize universal equality and strive to transform society from a hierarchical to an egalitarian social and moral model. Maoism sought to do this in the physical realm in a direct opposition to the empire, whereas the housechurch attempts to do it in the spiritual realm, and from within the hierarchical empire. On the basis of this comparison I posit, that the housechurch is a contemporary expression of the transformative egalitarian-universalist social and moral model contained in the Imperial-Confucian cosmology. I want to argue that both Maoism and the housechurch movement operate within the Imperial-Confucian model, and that both of these social movements follow the prerogative of this model which is, that it is the duty of moral men to replace the corrupt regent with a moral regent and thus restore the harmony of society. I want to argue, that the housechurch must be understood as a social movement which attempts to re-claim and re-create the aura, or enchantment which the Maoist state harnessed into the Mao cult, and which it later lost. Besides from the arguments listed above, the plausibility of this argument is further augmented by the fact that it also explains why both movements have been so successful in China. The population which they spread in, is and was already inscribed in the transformative redemptive cosmology which the movements re-structure the world in accordance with.

4.11.3 Summing up the housechurch movement

The section starts by determining that the housechurch does not adhere to the hierarchical-relational model, or to the logic of guanxi-subjectivity which is its contemporary expression. By examining its cosmology we see that the housechurch is a pre-stage of a millennial movement. It seeks to create a better order out of the imminent destruction of the old order. The housechurch

uses its 'secret' character to create a social space within which the re-emerged hierarchical-relational social model is rejected. Through a comparison between the housechurch and Maoism, it is argued that the housechurch is a social movement which attempts to re-claim and re-create the sense of enchantment which existed in the Mao Cult. It is then argued that the housechurch is an example of a contemporary expression of the transformative logic of the egalitarian-universalist social and moral order. In accordance with the Imperial-Confucian cosmology, the housechurch attempts to replace the corrupt regent with a moral regent, and thereby reestablish harmony in society.

5. Conclusion

Why is the ongoing shift in religious practice in the case groups taking place?

The Vajrayana Buddhist case group has become religious as part of an effort to gain elite status in the structure of entitlement which is emerging in contemporary China. In the case of the Christian housechurch congregations, group members have become religious in an attempt to ameliorate the perceived disruptive consequences of that same emerging structure. While both case groups have become religious as a reaction to the emergence of this overall structure of entitlement, one group utilizes its religiosity as part of an overall strategy to enhance and solidify its status within this structure, while the other group utilizes its newfound religiosity to reject the premises of this structure, and to protect itself from the what they perceive to be its disruptive effects.

Why have they chosen to join private rather than state sanctioned religious groups?

The choice of the sangha of the Living Buddha is motivated by the position of this religious group within the field of Buddhism, which enhances its status affirming qualities within the media field, as well as in the overall emerging structure of entitlement. Furthermore, members chose this particular religious group because of its perceived ability to ensure success and confer protection by magico/religious means. Furthermore, the magico-religious efficiency serves the purpose of reducing anxiety.

In the case of the Housechurch, it was shown that Protestantism was chosen because of its position as a moral and unselfish alternative to the other available religions in the religious field.

Furthermore, group members chose the underground housechurches, rather than the official churches, because of the housechurches' position within the Christian field, in which they are seen as being the 'real' and spiritually superior alternative to the 'fake' and spiritually inefficient official state-sanctioned churches.

How can we describe the case groups in the terms of the anthropology of religion?

Initially it was concluded that neither case group matches the description 'rational-ethical.' Rather than describing the group in religious terms, the Vajrayana Buddhists group is best described as a guanxi-network consisting of guanxi-subjects. The housechurch can be characterized as a social movement in a pre-stage of a millenarianism.

How do they perceive themselves and the surrounding society?

Both case groups perceive themselves and the surrounding society in accordance with what was termed the Imperial-Confucian cosmology, which contains an inherent dialectic between a hermeneutic logic and a transformative logic, which were termed 'the hierarchical-relational social and moral model', and 'the egalitarian-universalist model' respectively.

Through an examination of its inner and outer-group relations and praxis in the clubbing, service-interaction, and religious field, it was argued that the Vajrayana Buddhists perceive themselves and the world in accordance with the logic of the hermeneutic pole of the Imperial-Confucian cosmology. Through an examination of the perception which the housechurch has of itself and its surrounding society, and also through a comparison between the housechurch and the Mao Cult, it was argued that the housechurch is utilizing the transformative egalitarian-universalist pole of the Imperial-Confucian cosmology.

What do they use their newfound religiosities for?

The Vajrayana Buddhists use their newfound religiosity to create elite distinction and to strengthen their guanxi networking efforts. By doing so, they attempt to strengthen their connection to the life-force at the top of the social and moral hierarchy which they perceive themselves as being a part of.

The housechurch members use their newfound religiosity to create a social space within which the hierarchical-relational model can be rejected, and an egalitarian-universalist social and moral

model put in its stead. Through the expansion of this egalitarian-universalist model, the movement attempts to create a direct connection with the source of life force, and thereby re-create the enchantment of the Mao Cult.

How do these perceptions affect the strategies they employ?

In effect, both case groups are attempting to recreate the enchantment, or life force, which was harnessed into the Mao Cult by the state and which has now been lost. Because of their inscription in the hierarchical-relational model, the Vajrayana Buddhists utilize the strategies of status distinction and guanxi-networking to achieve this goal. The housechurch members, on the other hand, utilize the strategy of circumventing the surrounding hierarchy to re-establish enchantment, because they are inscribed in the egalitarian-universalist model.

6. Appendices

a. Summary

The thesis examines two emergent religiosities which flourish among university students and young professionals connected with the private media field in Beijing. One case group consists of young successful professionals from the field of private media who have started to worship a living Buddha of the Vajrayana school. The other group consists of students from universities connected to the private media field who are becoming involved in the underground housechurch movement. The thesis shows how these religious practices are connected with the efforts of individuals and groups to position and distinguish - or distance themselves from what Amy Hanser has termed 'The Emerging Structure of Entitlement.' It links the religious practice to distinction practices which take place in the fields of clubbing and service interaction. It goes on to examine the group's relation with and perception of themselves and the surrounding society. These are identified as being inscribed in two separate social and moral models which are both contained in the Imperial-Confucian cosmology, namely the hermeneutic model which can be described as hierarchical and relational, and the transformative model which can be described as egalitarian and universalistic. The thesis argues that the housechurch is a contemporary re-emergence of the social and moral model employed by Maoism, and that both the housechurch movement and Maoism should be understood as expressions of the transformative model inherent in the overarching Imperial-Confucian cosmology. It also argues that the Vajrayana Buddhist group should be seen as a contemporary expression of the hermeneutic model which is

similarly contained in this cosmology. Finally, the thesis shows that the particular religious strategies employed by the groups are caused by their inscription in these models and in the overarching cosmology.

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c. Transcriptions:

i. Didi Hui Interview

T: So where did you tell him I was staying (I was living in the translators home, which was not something which she wanted to be publicly known, for fear of damaging her face)

I said you were living with us, not with me.

B: Right so like a bunch of people, ok, I'll tell him that. So he's down by the subway? Oh, there he is...Eh...Didi! What's up man?

D: Hey,

B: long time no see, so how are you doing?

D: eh...sniffing (he looks tired and slightly ill)

B: Too many late nights drinking? You worked last night?

D: Tired

B: Me too.

D: you look thin!

B: Well after New Year's, people haven't been feeding me as much

D: (coughing)

B: Your cold hu, let's get a warm place. Do you like Korean?

D: anything is fine.

B: ok, come on then. (We start walking) Was the drinking at work or for fun?

D: at work, during working hours. I left at six in the morning.

B: And everyday is the same?

D: most days.

You should watch out, if you keep up like this you could die young.

D: What?

B: just kidding.

D: I don't care about living long, as long as I'm happy.

B: I know you are like that.

D: Anyway, I really missed you.

B: I missed you too.

D: How long have you been in Beijing?

B: About a month and a half.

D: (Coughing)

B: ai, shit, you're really sick hu? Anyway, I said I'd call you when I got to Beijing, so that's what I did.

D: So did you see Mary again? (The woman I know him through, who is one of his best friends). We both spent most of the New Year, and who also got Didi involved in the living Buddha's group.)

B: Yeah, I saw her, but she's really busy these days.

D: Yeah, I know.

B: I think she is in Taiwan shooting a movie right now. I don't know if it's her company which is producing the movie or if she is acting in it.

T: You're really busy at work hu?

D: yeah, too busy. (We enter into a cozy, busy Korean restaurant)

Waitress: Welcome customer.

B: Please seat us somewhere warm, he's too cold – yeah that's fine. So ##### here is also studying at the movie school.

D: Do you know Mary?

T: no we are on different years and lines.

B: It's strange hu, in a big city like Beijing I randomly become good friends only with people from the movie school. So how about something warm to drink, I'm assuming you don't want beer!

D: Your right, I'm extremely tired.

B: whats the name of the bar where you work again?

D: It's #####

B: Do you know it.

T: yeah, it's a place you have never been, it's a huge bar.

B: well, were tired as well, but that's just from playing around. So what kind of meat do you like the best?

D: pork

B: pork it is then, and well get the beef as well and some vegetables.

T: they will give you some vegetables to roll the meat with.

B: I see, well then let's have a soup – feel like soup? Oh and this one, and that (pointing at the menu)

That should be enough.

T: can you eat spicy?

D: No I can't.

B: Oh, ok, well then we'll get two different ones. So, seriously, beer or no beer?

D: Hu? No beer – but how about bai jiu (Chinese brandy)

B: sure, that should warm us up some.

The brandy arrives

B: Well, cheers.

D: I knew Yang from I was really small.

B: You know each other from Shenyang right? Are all of the people in that group of friends from Shenyang?

D: very few.

B: (To the translator) yeah we met here in Beijing through Yang, and then went together to Shenyang for the New Year, and he's a few years younger than me, so he's my younger brother.

D: We even gave him a Chinese name.

T: what is it?

D: Ma Chao (Famous warrior-general from Chinese history)

B: I told one of your classmates about the name – he was very impressed, it seems that it is a good name you have given me. So when I was with these guys we were partying constantly. Really, all the time. But perhaps that's normal at New Year?

D: Yeah it's different now. I have to work, so I party with different people, different customers. Yesterday we had Piji playing at the bar.

B: A DJ?

D: yeah a very famous DJ.

B: Oh right you also told me you had this other DJ, a girl, world famous, right?

D: Yeah, she played at our bar last month.

B: the people we met in Shenyang, are they also living in Beijing?

D: No, they live in Shenyang. Only me and Yang have moved to Beijing.

B: did you hear about how Yang won all that money in Las Vegas?

D: no

B: yeah, she told me that they gambled in Las Vegas and that they won more money than the trip had cost them. She is really lucky that one. Has her own company, lots of money.

D: China has a lot of gamboling as well, but here it is illegal.

B: except for in Macau

B: maybe it's the living Buddha who gave her all that luck. You also have him as your teacher right?

D: yes. I believe in him. He 'baptized' me (the basic ritual of 'taking refuge')

B: How does that take place?

D: first he put some water on my head while he was chanting. Then he cut of some of his hair and gave it to me. Then I had to recite a sutra of faith, which goes like this: Namob jinway, Namob jaya, Namob sangaya. (I believe in Buddha, I believe in. his teachings)...Now I have to recite this sutra 100.000 times. Then I will reach the next level.

B: what happens when you reach the next level?

D: Then I will become luckier and smarter. Also it will increase my faith.

B: Ok, so er...what happens in the group, I mean, besides from what changes inside you, what happens?

D: Then I will recite the next level sutra, and the lama will teach me the words for the next level sutra, and the rules.

B: Rules?

D: Like, you cannot do something. Mary is higher level than me.

B: was she the one who said, come with me to meet this teacher?

D: yes, we went together.

B: so who got Mary involved, was it a friend from the movie world ?

D: Yes, I think so.

B: Where do you meet the teacher?

D: When he is in Beijing, we come to him in his home.

B: But doesn't he have a lot of believers?

D: yes, quite a few. The other day a group of us met and spent some money buying fish. Then we prayed a sutra of mercy, then we set the fish free in the river.

B: For good karma or?

D: yeah

B: how many people were gathered?

D: over two hundred people.

B: So is that the whole group? Is that all of his believers?

D: he has a lot. There are also believers in other cities, in Taiwan.

B: So what is the living Buddha like?

D: he is very powerful.

B: so what kind of people is his believers, is there a certain type, or is it mainly rich people or also poor people who believe in him?

D: there are all kinds of people, rich and poor. The only requirement is that you believe. People come to him because they want him to guide them in their life. If you want to come yourself, I will take you.

B: Ok, great, I would like that.

T: I can come and translate for you.

B: perfect.

D: he isn't in Beijing now though. When are you going back to Denmark?

B: In a month or so.

D: Ah, well, then when you return we can do it. There are also some westerners in the congregation.

B: And do they speak Chinese better than me?

D: Yes, they are extremely good at Chinese.

B: right, well next time I come to China, I hope my Chinese will have improved some.

D: Well, you learn fast.

B: yeah, but I'm not too diligent when it comes to my Chinese lessons. But I will continue studying Chinese in Denmark, so next time I return, maybe we will be able to speak without the help of a translator.

T: It will happen.

B: I was offered a job as a model by one of her friends who works as a photographer in an advertisement company. Not something I had previously thought about doing, but maybe I could come back here and do it for a while and learn some more Chinese.

D: well have you thought about what you want to do in the future?

B: Well yeah, it could be a lot of different things, I could work for an NGO, or the Danish state, but I also thought about working for a company that deals with China, or for the Danish embassy in Beijing. But acting and modeling here in China might be more fun.

D: I think you could probably earn a lot of money doing that. I can introduce you to some jobs in acting if you want.

B: really?

D: yup.

B: well I'll think about it (laughing)

D: I know some people in acting, so if you want.

B: well, thanks, it's really crazy; China is like the Wild East – the new land of opportunity.

D: yeah..

B: Like your friend from Holland, he decided to come to China and start over, and he is doing really well, right?

T: yeah, (she explains how he came to China to start a new life, and now is very successful as a photographer)

D: I know a very tough guy at the movie school,

B: when you say tough you mean, a powerful man, right?
D: yeah, he is like my big brother,
B: Like me.
D: I know him from the nightclub.
B: you know a lot of people through that club, hu?
D: yeah, and they are not just anybody. I'm talking about bosses and such.
B: Right, because it's one of the best nightclubs in Beijing, right?
D: yeah, it's the second best nightclub right now, we used to be number one, but there is one place that is regarded as even better than us now. In my club, people will spend 20.000 RMB in a private room in a night.
B: How much do you and your friends spend in a night?
D: Normally I don't have to pay, because I get invited by the other people, but if I go out with good friends, and let say I invited, then I will spend let's say 3 or 4 thousand in a night. But then they pay the next time. Like when we went out in Shenyang to "**** I was paying then.
B: Yeah I remember, thanks. (To the translator) I drank a lot of his booze!
B: (And on that note) Do you guys want some more beijo?
D: No thanks (coughing)
B: But I was wondering about something. At all the parties we went to, even though you all had a lot to drink and a lot for the nose, you didn't really go crazy. Like in Denmark, if people drink a lot they often become more rowdy and noisy, but you guys were very calm and just sort of relaxed.
D: Chinese party differently, or Chinese people are like that, but, er, I think our parties have that too!
B: right, but it's less than in Denmark. I'll give you one example: Like at all the discos we went to, there were those go-go dancers,
D: We have that too!
B: Right, that's..
D: At our disco it's a western girl, that's very rare.
B: right, and when I saw her I was like, wow, look at that, she is sexy! And I looked at her. But you guys were like ignoring it, or you didn't say anything about it.
T: yeah of course, what you want to say? Of course!
B: why of course?
T: then your....a very erotic person, low level person.
B: Ok.
T: like somebody do very hard work, and earn very little money.
B: ok, so if you get too excited about this stuff then you?
T: then it seems that you're a really cheap person
D: So anyway, do you want me to try and get you an interview with the tough movie guy?
B: when you say tough, what do you mean?
D: He is the director of a movie group. He is kind like one of the most famous directors in China. Everybody know this guy, because one night, he is taking drugs with a director in his flat, but then the police come into the building, into the apartment where they are taking the drugs,
B: Ok,
(They talk about the story for while – the guy is one of her teachers after all. During this talk Didi snorts a line of something from a glass vial)
D: I have to take this because I get so exhausted from all the noise at my work.

B: maybe you need a break.

D: yeah, I need to relax, when it was New Years holiday I was also partying all the time.

B: Yeah, it was like that most nights.

T: did you also take (drugs)

B: No, not me. I don't want to risk it. We have a history of mental illness in my family, so I'm never going to take that chance. I never tried.

T: me too.

B: well, if you come to Denmark, my family has a summer cottage where it's very quiet and beautiful, you could rest up there.

D: At July there is this big beach party in a beautiful place about two hours outside of Beijing. I will go there. You should come.

(We talk about that for while)

B: so that's why I was curious, because even the people who party the most in China, they are still very moralistic about it,

D: well, sometimes we rent a big summerhouse with a lot of rooms, and that's a different story.

B: so the club is too public?

D: yeah.

B: So if you're kissing in public, you're like a cheap person?

D: well, sometimes we rent a big summerhouse. It's 1000 RMB a day, but a lot of rooms, there people kiss and stuff.

B: So why not at the club?

D: Because that's Club! Too public.

B: I see, do you know a club called Propaganda? In there the style is quite different, and people are also making out.

D: Ah, I don't like this club, there is too much of a cultural mix going on, people from all over the world go there. Chinese people have their own way to party, and it's not possible in there because it's too messy, everybody is crowded together, so there is no privacy, and the music is too loud. It's really a low level kind of Club. When I go to a club with friends, I want to spend the time with them, not talk to strangers.

T: Also, rich people don't like Propaganda for this reason. The place he wants is expensive, and more fancy. Like everything in Propaganda they do is so cheap, so ugly. Foreigners go there to make friends and blablabla, its cheap place to get drunk.

D: the Chinese way to play is different.

T: In Propaganda, people will talk to you, like 'hey hey germer' (friend/cousin) this is no good.

B: Why not?

T: He is not used to it. And, no place to sit and all the foreigners together, mix together. In a good club, everybody can have a private room where you play with your friends. He's not into this way.

D: How about you, do you like that kind of place?

B: I like both kinds of places, but I will say that I do like to meet new people when I go out. Also, in Denmark it's usually the case that the clubs are in the Propaganda way.

D: The Chinese go out with a group of people, and they want a table where they can sit down together, and not get disturbed.

T: means , it's a big mess, they have good people and bad people.

B: luan,?: you remember what Didi Hui said about Propaganda?

T: I think he means promiscuous sexual behaviour. and chaos environment

B: You also need a servant, right?

D: That depends on how much you're spending at the club.

B: Is that a cold sore you have there? I think it must be. You can get medicine for that you know. I get it sometimes myself. It's very common in Denmark.

D: why?

B: well, I guess its cold there, or we kiss too many girls.

D: right, right..Well, maybe that's how I got it too.

B: what about the girlfriend, aren't you together with her anymore?

D: yes, but we are not married, and we won't marry either, because it would be boring, and I don't have time to have a kid, and we wouldn't have enough money. I'm too busy making my way to start a family.

B: Do you guys need something, coffee perhaps?

D: No, nothing.

B: more beijo?

D: no, really no. I have had a lot too much to drink the last couple of nights.

B: what do you guys think about renqing, guanxi and mienze(face), I'm thinking about writing about this topics in the thesis. Do young people take those concepts seriously?

D: Chinese people need a good face.

B: so, how does face work, do you lose face if you look too much at the go-go girl or what?

D: No, the first reason to lose face is not having money.

B: So ones face is equal to ones money?

D: not only, but almost.

(We talk about the food for a while, I go to get a coffee and come back)

B: What?

T: We talk about the club, like you have many group of people, but you cannot have a good relationship with them all. And maybe only in the club you say, hey dude, hey man, like your really close, but these people they will not take you into their real life, so he said, you have to know which position you are. You cannot cross this line. Otherwise they will hate you. Have to know which level you are.

D: Like Lin Chen, we have know each other for 10 years or more, so we know we are real friends, but other people, that you don't know so well, you have to carefully think about what kind of relationship is it.

B: So do you call these people who are not real friend's guanxi friends?

D: it is one word for it, that depends if you have a guanxi-relationship with that person.

B: so can a guanxi relation become a real friend? And can a real friend also be a guanxi-friend? Er, I read in a book on guanxi-relationships, that guanxi-relationships are not just like – I give

you this and you give me that, the people must also have some emotion for each other, their relationship has to be good. Is that true, or how does it work?

D: Yeah, more or less, and I guess good friends can also be guanxi friends, but then you don't think of it in the same way.

B: The book also said that in China, Guanxi is the most important thing to have, but the book is somewhat old, is that still true today?

D: Yes, it's true. In China you really need good relationships, like only working through this, you can get a good job, money, a place to live, anything you want in your daily life

B: could you give me an example?

T: like if your children go to a good school, or you need to go to the hospital.

B; when you got your new teeth, did you also go through someone you knew?

D: no, for that I went to the very best dentist.

B: no for that I didn't need guanxi, just money.

D: So what should we do now?

B: well, do you need to go home and rest?

D: If I need to go home I will go.

B: Ok, so what do you want to do.

D: Go out and have fun..

B: Sounds good. So would you try to arrange an interview with this tough movie guy?

D: Yeah, sure.

B: Fantastic, will you come with me and translate?

T: yeah.

D: when do you have time?

B: Anytime, whenever he has time. And maybe you could get me an interview with that photographer guy from your school.

T: Ok, I'll ask him.

B: Thanks. He seems like a nice guy.

D: I'm going to go, but I'll ask the movie guy, and call you and let you know.

B: Oh, ok, well thank you, that's great. And if you have time to go out and have fun before I go back to Denmark, give me a call.

D: Ok, maybe you and me and Lin Chen can go together.

B: Would be good. Well, See you then.

D: See you.

T: I hope he can get you the interview with the movie guy, he's really powerful.

B: He's a nice guy.

T: Yeah, but, too complicated for me. Typical Chinese guy.

B: how do you mean?

T: like fighting for the money and want to get power. Typical Chinese guy, western guy is better.

B: well, western guys also want money and power..

T: em.. Yeah I guess, or maybe I just want some traveler

B: they are not like that you mean.

T: I don't want the guys if they have this ambition for the power and the money.

T: Do you really think he will get you this interview?

B: I don't know, I guess he will try.

T: yeah, maybe.

B: You don't think so.

T: I'm not sure he can get it.

B: why not?

T: because he is just some guy from the nightclub. It's like you know, in the nightclub there are all these different groups, and they are only good friends in the nightclub. They won't bring the other people to their life.

T: So, I think he is like the PR, he has to know all kinds of people.

B: Yeah.

T: So, did you understand everything he said.

B: no not at all, my Chinese isn't good enough, could you tell me what you remember from the conversation, then we can go through it, and I can find out if what I thought he said is also what he actually said.

T: Ok, let's do it. So one question is about the propaganda

B: yeah I'm pretty sure I got that part.

ii. Interview with translator about Didi Hui

T: Another question is, you know all these tough people right, but will you become like their friend?

You know in the real life?

B: em

T: he said no way, you have to know your position very well, cross the line, everybody will abandon you.

B: what does that mean?

T: that means his position is not that high. And er he told me about he don't want to get married right, and he said, see these people when they go to nightclub they are like God, from security guy, from the moment they into the gate, then they went to a private room they are like God and they are like spending 40.000 RMB a night,

B: Gasp!

T: And he told me: Think about these peoples life! Oh, incredible, I want that kind of life. Then, in his face and in his eyes, you can see this kind of hope, shining, 'One day I'm going to be one of these guys. And then I ask: will they like take you as a real friend, and he said no, he can not. Then from this.

B: And why not?

T: Stupefied by my ignorance: because he's just a guy from the bar! They just need him when there is a party, but eh, except this, who needs him? Right?

B: Yeah, I'm not sure exactly what it is he does at the disco,

T: He's just the selling manager, like, his job is mainly like know a lot of people, then keep a good relationship with these people, then make these people bring more friends, then he know these friends, then just make these friends bring more people but now he said, when he gets the time, cause now he said, the competition, cause his bar is in the location all the high level bars in Beijing are ### Lu. This location is recently, cause the economy go down you know, so it's really hard for them. Competition a lot so, I guess some of his old customers, they didn't come recently. His job is knowing people and get them to the bar, and hold them by keeping good relationship with them. Give them discount, or you know give them convenient, like I have this guy in the bar, or you know make everything more easy, it's like this guy catch these people, lead them and

hold them and let them bring more friends, selling.

B: I see.

T: It's kind of like the direct selling, but more about making good relationships. Every bar have this guy.

B: what was it called?

T: he said selling manager. That's why his job is go to this party, drinking with these people, then go to the other party drinking with the other people..

B: hard life.

T: His stomach is really bad, and every night he has to work from nine o'clock till six o'clock in the morning. Drink a lot, really, and all the Chinese are like: Friend!! hey hey hey, come here, drink, drink, all the time...hey hey hey, ah, this is my Friend, yeah, good brother and, you know lets drink!

B: Also he was taking drugs now, I thought only at the parties, but no, maybe all day hu?

T: Yeah he's like (pretends to have a dripping nose) and then he is sniffing, IT'S REALLY CRAZY!! I thought REALLY!! he said, he don't take heroin, he only take K.

B: K is what?

T: another thing, maybe I can check from internet. One of my friend's take it once and she swear she will never take it again...K...is white as well,

B: all these people take it actually, and I think it's speed.

T: what is speed?

B: Speed is a drug that gives you more energy, and you can dace all night and you're in a good mood.

T: He has to do like that..

B: either its cocaine or its speed.

T: if he do like this (makes a sad face) how can he be selling in the bar, his job is PR.

B: Yeah

T: I think you found the right kind of guy.

B: you mean because he knows so many people?

T: yes, but these people will not be so easy to get to talk to. I think he told you quite a lot. Tonight. Cause you are from his real life. So he told you quite a lot.

B: I really like this guy a lot, as a friend.

T: I can see, he take you as a friend. He really would do a lot of things for you.

B: It would be a lot easier if my Chinese was better, or if he could speak some English.

T: yeah, cause add me, then you can't be that close. But if he really can arrange this teacher, I think it will be the same, with me or without me, it will be the same.

B: And anyway, it's one of your teachers so that's a bit..

T: he's the teacher everybody talk about. (The translator had previously told me a story about how this famous teacher at her school was arrested for drug use at his apartment. Like when the police into the room, he just say: Ah..We are discussing the script! what are you doing here? He really stoned, he really high. Ah, we can see it on Youku!

B: they recorded it on video?

T: I don't know who, but the neighbors called the police, then the journalists, you know come in with the police, and they just break in the door, and they just see them directly using drugs.

B: But they didn't go to jail or?

T: they go to jail, of course they go to jail, but only for short time.

B: how long?

T: about one month.

B: And he is really famous or?

T: this director is really famous and this photographer is famous in the inner circle of the movie industry. But this director is, eh, normal people know this director – Jiang Yun.

iii. Skype Interview with translator about Didi Hui

T: Bear

Bjørn: Hey

Im transcribing right now, what does 'Luan' mean?

T: which sound?

B: it sounds like Tai Luan

Do you remember what Didi Hui said about Propaganda?

T: means , it's a big mess, they have good people and bad people .

luan, i think he means promiscuous sexual behaviour.

and chaos environment

B: Did he say anything about missing a VIP section?

T: i don't remember. sorry

B: Well what did he mean with good and bad people?

T: i think he means promiscuous sexual behaviour

B: So if your sexually promiscuous, your a bad person?

T: and people have all kinds of purpose there.

B: Like what?

T: no...don't stick on one point .

you can just imagine a bar with people wanna fuck, with people wanna take drugs, with people wanna steal money, or the girls wanna find a rich guy or prostitute..

B: So, what is a good club like?

like what decides where the club is in the club scene hierarchy?

just write whatever you think of first

T: money and social rank

B: it dosent have to be smart

T: or money and power - no, of course

B: Did Didi Hui also dislike propoganda because high class people aren't seperated from low class people in there?

high class that is

And did Andreas write back to you yet?

T: Didi Hui think PROPAGANDA are too low level, all are the poor white guys and student.

no any person has value for him.

B: So, the club is a place to make connections with usefull people?

T: of course, is another social tool

iv. Interview with translator about government surveillance.

Student (S): Four years ago, we (students in Beijing) had a campaign because of this island, you know China and Japan always fight about this island. You know this island, Beijing Island.

B: ok, yeah.

S: So, at that time we just have a campaign to refuse everything from Japan. Like Japanese car, like we have some demonstration. So in my school, like im in highschool, we want to arrange this demonstration for against the japanese stuff.

B: because Japan wanted to take that island or ?

S: yeah well, because Japan is too much. Anyway we thought we would stop buying Japanese stuff, and then they will see, that if you mess with China, you will lose a lot of money and market. And then we are planning to do this demonstration, so I was like sending emails, like hey lets get some people on Sunday, like organizing our classmates, and before we are sending the very normal message, without mention of these Japanese things, but after we are sending these message about the demonstration, we cannot send any message for maybe half an hour or one hour. Really, if you have this kind of work in the cell phone, you cannot send it. But if you have normal message you can send it. I really remember this well. So what are you going to do, they can control every phone right? They are controlling, cause now China only has two telephone companies, one is China Mobile one is CDMA, and actually they both have their background in government, but CDMA is more involved to the government. They only have two companies, because government doesn't allow others to be in this market. So actually the government is controlling all the communication stuff. So it's really easy for them to hear or bla bla..

B: surveillance?

S: yeah, so that's a good example, **even your cell phone turn off, they can hear you!**

B: but how would that be true?

S: for example in this area we went to, Zhong Wen Chun, this building, they have all kinds of surveillance..

B: like cameras?

S: not cameras, like waves in the air. You can bring your computer there, and you can see your computer hard to work, and your mouse, like shaking all the time, because there are too many waves in the air, it's easy, I don't know if you turn of your cell phone can work or not, but I know for sure that I can not send something about politics.

B: Well, that's like in internet chats where the program won't allow people to use words like fuck or sex, it doesn't mean that there is somebody listening to everything people say or write.

S: But it's still dangerous.

B: You mean because they can see what number wrote it? but in China everybody buys their telephone cards on the street, how can the government then know who talks about what?

S: so you think it cannot work because of this? No way man, they can tell where the phone is being used because of the waves, they will find in which location you are, it's really really easy, like. If you buy a renmin card (temporary fixed amount prepaid card.) then you can do it, but that means you are planning to do it. But normal people they won't change their phone number!

B: ok, but how many people are there in China, more than one billion right, so you really think the government is keeping everybody under surveillance?

S: But this is Beijing! China spends a lot of money every year on surveillance.

B: what about this neighborhood secret police, which is more like old ladies keeping an eye on everybody on their block, do you know what they are called?

S: Oh, the Jie Fang, that's why you have to have a temporary registration to live here.

(A few days before, the police had blockaded the block entrances demanding registration of residence from foreigners – looking for unregistered occupants)

v. Easter Celebration Interview

I go to an address given to me by one of my house-church contacts. The Easter celebration takes place in an upscale rental building, possibly a hotel of sorts. As we walk up the stairs we are met by lively music which appears to be live.

B: Did they already start?

Member of the student congregation (M): Yes, it's our student show. Next show is my university

B: Are you also going to be in the show?

M: No, I will take care of you.

We enter a conference room, and the rather unexpected sight of a stage on which a group of youngsters in costume are miming and dancing to a popular western cabaret song which is blaring out in the room through large speakers at the side of the stage. In the conference room about 100 people are seated in rows, clapping and laughing. It's like a giant costumed karaoke show. The act is tuned down, and a Christian message relating to the theme of the song is spoken softly into a microphone. Then the next act shows up on stage. The group is from another university, and so it goes for an hour and a half. Some acts are taken from bible scenes and have religious messages as their main turning point, while others go for cheap laughs and skimpy clothes. (skimpy for a Chinese Christian crowd).

In between acts spokesmen from the different student congregations greet the crowd, give thanks and small prayer or sermon styled messages, followed by popular rhythmical hymns common to the house-church congregations. The show goes from exclusively fun cabaret styled shows and the Chinese version of standup comedy in which an actor gives a humorous monolog which builds up to a word pun, to sincere messages or songs, in which everybody participates. The crowd is vivid and engaged; people are having fun, flirting; hooting; clapping and singing along. The average age is mid twenties. The older people who are present are mainly prayer-leaders or priests who double as toast masters and musicians. Also various Christian games are played. In one game the members of the crowd have to recite their favorite bible quote into a microphone which is circling, and then pass it on to someone else while a clock is ticking towards zero. Whether or not the person who ends up with the microphone at zero has lost or won is unclear to me, but she is rewarded/compensated with a framed bible quote. Everyone is capable of producing a satisfactory bible quote.

Towards the end of the show, a couple of the participants start talking to me, asking me who I am and so on. This informal conversation goes on at the same time as the music is playing, the first audible sentence in the recording is:

B: Well, I don't think we have this in Denmark.

Member2 (M2): Church become the bar.

B: the what?

M2: the bar, or church become the picnic, so many young people don't party real hard. Just many old people don't live the God, just young people..

B: So it's mainly young people who are Christians in China?

M2: yes, because manage real life and keep faithful is difficult, is hard to handle the eh, nowadays most young people always go to disco, go out, drink and they always losing control. They very sad, and they can't find something to support. They don't believe the family, they don't believe the friends, and they just can't find themselves actually, because not real. Just something like dream. If they famous star, one day they rich, but nothing in their heart, not kind. They just, eh, compare – I'm richer than you! I have power or something. People have become ugly. Very ugly. And then more people don't believe each other.

B: Trust you mean?

M2: what is trust...yeah, I don't believe him, er faith...ah, yes, trust. For example, before three years, I like her (referring to a character in the show?) I don't know anything about God, I don't know anything, it's just me! And actually I think life is empty, nothing. So one day some guys tell me about their spiritual way to know the freedom, and they become better,

B: and then you went to the university congregation or?

M2: No, I don't like to study, I just always play, always come to bar, I think nothing is very special to me. So, so, it's empty. So I think nothing deserved. I don't like my family, I always flirt with boys, so I think these three years I travel a lot. Also my sister, that's my sister (points to a girl about her own age)

B: do you mean your real sister, or your spiritual sister?

M2: if one person saved, whole family saved. My grandmother, and my parents, all believe in God now.

B: Did you convince them?

M2: (smiles and nods) You become a door, you open the door, welcome the Jesus will come to

your home, so everything will be changed, just open your heart, I think (laughing) so if you are free, you are always welcome to join us Sunday, we have eh, party

B: party? That's not allowed (joking)

M2 Ah!! lot of people together and share the thoughts

B: ah, I thought so (laughing), well maybe tomorrow..

M2 and you can learn more Chinese language and meet young people friends.

Long conversation about learning Chinese and exchanging basic pleasantries about accent and origin in Chinese - to test my level of fluency.

B: So this experience is much more intense than what goes on in Denmark, you guys are so, ah! I became Christian and it changed my life, right?

M2: yeah, some things different because different experience, we will feel really moving, really touching,

B: Do people in China have a big need? Do they really need something?

M2: China don't have it's own, er..

B: what about Buddhism?

M2: Ah! That's from India.

B: I know but it's become something very Chinese.

M2: but it's a bit strange.

B: so why do you think Christianity is so popular in China?

M2: I have a cousin in England, she live with family and they believe in God, but she say they don't really accept God in their heart, it's just tradition.

B: and here, it's very alive, so why is that?

M2: culture different. But I think inside we very similar, we feel happiness same way. If we have very good life.

B: I also talked with a lot of Buddhists, and they believe in the Buddha, but they use the Buddha to become richer,

M2: they just ask more money. They go to temple, say please give me good luck, lots of money..

B: Don't Christian people in China do that as well?

M2: no no no.

B: isn't the so called money gospel also in China?

M2: some. Just make your heart happy, and you won't need the money. Cause always do something, or always ask something, and you will be loosing the image. For example, I working always, I want be a boss, I want to be more succesfull, I always working, and I will forget everything. Maybee I will become a crook, a bad person. If you want something, you will be loosing something.

At this point I'm invited to a Christian art exhibition, and more people join the conversation, others start cleaning the room, stacking chairs and so on. We explain pleasantries about countries and so on. After a while I am approached by an older person, a prayer leader (PL) from one of the university congregations.

B: Why do rich Chinese become Buddhists?

PL: they are afraid to lose what they already have. So they don't want the giving, always catch the more. Gospel giving, so in our church, some people rich, they are famous stars, they singers,

they also have the very successful. So why they come to church? Because (of) their attitude, they very kind, not always want money, and er, just want some different life, just follow the gospel, God will show what you can get, what you can give, if you just pray for something, maybe God will give you! So whatever, whether you successful or fail down, God give you some wishes.

B: I'm just wondering why some people choose Christianity, while others choose Buddhism,

PL: Just people want hope, they want hope something. Last month we go to a very small island in Fujian province, very small town, but all the people believe in God, and they very happy. They not like us, always want something, success on the job, on the study, so they will be troubled by this topic. Our environment is not the same, but, if you want something simple, you will become simple, and you will become the more happy. The kind of way you want, the kind of life you want. Some, er, how can I say that, like my father, he is very successful in the recent years, always work, but now have something sick. Many problems will appear, very difficult to life, can't find something in his heart. He don't believe anything. I'm his daughter, but he don't believe me.

B: He doesn't trust you?

PL: yeah! And some people very rich, but they can't find a real life. Only drink all the day, they think the drinking will solve their problems, they just drink and go down to sleep, and second day, YOU drink! Always like this. Some people like drug, a lot of rich people, don't know how to spend their money so want drugs, and give to the people around him, and the other people loosing themselves, and they loose the family. In my opinion, I have know some people, musicians, can't change, so only pray for him. One of the most rich and famous people in China (I didn't catch the name) his family is in ruins, he is very angry and treats his family badly (this is gossip from magazines and such) his son think, oh, why did my father become like this! He is very lonely, and takes drugs. I know him a bit, and I talked with him. Not very close. And so many rich and famous people are the same. On the outside they are rich and famous, but inside the family it is bad. They alone. People can't live with them. So many many families have this problem. So the young people will become so wild. We want to do something, but nothing can control them. They have money and power, and they think 'I just do what I want, you can't change my mind, you can't say no'

They can't find real life values.

B: What about renqing and guanxi? Don't those values still exist?

PL: but now, young people want more personality

B: You have to go now?

PL: Yes, I'm leaving

A woman around 37 years old enters the discussion (she is the prayer leader of Jesus Church (not it's real name) The first prayer leader explains to her who I am, why I'm there and what we have been talking about, and then she resumes the discussion with me.

B: I was asking your friend about why Christianity has become so popular with the youth in China.

PL2: Definitely I think it is Gods heart, it's his heart to save all the people around the world.

B: But why is it Chinese people that are becoming Christian right now?

PL2: I think only his work can do this.

PL: I will go now,

B: Ok, well goodbye, nice talking with you

PL: Give me your home number?

B: Ok, sure

PL2: If you like, she wants you to go to her message on Sunday.

M: I will go now, give me your phone number?

B: ok, and I will call you tomorrow about the Sunday message. Thank you for taking me here.

M: Ok, my pleasure, see you.

PL2: Short time ok for you now?

B: Yeah, it's ok, I have all the time, no plans tonight.

The group is talking about where it is they know me from, the initial member who brought me tells them about the translator whom she knows me through, and the explanation is accepted.

PL2: So, he came to Europe and America, gospel has spread. Who spread gospel, God himself, he use his believers to spread the good news. Now the time for China has come. Especially our church, we put our heart into Christ. So we have a fire in our heart. So that's why you know God gave us so much collage students and young people. It's the tradition for Chinese, you know old people, to believe, but now, you saw so many young kids. From Genisis 6. we left him, so we lost the covenant, we lost the covenant of Christ, we lost the covenant that God gave us, so nowadays God give us young kids to have gospel in his heart, then he will save the world. Because you know in act. 2 it says that, only when the people of the world hear of the gospel, it mean that the end of the age will come. So that's just his covenant, he is just doing it according to his promise.

B: So, you think the end of the world is neigh?

PL2: What?

B: do you believe the end of the world is close?

PL2: I believe everything it says in the Bible.

B: but it doesn't say a time, but I know that a lot of Christians believe it will be soon...

PL2: I'm not sure, but we can see that there are some signs that happen. Signs occur as the Bible says. A lot of disasters and you know also disease. A lot of disease just happen, so that's written in the Bible.

B: but doesn't every age have this, isn't there always disease and war and disaster?

PL2: I'm not sure, I didn't observe the whole of history, but I think what we should focus on is just obey his order, by the way I'm ##### (her name)

B: I'm Bjørn.

PL2: oh ok, well, anyway, whether or not it's end days, I think we should just focus on his covenant, that is what we can do. I have several friends in foreign countries, they are really surprised to see the work of the Holy Spirit, and some of them stay for a long time in our church, and they just enjoy it.

B: Yeah, cause it's very lively

PL2: that is what God said, his work is lively.

B: In Denmark it's not like this, it's much more boring

PL2: (Laughing) yeah, I agree, in USA and Europe is more like a living habit, kind of traditional,

B: they do try, but..

M3: they don't understand the real meaning of go to church, they don't understand the meaning.

PL2: I think one thing is important, it's the covenant of Christ. You know what also in Harvard, eh Harvard University, the first man that create this collage, his aim is to give Christ to his college students, and now, today, no one remember this. So I think as it says in the Bible, the people who lost the covenant will have no spiritual power, so a church without Christ, without

activity of the Holy Spirit, will withered. No matter how people work hard, it will withered. What we should focus is you know his word.

B: but besides from the will of God, isn't there also some emptiness in people, some readiness?

M3: I agree with you that in human life, in human existence, there is something that is something called emptiness, this emptiness is called emptiness of spirit. This make people want something, and some people find religion, but Gospel is not religion, I mean gospel is not only religion, religion means people do something to feel good. But God gives us something that can carry us, something that is real. In China it is true, some Christians they are just having a religious kind of life, I agree with you, but what God want to give us is a real thing that can meet us.

B: Right, but what I'm trying to ask is, if you think there is some connection between Chinas recent history, with the transition to capitalism and the demise of Maoism, and the current popularity of Christianity?

PL2: Yes, it is all a part of his plan, but this is a very human thought, from his eyes he want to save everyone, that all. He want everyone to listen to his word, then be a light people, then when he die he can go to heaven, that's his heart. We can have different like opening, but..

B: but when Christianity first came to China, it had almost no success at all..

PL2; Just like early church, yeah, that's God do in his own way, because he said in the Bible that, I will choose the weak one for glory in my name, that's his way.

B: Ok, oh well..

PL2: I'm so happy to talk with you, actually my husband and I we live very near by, we work at ### university, he works in college, I work in primary school, in the junior school of ##### so, we have Sunday worship at ten o'clock.

B: Ok, I will give you a call.

PL2: and I think we can talk more about gospel.

PL2: So, you have tradition of worshipping God?

B: well, not like this, I mean I sang in the church choir and such, but it's very different from this..

PL2: that's the early heart,

B: In Europe it's much more about the personal relationship with Jesus, here it's much more passionate.

PL2: Yeah, I think the heart at the beginning is very important.

B: I mean in my society Christianity is a tradition, it's normal and nothing special..

PL2: yeah the heart at the beginning is important, you know how can we be thankful when we realize that we cannot solve the sin, er the original sin , we can not do it, only he can do it, and he did it for us. So that's why we feel so thankful.

B: Right, but you know for me, in Denmark, I have been to church more than the average Dane, and for me, it's nothing special..

PL2: Em..In society we have another spiritual existence it's called Satan, and what he is doing is to try to steal the thanks of the Christians and also the heart for the spiritual things. So when you realize you are spiritual thing you realize you cannot solve the problem by your hand, but have to do it in your spiritual way, oh you think, hard, I can not do that in my own way, you have to pray, at that time you will find out how valuable the gospel is. He tells you. But I quite understand what you said. I understand you. That you should do things you own way.

B: So I guess we should be going, looks like everybody is leaving...you wouldn't happen to be going towards ###?

PL2: We are just in the same way, so you can follow.

B: Ok, great, So how long have you been a Christian?

PL2: around five years.

B: How did it happen?

At that time, my husband he is my friend, and at his work they talk about the gospel, and he listen and he became saved, and then he take me to listen, so that's the way.

Continued interview in car as they gave me a lift home

B: So before you were Christian, you were not religious at all or? No, not at all. Myself (laughing) I am only myself (laughing- the fellow passengers laugh along)

Me: Ok, yeah, cause I know a lot of Chinese people they can have a lot of different religions like Buddhism, ancestor worship

Leader: yeah yeah yeah.

Me: You don't do this? You don't give money to the spirits?

Leader: no no no..actually, my parents do that, but I , I never.

Me: Don't they get mad at you? Then when they die, you won't give them?

Leader: maybe while I was small, my parents told me to do that, but I do not know what that mean, but now I would never do it.

Me: but don't they get mad at you, your parents?

Leader: Actually, they are teachers, they are not in the countryside, peasants will pay a lot of attention to that, but we are not.

Me: ok, yeah, they don't care.

Church member (passenger): My father care a lot about that.

Leader: (laughing)..that depends...

Me: I see a lot of people in Beijing burning spirit money on spirit money day...

Church member...uhm..yeah

Me: having fires on the street..

Leader: Actually that's kind of a ghost culture.

Me: what?

Leader: Ghost culture, it's, we are just worship Satan, it is Satan's way of controlling all the people who don't have Gods word. So we don't do that now.

Leader: You have email?

Me: sure.

Leader: so give me your email, so we can stay in touch.

Me: Ok, do you have something to write with?..it's.(we exchange contact information)

Leader, so give me a call tomorrow, we have a meeting at 11.

Me: Ok, sure, tomorrow or Sunday, I have promised to take part of a birthday, so I'm not sure which day.

Leader: Ok, no problem.

Me: so you think all the things that people do that belong to the traditional culture..

Leader: Not traditional. The Bible says, you did not worship your Gods, it was Satan, only two, demons and Holy Spirit so, so actually, in China we have a lot of history of worshipping Satan, but we don't know it. We consider it as culture, but in culture there were a lot of tricks, so for Chinese it's very hard to believe in God, but God really do it.

So, you didn't tell me where you want to get off, what is your address?

Me: actually I don't remember the address, but its right here, so if you can just drop me of in the

next intersection, I can find it no problem,
Leader, it's to the left here?
Me: yes, it's over there somewhere.
Leader: ok...so.. Biarn..?
Me: well...Bjørn, but I don't say that to non Danes, it's too hard to pronounce the ø. Well,
goodbye, and thank you.
Leader: ok, bye, talk to you tomorrow.
Me: yes, and thank you for telling me about...
Leader: my pleasure.
Me: Bye.
Leader: Bye.

vi. Interview with translator about what goes on at housechurches.

B: So, you have to share?

T: You have to share you know about what you are listening, what you learn and what his word work on you.

B: Ok, so what will people say, do they talk about their problems in life?

T: Yeah, some talk about their problems, like my friend, she always talk about what she learned from today..

B: Like what?

T: like one chapter, like two or three pages, then the priest will read it for you, and the priest will say, ok, today's topic is..bla. Bla. Bla. And, you can see from the Bible, that bla bla

B: like what?

T: like the, like the...shit like the forgiveness!

B: (laughing)

T: do you have a bible? Or like this I'm the God, I'm the only way to the truth. I am Jesus, I am God.

But the main thing is, when you are Christian , you have someone to share, to tell you problems to the other people, then they will tell you what you are going to do. And like, every weekend you go there and share your thinking, and ah, also, there is a lot of people they believe that, and they talk to you every day, and a lot and a lot and a lot,

B: so it's a community?

T: Community!! and also I think Christian (protestant) is more easy than catholic. In Catholic religion you have so many rules, but the Christian in China, you don't have to do anything, you just have to believe.

B: yes, the personal relationship to Jesus is the main thing in Protestantism...

T: Yes, you can pray anywhere, even your shitting

B: laughing..

T: there is a difference right, like if you ask the priest: can I smoke while i pray to God, he will tell you no. But if you ask him when I am smoking and I want to pray to God, can I? He will say yes! It's ridiculous. But when you believe, you will want to follow all these rules. Like my friend, she is definitely following all the rules in the Bible. She would rather die than have sex before marriage.

B: maybe I can interview this girl?

T: Yes and then she will tell you all the things about God. Like last time I talk with her, she told me, between man and God there is some devil. So we should, you know, believe to God, we should directly pray to the God and believe in God. They we will be saved.

B: from judgment day?

T: from the devil, from going to hell. And then I say to her: I don't care. And she say to me: You don't care? After you die you go to hell or not! I have to save you. Then I told her, if you always only want to talk about this Christian and God stuff, then I cannot communicate with you, then she said ok, then if you don't want to talk about God, then I don't have anything to talk with you about with you either, so that day we are just angry and leave. She said: you should leave now (laughing)

B: So, are you still friends?

T: yeah, but she, she changed totally. She's a different person. So I really cannot accept that, really! Before she's my best friend, now I haven't seen her a long time, didn't talk with her maybe two month.

B: Only two month?

T: long time, before we are together everyday. (Long talk about how they met a guy a while ago in a disco) Ah, but at this time she only believe in Christian a little bit, only the last year she totally believe.

B: How many of the students in your school are Christians?

T: I could say about 7 or 8 percent, maybe ten percent, that's a lot man.

B: Only Christian or also Buddhist or?

T: only Christian, like of all the people I know (who are religious) the main is Christian. Buddhist people only two, in university not so many really.

B: I have this idea that it's mainly elite or rich people..

T: they believe in Buddhist, yeah..

B: and er..normal people they believe in Christianity..

T: If you have more, you afraid to lose, you know. But the Christian, you have any idea how fast they grow? Goddam fast!

B: did you hear about the sects in the countryside, like eastern lightning?

T: I know, even some churches in town, you know this friend she still believe very strong in Christian, but she never go to this church again because now they have started to gather any information about you know like her family or her post or passport number and every number like id number.

B: they have that?

T: they have that, they have everybody's,

B: but why, why do they need it?

T: That it! Why do they need it, it they have a very detailed file.

B: Should I go there? Do you want to go?

T: I don't know, maybe I should tell you...

vii. Interview with Local Church prayer leader

Translator and I end up going to a meeting at this information gathering church the following week.

This is the interview which I conducted with the prayer leader of that group.

Translator and I drive to an anonymous slightly run down looking residential building, where we are ushered inside by a member of the congregation. Today's session has already started. About 10 persons are gathered here, half of which appear to be college students, and half of which are grownups dressed in plain, inexpensive looking clothes. The group is seated in a semicircle. In

the middle of the semi-circle is a blackboard on which a three step ladder has been drawn. At the blackboard stands a middle-aged woman. She is the prayer leader of this housechurch. The room is filled with a thick sent of something resembling cannabis (turns out to be medicinal incense). The group is engaged in an emotional discussion. The group members take turns talking about their worries, and the prayer leader responds to these individual worries by relating them to the contents of the Bible, and to this days lesson, which is a three step ladder towards putting God before oneself.

The session ends with the standard protestant declaration of faith, and the scheduling of the next meeting. At which point most of the group leaves the building. A few stay behind with the prayer leader, the translator and I.

Me: I hope you didn't stop early because of us?

Leader: No no.

Me: I'm sorry we were late.

Leader: Doesn't matter.

At this point the Leader makes a point of asking my translator what her name is and where she lives. (My translator has previously explained to me, that she was anxious about going to this house church, exactly because they collect information about their members, and supposedly keep a file about each one. The translator is no longer actively involved in the housechurch movement, but one of her best friends has become increasingly involved to the point where she contemplates becoming a missionary – but even she won't go to this church anymore. They are no longer good friends, because the translator's friend only talks about God and tries to save the translator. The translator gets visibly shaken by this turn of events, and I ask her if she wants' to go home. Too late she says.

Me: So, what were you talking about today?

Leader: We were talking about, so how should we start to get Gods life in our life– you saw the picture of the three steps, I think you know the three

Me: Oh?

Leader: The first is we don't know Christ, then we learn about Christ but we cannot get rid of old habits and we are full of unbelief, er unfaith, and then we listen to his word and we become more and more faithful, and he sit in our chair,

Me: Chair?

Leader: it's like he is the center and he is the owner of our life and we live a very very free Christian life. Then we talk about what happened, what people do and how they feel Gods presence in their lives.

Me: So first you have a sermon..

L: And then we study and confirm, so after you heard the message, what er, what did he do! In the days since we have seen you.

Me: so they have kind of spiritual homework?

L: Well, it's not like homework, if you, you know we have to face our problems every day, so faith in God can solve them, so what is your work of God's words, because bible says, Gods words have their own power, so when we have problems, how does he help you, how does he use his word to help, so what changed.

Me: Ok, so that's what they talked about?

L: yeah and also after they heard today's message they talked about so this is the work God give me.

Me: So this was a different message from the one last Sunday?

L: there are some differences, but all message just come from one thing, a spiritual fact, so they share their em thought after listen to message, and then they share their prayer their feeling of the prayer together

Me: Ok..er are you burning incense?

L: The smell?

B: Yeah yeah..

L: That's a Chinese medicine, er we use this to, er, keep fit, and for acupuncture.

B: Moxibustion?

L: For acupuncture, and then it is burning on top, go deep into your body.(leader goes to fetch a big incense cone which has been burning. After it has been burning, you can feel..it's very popular in hospitals.

B: ok, it's quite strong!

L: Oh right..because if you are afraid of..It keeps the room clean, because the smell itself can kill disease. It has a very long history in China. You can always smell this around me, in my clothes, it's amazing. Before, my husband he study this but I don't think it is special, but then three years

ago I am sick in the stomach, and the normal medicine didn't help, so I try. It's so amazing because it really heal, it's a God gift.

B: did this happen before or after you became Christian?

L: at the same time I think. So now I seldom go to hospital. First thing I have to study acupuncture, you know God made this..it is made of grass, and it heals people, I think it is amazing, and er Chinese people have a very long history of healing people with this kind of thing.

B: Yeah, it's amazing...so it's not God that heals or?

L: It's very complicated to explain why....(long conversation about Chinese medicine here)

L: I think it is a lot like Gospel – it takes time and it's hard to explain why, but it really works! You have to listen to the message and you have to pray. People are seeking many things like money and material things, And people without Christian life, without belief, they will have all kind of things but, they will not have spiritual things, and that will end everything..

B: er?

L: I mean nowadays people, especially in China, people have no belief, so they think that we have only human body, so they live for the body, but something, something will happen to their spirit, so in China, all kinds of um, successful man and college students they will suicide. In China about two million people, each year suicide. And twenty percent of them succeed. Around 200.000, and many of them young people. So we are doing the right thing, we are looking for a good life. The spiritual thing, gospel, really needed in the country.

B: yeah people are under a lot of pressure, especially the one-child generation

L: That is from social point of view, but actually, in the society you can explain it in your social way, but you cannot solve it. The only solution is the spiritual way. So even in the psycho hospital, in this hospital, in China now, it is so busy, a lot of psycho patients you have in these days, many people with this problem they have to stay at their house because no room for them. In the Bible it says that more and more psycho patients will occur because of spiritual problems so God is really urgently needed in this country.

So today's message talk about the spiritual things, so in the Bible, already in the Bible it's revealed the secret of Satan. No book says very clearly about Satan's work, but in the Bible it says very clear about Satan, how he cheat people, and separate people from God, he try to cheat people or you know use the demon to, er control peoples mind and use demon for, especially in Chinas countryside, they are demoned by Satan.

B: possession, or possessed?

L: yes they are possessed, and they can use voice and heal and people start to believe in them, and they try to do some, you know kind of if a person invite people to their home and they pray to HIS God, like Satan, and then people will also do it. This kind of thing is very common in country side.

B: Do you mean the healers and such?

L: yes, for the physical and especially psychological problems,

And now in the city people more and more began to rely on the idols. Even in the college students, even a college student will begin to worship the idol. Like the Buddha or all kinds, in China all kinds of idols

B: well yeah people have lots of religions in China.

L: Not religion because, well some are religions but some are just some kind of image, anything, a picture or a picture of one Buddha. Just they begin to pray.

B: you don't think Buddhism is a religion?

L: It's a religion, but what they giving their worship to is not really God. There is only one God in the world. But people do not know, so it's not their fault. So the danger of religion is that people want some answer, they are eager for the answer, so Satan will use all kinds of religion and in America and also in China now there is activity of Satan, there is a group called Satan church, they worship Satan very boldly, very directly, sometimes they kill people, you can find out about this on the internet. So it is really a very complex, er

B: Complex? you mean like a war?

L: the spiritual, yeah, Satan is very strong. Each year, you know this figure is not in China, but in the world, the top three ways of dying of young people from 15 to 24 is, number one is accidents, number two is cancer, and number three is suicide. So you can see that Satan has done more to destroy the younger generation, because if human younger generation is destroyed, there is no one to fight so he is trying, because now is end age, so he is trying to grab more and more younger generation life. So you can see that in Japan and also in China that all over the world, the spiritual problem of the younger generation are becoming larger and larger. In China now, I'm a junior student teacher, And I can see that problem is coming earlier than us, I had my childhood, my parents did not understand me, I want person to understand me, that's my problem, but now the students of primary and junior school are grabbed by internet, by sex and sometimes by drugs. So Satan uses his power to attack the younger generation. Satan will try to grab more, so there is urgent need for the church. In our Church there are some psycho patients, they are young age, child like 15, and then their mother or father take them to my church and listen to gospel, and they get better gradually get power. Gospel really have a strong power to heal people.

(At this point my translator is exhibiting signs of unhappiness – she is slumped in her chair and looks sullen – the leader asks her if she is all right, she claims to be very tired)

You have not been a Christian for so long right? You said five or six years right (refers to earlier conversation)

L: Yeah, almost five years

B: So how has life changed, can you feel the difference?

L: If there is no change, I will not continue, there is a big change happen on me.

B: Ok, so like what?

L: Like what, em, I used to be er, proper word, seven years ago I have a lot of history of, er, people become gloomy and often suicide, how do you say, they often use it in hospital

B: depressed?

L: yeah yeah, depressed. So at that time I meet God, and I'm healed.

B: ok

L: so that's the biggest, if you want to see...I can see that is why..

B: so you got out of it,

L: Laughs..

B: I mean you don't seem very depressed now...

L: I have a lot of history..every night I used to cry, and er my head is so dark, and I think I'm going to die in the dark.

B: It often seems to me, or a lot of the other people that I have interviewed also met God at a time when they are in a dark place..

L: Actually, when you get rid of the dark place, and you become lighter, actually that's a very good beginning too, because um maybe that maybe because you do not say the wrong word, living around people who do not have gospel, they are in a dark place, so knowing gospel and spreading gospel, they are connected, if only knowing without spreading, um..in Genesis chapter 1 verse .27 to 28, God he uses images and create us. His image is (our) spirit, and then it says that, he gave us the power to control the world, to conquer and manage this world, so these two are connected. And this world, people lost his image. But we do not believe him, we just think we do not have spiritual body , so we work only for the physical body, and then we realize that, oh no, this cannot give comfort and that the thing that is needed is to know him. Then we realize

that to live for the physical body is not the way, and we get to know him. And In Matheu it says that, you are my children and you should spread the gospel to those who do not hear about me. I think this is the order that he gave us, the way he give us so, because all of us are not Christians because no one pass it onto them. So if you know that if a person does not know God he will go to hell, how do you feel about that?

B: well, in Denmark, we don't really think much about hell, Christianity is a very personal thing, and it is considered kind of rude to try and convert someone...

L: Actually, spreading his word is something we cannot do by ourselves, we cannot do it by ourselves, Holy spirit is needed. So if a person do not know the truth, you ask them, do you want to know the truth, and they say yes, I want to hear, talk to them.

B: (I explain how baptism and confirmation take place in Denmark.)

L: Actually I think, in Denmark and in Great Britain (Europe) a lot of young people, they do not believe in God, truly. Just because their family members are in the church, and now no temptation for young people. So in the Bible we have old testament and new testament, but the centre of the Bible is the gospel. Jesus is Christ. And at the beginning of the Gospel it is very clear, and it is focus a lot on the centre. But as you are come through time, in human, in all human empire, um European country, first, Satan use the EMPEROR (My emphasis), to um prevent gospel from spreading

and then God do his work, and then Christian became the national religion of Roman, and then people become to um, you know at first (the Christians) had a hard time together, and then it gets real easy, and at that time Satan he is very peaky, he use all kinds of thing that is not really God, so at temple, people are cheating, so Christians do not pay enough attention on Jesus, except himself, and other things like love, of course love is good, and they other thing like charity in church, it's good, but actually in the Bible (it says), focus should be on Jesus himself. You know on spiritual thing. First is love God, then is love each other.....So I think when Jesus is revealed, when Jesus is forward, people will want to spread gospel, but we focus on other thing, I do not mean it is wrong, we for example do some charity, but how can a person, for example a children, I mean lost he feel, of course we should give him money to live his life, but one thing more important is, he have to meet God. Because, our life on this earth is limited, but our spiritual life is eternal one. So which one is more important? We should do all things, not only teach him gospel, only give him money, so that is what we think.

L: Actually, at the beginning, people will fell crazy about Christ, but then it will change, this is the history. Like what happened in Europe and in USA, so now in China, it's just again. First people focus on Christ and then they will change. Just as written in Old Testament, it's not easy for people to understand gospel, it's really difficult. So what you saw in China now is just the beginning. Gospel, It's early church, what have happened in Europe.

What about the so called money gospel, or prosperity gospel, does that exist in China, and is it popular?

L: Em, you know in Mathew 15, when Jesus healed, Jesus has done a lot of miracles, a lot of people follow him because they think Jesus is a very good doctor, because he can heal, and they think he is a prophet because he can make miracles. So Jesus really done things. But the most important thing is that he is the Christ. So what does Christ mean? Christ means three things, first of all he is the one who will sacrifice himself for us, second, he will remove Satan, and third he build the road for us to meet God. So this is the most important one. So Peter he said, so you are Christ, you are living God, so Christ he can heal people, he has canceled death for us. So Christ is key thing through all the Bible. But people they think, oh Christ is just basement, we should keep focus on it only in the beginning, and then we begin to focus on who, on miracles, it's..it's I'm not saying it's wrong, if God give us the power to save life, but if we come to focus on it, this is wrong.

B: Do you think people in China use Christianity to get health and money and so on?

L: Yes, some of them are doing this, but certainly when peoples basic problems are solved, what are peoples basic problem? This is leave from God, separate from God. And when the tree is rooted, I and you get hold of Christ, everything will be ok. So if I am together with God of course I will be healthy. This is not cheating, this is what it says in the Bible. But if you only seek for health, you know, I want to become healthy, will be cheated by Satan, because Satan also can heal you know. People of Satan church they can do a lot of,

B: Satan can heal?

L: they can heal people! They can change a rabbit into a cat, they can do a lot of miracles, so how can we tell? How can we tell where is this power come from?

B: This happens in the countryside?

L: I read this news on internet. It's the news about Satan Church. They can give people power.

B: Ok.

L: You know the Falun Gong?

B: sure, yes.

L: You know them? You know why a lot of our professors and students believe in Falun Gong? Because Falun Gong has healed, so who give them power? Who give them power to heal, Satan! So Satan has also power, so if (what) we believe is (to) come to power, we will be cheated. So I do not mean healing and miracles are bad, I mean that is not our focus. We should pay attention to God, If we forget that, we will be cheated. Only thing that makes Christ different from Satan's power is what? Is Christ. And the only word that Satan is afraid of is Christ. So when we are

casting the demons we are saying in the name of Jesus Christ, the demon will go. So we do this, we do not go (and say) in the name of power in the name of miracles, because Satan is not afraid. I can make the same thing too! So in our church we know a lot of people who have some problem, and sometime they will be possessed. And when we go to them we only use one name, Christ. That's why I can confirm, you know, because I follow to this field, and, at first I was shocked, that ah! It's true!

B: what happened?

L: She was working out in this field, and er possessed..

B: how do you know I mean..

L: A girl, speaks like a man, and this man he said, you know dirty word to us, and he laugh at us, and say (speaking in a distorted, high-pitched voice) 'how can you believe?, I know you cannot see, I know this one is not so faithful', and that man is running, because not so faithful. He know everything, because possessed by Satan. And then we would gather and pray, in the name of Jesus Christ – he's gone. That's why I can confirm, you know I, I cannot be faithful until now, because some years I have too much things, and now I become stronger, it's true, I'm happy it's true.

B: This happens a lot?

L: several times.

B: How can you tell when someone is possessed?

L: Sometimes in people's lives, they are ugly, sometimes they want to fight, so, what happened?

B: They are possessed?

L: no not possessed, but some kind of spirit is coming into you, so what I'm saying is possessed is only an extreme stage. For example, we want to study hard, we want to work well, but somebody anyway will go to the internet to do a lot of you know useless things, so I do something I do not want to do, how, how is that happen? This is Satan influence. He let people not believe that he exists, that's the trick.

B: But how can you tell if someone is possessed or not?

L: usually what we saw, you know, his voice changed, and ah, just out of his mind.

B: In the movies they usually tie them down and..

L: usually no need for that, Satan really afraid of the name of Christ, so we can get him. In the psycho hospital, sometimes we go to the hospital and pray, so when we come, the psycho

patients just listen very silently. So, because the demon, he is afraid of the name of Christ, so that's why we only talk about Christ,

B: so you go to the hospital and?

L: Actually, everywhere we go we pray, so sometimes we go to hospital, sometimes we go to meeting or someone want to hear about gospel, we go and spread the gospel.

B: Hm, well do you want to go home now or?

L: Laughs, this is my home. I do not have class tomorrow so it doesn't matter, if you like we can continue.

B: Ok, fine, I just thought maybe you had to go to bed or something. (Time is around 22:00)

L: Not yet.

B: So you have a lot of young people coming to your church...

L: Yes they are so thankful and want to share. Because in China people are confused, especially the college students. People are confused about their situation. They are seeking a good life, a better life, but, they are seeking again and again and no answer, so we go to the place and pray, and God will just send a person that he prepared.

B: so, in China relationships are very important, right?

L: yes.

B: so is that also how the gospel is spread, or how is the relational aspect of this culture connected to spreading the gospel?

L: relationships, this way of spreading the gospel, is also the work of the Holy Spirit. In act 20 of the holy spirit, so act is also the act of spreading the gospel, the way taught in this act, chapter 1, 8, is that you wait till the holy spirit come on you, and then you can spread the word to the end of the world, so actually, you not spread gospel through relationships, because relationships is what we do in our physical way, but we cannot do it in a spiritual way. God wants to spread gospel, so he has his own way. So we just pay attention to Christ and we feel peaceful. And then some day, God will prepare a person to you, so it's his plan, and he will control everything, so we just wait and he will give directions.

B: but isn't the gospel also a way of creating a community with love?

L: well, nowadays the definition of love is people love. Only physical love. So you know in China, now, this kind of relationship has caused a lot of problems. You know in China the family normally is parents live with the family, and it is very difficult to live like that. So now, a lot of problems arise because of this situation, and that is people limitation. It's so hard for them to live

together, because human love has its own limitation, so many people worry so much about this. They are very strong at work, but when they come back it is so hard to live life. So with everything it is the same, without God, human love will someday meet its limitation. And in the end, the person's limitations will cause the person to think about his life. And then he will be prepared to meet. Because in the Bible it says that, everyone in the world will hear about the gospel, at least, and then the end days will come. (She point to a plaque on the wall, which appears to be homemade, with drawings and a bible quote written in Chinese)

B: Oh, one of your collage students made this?

L: Yes.

B: What does it say?

L: Mathew 28: The gospel will spread all over the world, and then the end day will come.

B: Why is it, that you cannot get a real church? Or why is it that normal churches are accepted but you are not?

L: um, because, well, the state churches, they have a church, right, but they do not talk about Satan.

They do not talk about spiritual things. All the things that conflict with physical idea (ideology of modernity/asceticism) they are removed. So that's not the Bible. Bible talk about spiritual things. In the Bible it says that when people who really believe in God gather, this place will be a holly place. So this IS church. So if people gather but they do not talk about the real word of God, how can that be called a church? A lot of people go to the churches, but they do not hear any word about Satan, and Satan is very dangerous. Also they do not confirm and they do not talk about spiritual things. That is not bible. Government they do not know this, they only think about – oh you cannot talk about there is a God, this is not good, it is their knowledge, their limitation, so they cannot know this. They will only allow a church that cannot talk about the real things, you know, so we do not go there.

B: How can the government control what the priests talk about?

L: Because the priest is a type of person with a very tight relationship with the government.

That's why this church appeared, because we want to do the real thing, tell the truth. Truth is powerful and lies will die one day.

B: Do you have problems with the state?

L: not for now, but em, you know in the Bible, you know early church to Roman church there was prostitution and there was theft, so I think it will happen in China, but we are not free.

B: But it happened to other underground Churches already, right?

L: It happened in some church already, I think because in that church they have a very strong relationship with foreign country, so I think we can understand the government, because also they have to think about the country's security, I think we should not, em, our Christians should understand our government, because they do not know about true things, I know, but they have to do their own thing, they have very em strong relation with foreign county, of course government think, oh what are you doing?

B: but the priest (referring to a priest from a previous gathering of several housechurches) he is from Korea, right?

L: But I have no connection with Korea! And I think the most important is, God really is protecting us. We celebrate, we have a lot of things (activities), only way is, God is protecting us.

B: you don't rely try to keep it secret?

L: Of course we should do everything that the Bible says we should. Many things we cannot do, but we are (real) Christians, so if something happen, we will obey his rule and not be afraid.

B: you will accept..

L: We're sure that all the things that happen, he will give us peace.

B: So would you say that the housechurches are against the state?

L: No of course, how can we, I mean we are doing the spiritual bible, right, so the enemy is Satan, of course, Satan will use the government to play us, but that made us pray more for our government. Pray more for the college student, because someday, a person, a college student, a person who understand gospel, will go into the government, and then, whole country will be saved. That's the way.

B: that's the plan?

L: It is plan! So you know the thing to be against the government, it is not Gods way, because the people in the government, they do not know the gospel, so how can they say! Like us if we do not know gospel. We will be person who will pray for them, and we will see. Being someone is more dangerous, you know it is safer to be like the others, but I pray and go on.

B: So how many Christians do you think there are in China?

L: It is said that in China now it's one tenth. But some are not focused, but focus on activity or fighting the government.

B: These strange movements in the countryside, like eastern lightning?

L: That is heresy! That is not belong to these churches, I want to tell you that those schools have a very um, at least not in doctrine way.

B: So how large a portion of that tenth is in the government church and how much in the housechurches?

L: I do not know, but one day, if God give them grace, the people in the government churches will want to do the real thing. People have a desire for the truth. Sometime when the God time come to them, we will stay together and try to spread gospel. So gospel cannot stay with one person, so we will pray for them, because we are saved! So only now will we be like this (in secret) but one day God will do.

B: So are you formally a priest, or do you just lead the discussion?

L: No, this is a branch of the student churches, um, I lead,

B: what do you call it?

L: we call it local church. We have two messages on Sunday, and we have several small groups here, and we do some ceremony..

B: so you have two Sunday sermons, do priests come and..

L: also leaders will do it, from Beijing.

B: do you have to take some kind of education to be a leader and do sermons?

L: yes we do it, e., minister training

B: so what's it like? Do you have to go to school?

L: that depends, there are different ones, we go and listen to the priest and have lessons, and then..actually, lessons are of secondary importance, most important is, the spirit will call us. So this is the training in, how to get spiritual power. Of course knowledge is power, and em, spiritual power is from your relationship with God,

B: who can tell what level you are at?

L: God knows, and also the heart knows.

B: But do you say: I'm level three!

L: I cannot do that, but it is all according to Gods work. For example, how I came to Gods work. I was sad for three years, one day in my class, there were ten students. One day I was teaching, the class was twenty students. I fell so sorry for students. They are working hard, but they feel so empty. So unhappy So I began to tell gospel in the blackboard (laughing)

B. ok.

L: It's his guidance, because (If) he doesn't allow, I cannot do that, so I begin to tell the bridge, you know the bridge? The message of God, the central message of the Bible,

B: the bridge?

L: People, how to believe in God. How can people meet God, about Christ, how he covered the way, how he made the way,

B: so Jesus is the bridge..

L: so I talk about that, and ten students they want to accept God. So I get them..

B: what right there in class?

L: yeah! Yeah! So it's hard to do that, because I cannot do that, so these ten persons, they gathered in the library, so I ask my leader, I said, because they will be saved with the Bible, I said there are ten person, they want to listen to the gospel, can you go? He said YOU go, I said AH, I go! So that was the beginning. So who do this, God is the timing, **God feel the timing and then I begin, and then I begin to feel I'm not in the dark.** And then when I get more spiritual power, and Then I confirm, and then God began to, you know add people, more and more and more, so he will judge..He know how many people you can guide. He know, and then everything happen

B: So you guide all these people

L: yeah all these students and collage, um

B: but these are not all students?

L: Yeah, some of them are, um students mother

B: Oh! I see..so there is something to my point about the gospel spreading through networks?

L: well, the Bible say, if one person saved, the whole family saved. So when one person convert, gospel will spread in the family. So now, his mother is saved, and some day God will do it.

B: This mother who was taking part earlier, she was worried about her son, right?

L: Yes, she was telling how he is not so faithful, and he has problem with the hearth.

B: I see.

At this point we agree on meeting again and say our goodbyes. On the way home my translator is scared, she makes me reassure her that she is going to be anonymous, and she is upset that the group now has her personal information.

T: I just don't want them to be in contact with me again.

B: I could write them an email and explain that you are not interested in having contact with them?

T: ah don't do that man..but the government, this kind of organization, this branch, they gonna find out! Which ones are back to this branch, they gonna find out everybody, and then gone!

B: I don't think it's a problem because you are not involved with their organization, you don't participate in their meetings or anything, don't you think?

T: you don't know about Chinese government. Some student and teachers recently signed a document about human rights right, and now, they just disappeared, they just disappeared. (long story about how this disappeared professors wife went to USA to get Obama to help, and how a lot of people helped until finally the professor and a lot of others were discovered in Jingjiang province.

L: These things happen man!