

Miraculous Modernity: Charismatic Traditions and Trajectories within Chinese Protestant Christianity

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Singing along energetically to the postlude hymn, “Lord, Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing” 今要散离求主赐福, hundreds of worshippers filed out of the afternoon worship service held in a state-sanctioned “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” Protestant congregation in the industrial metropolis of Hefei 合肥, Anhui 安徽 province in 2007.¹ Just as one might expect in a congregation officially registered with the atheist party-state, the pastor’s exegesis of the Bible had emphasized moral behavior as opposed to supernatural forces, exhorting the audience that true meaning in life comes from service to one’s fellow beings. Although most members of the audience left directly after the service, a sizeable number lingered. In about a dozen small circles spread throughout the sanctuary, they huddled together, praying. In one such circle, a middle-aged woman stood in the middle of a group of women, tears streaming down her face, eyes shut, hands clasped together. Against the low muttering of the women’s voices, the voice of one woman who seemed to be speaking on behalf of all the others rose and fell in curious bursts of intensity. Every few words were expelled forcefully, as if she were rebuking someone. When at last the praying ceased and the group dispersed, I asked one of the women what they had been doing. “Exorcising,” she said, matter-of-factly. “Driving out demons.”²

Overview

This chapter will discuss the historical roots and contemporary resurgence of a form of Chinese Protestant Christianity variously called “Pentecostal” (*wuxunjie* 五旬节), “supernatural” (*chaoziran* 超自然), “charismatic” (*ling’en* 灵恩), “superstitious” (*mixin* 迷信), or “miraculous” (*you qiji* 有奇迹; *you shenji* 有神迹). Both the phenomenon itself and the question of what to call it, are key questions with relevance for understanding contemporary Christianity in China. As Daniel Bays notes in his chapter in this volume, Protestant Christianity has led the religious resurgence of the past thirty years and a clear majority of Chinese Protestants “seem to be ‘Pentecostals’.”³ Bays’s discussion of this question of terminology makes clear the high stakes involved. Are “miraculous healings” signs of Christian blessing in the tradition of the Biblical

¹ The Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council are the two state-sanctioned Protestant Christian umbrella associations that interface between local congregations and the party-state. The term “three-self” specifies the three major criteria for state-sanctioned Protestant Christianity in China: self-led, self-financed, and self-propagating. The “three-self” designation emphasizes a nationalistic separation from any trace of dependence on foreign missionary leadership, funds, and evangelization in the early chapters of Chinese Christian history.

² Fieldwork observations, Hefei, China, July 2007, Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye. This chapter draws on my dissertation, “Miraculous Mundane: The True Jesus Church and Chinese Christianity in the Twentieth Century” (Harvard University, 2010), and on pre-dissertation fieldwork. Instead of citing to pages in my dissertation, I will cite to the primary sources themselves.

³ Daniel Bays, “Protestantism and Modern China: Rejection, Success and Disaster, Survival and Rebirth”, in Vincent Goossaert, Jan Kiely, and John Lagerwey, eds., *Modern Chinese Religion II: 1850-present* (Leiden, 2015), p. 2, 12 [obviously these page numbers will change]

Pentecost, or are they “the marks of superstition”?⁴ This chapter may be understood as a further investigation of issues raised within Professor Bays’s broader discussion.

First I will explain the rapid growth since the early 1980s that has made this particular form of Protestant Christianity such a fruitful topic of study, including a discussion of the numerous labels that have been applied to it. I ultimately propose that we use the generic descriptive term “charismatic” in order to indicate the human experience of divine gifts or power, including the experience of the Holy Spirit (*shengling* 聖靈, or the older term *shengshen* 聖神). Second, I will discuss the development of charismatic Chinese Protestant Christianity over time, from widespread charismatic discourse and experiences within mainstream Chinese Christianity around the turn of the twentieth century, to a sharpened discourse surrounding the “evidence” of the Holy Spirit partly due to the spread of the international Pentecostal movement during the Republican era, and through the persecution of the Maoist era, culminating in the relative relaxation of religious suppression in the 1980s. Third, I will discuss three factors contributing to the current popularity of charismatic Christianity in China: flexible “low-rise” institutional forms, a discourse of evidence and authenticity in a culture of “fakes”, and perceived compatibility with “modern” paradigms such as scientific rationality. My core argument is that charismatic Christianity has existed as a major modulation of Chinese Protestantism since at least around the turn of the twentieth century and has played a role both in facilitating the survival of religious communities during periods of persecution and in enabling Christianity’s rapid growth today.

Growth sector: Chinese Protestant Christianity

Sometimes referred to as “Christianity fever”, the growth of Protestant Christianity (*jidujiao* 基督教) in reform era China is rapid and ongoing.⁵ Considering the fact that in 1949 Chinese Protestants numbered around one million and that public religious activities of all kinds were suppressed from around the late 1950s to the late 1970s, this growth is substantial.⁶ Conservative estimates such as the official government figure of 17 million Protestants in the state-sanctioned churches in 2009 pegs the number of Chinese Protestants as being roughly equivalent to the entire population of the Netherlands.⁷

⁴ Bays, “Protestantism and Modern China”, 8.

⁵ The Chinese term for “Protestant Christianity” is actually simply “Christianity”. In official parlance, Catholic Christianity is termed “Catholicism” (天主教, literally, Lord-of-Heaven Religion). As Richard Madsen shows in his chapter, Catholicism has also grown during the reform era, but this growth is complicated by the official/underground bifurcation within the Catholic population and hindered by the state control of the official Catholic hierarchy. In this chapter I will discuss the term “charismatic Christianity” as a mode of Christianity that exists within both Protestantism and Catholicism but that tends to be most frequently identified with Protestant Christianity. For substantial treatment of charismatic modes within Chinese Catholicism, see Henrietta Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village* (Berkeley, 2013), Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, & Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), and Richard Madsen, “Beyond Orthodoxy: Chinese Catholicism as Folk Religion”, in Stephen Uhalley and Xiaoxin Wu, eds., *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Santa Barbara, Calif., 2001), pp. 233-50.

⁶ Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003), p. 1.

⁷ Ryan Dunch, “Christianity and ‘Adaptation to Socialism,’” in Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley, 2008), pp. 155-78 (p. 169); Yang Fenggang, *Religion in China: Survival & Revival Under Communist Rule* (Oxford, 2012), p. 93, citing a range of official sources including the 1982 Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party’s Document No. 19, “The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Affairs during the Socialist Period of Our Country,” and the 2009 report from Xinhua News Agency,

The most rapid Protestant growth is occurring in what Yang Fenggang calls “the grey market”, the sector of Chinese society belonging to religious groups that are neither officially sanctioned nor officially suppressed by the state.⁸ Depending on the number of Christian believers in the grey market, whose numbers are higher but also harder to record than those in the officially registered “red market”, estimates of the total number of Chinese Protestants (grey + red markets) ranges from as low as 23 million⁹ to as high as over 59 million¹⁰ or even 100 million.¹¹ From rural villages in Fujian to urban metropolises like Beijing, within officially registered places of worship and unregistered meeting spaces alike, Christianity continues to spread.

Scholarly observers of Protestant Christianity in China generally acknowledge the widespread nature of a certain style of Christianity characterized by lay-centered organizational structures and religious beliefs and practices that variously emphasize healing, exorcism, visions, particularistic divine protection, involuntarily emotional worship, and speaking in tongues (glossolalia). All of these phenomena are encompassed within the term “charismata” (from the root *charis*, meaning grace), which scholars of Christianity use to describe the experience of divine “gifts” or power attributed to the presence of the Holy Spirit.¹² In China, as elsewhere, this mode of Christianity has frequently been identified as “Pentecostal” by scholarly observers.¹³

As can be seen from the anecdote about exorcism within a state-sanctioned church in Hefei, these modes of worship exist not only within the “grey” market of Protestant Christianity, but within the “red” Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM, *sanzi aiguo yundong* 三自爱国运动) churches as well. Gotthardt Oblau, who has observed hundreds

“The Great Practice of the Freedom of Religious Belief: A Summary of the 60 Year’s Religious Affairs since the Establishment of New China,” September 4, 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-09/04/content_11997424.htm; Statistics Netherlands, Population Counter, <http://www.cbs.nl/en-GB/menu/themas/bevolking/cijfers/extra/bevolkingsteller.htm>

⁸ Yang, *Religion in China*, pp. 85-122.

⁹ Nanlai Cao’s recent discussion of the number of Chinese Christians cites the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, “An In-house Questionnaire Survey on Christianity in China,” in *Annual Report on China’s Religions*, Jin Ze and Qiu Yonghui, eds (Beijing, 2010), pp. 190-212, and David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C., 2006). Cao Nanlai, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity in China,” *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century* (Bloomington, 2013), pp. 149-75 (p. 173).

¹⁰ See the Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, Protestants, 59,210,000. Searched for “Protestants” in the “Religious Demography: Affiliation” overview, http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/china/#/?affiliations_religion_id=37&affiliations_year=2010®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2012, accessed October 29, 2014.

¹¹ Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, p. 7.

¹² The connection between involuntary emotionalism and the presence of the Holy Spirit has been well articulated in Robert Anderson, *The Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (New York, 1979), p. 11.

¹³ Gotthardt Oblau, “Pentecostal by Default? Contemporary Christianity in China,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, 2nd ed., Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, eds (Baguio City, Philippines, 2005), pp. 333-52 (p. 333); Allan H. Anderson, “Pentecostalism in East Asia: Indigenous Oriental Christianity?” in *Swedish Missiological Themes 87.3* (1999), 319-40; Daniel Bays, “Christian Revival in China, 1900-1937,” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, Edith L. Blumhofer & Randall Balmer, eds (Chicago, 1993), pp. 161-79; Deng Zhaoming, “Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations,” in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, pp. 354-78; Daniel Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, Mass., 2012); Chen-Yang Kao, “The Cultural Revolution and the Emergence of Pentecostal-style Protestantism in China,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 24.2, 171-88, doi: 10.1080/13537900902816657, accessed October 26, 2014; Luke Wesley, “Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7.2 (2004), 225-54. Edmond Tang questions the applicability of the term “Pentecostal” to the diversity of religious expressions and points out the difficulty of getting reliable sources. Edmond Tang, “‘Yellers’ and Healers—Pentecostalism and the Study of Grassroots Christianity in China,” in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, pp. 379-94 (pp. 385-86).

of church meetings in provinces all over China in the course of his work for the China Christian Council (CCC, zhongguo jidujiao xiehui 中国基督教协会), writes that “much of the Christian experience and witness within the realm of the CCC itself is fairly Pentecostal in nature.”¹⁴ In his recent contribution to *Global Pentecostalism in the Twenty-First Century*, Cao Nanlai estimates that Pentecostals or charismatics comprise sixty to eighty percent of all Protestants in China.¹⁵

In some cases the presence of these distinctive modes of worship within state-sanctioned Christian churches has been identified as a cause for alarm. For instance, in an article titled “Do not mistake ‘superstition’ for spirituality” by Fang Zheng in 2001 in *Tianfeng* 天風, the official magazine of the state-sanctioned TSPM churches, Fang cautioned that practices widespread within the Chinese Church such as “healing sickness and exorcising, speaking in tongues, preaching in a moving way, praying and weeping, or fasting for days” were not proper expressions of Christian spirituality.¹⁶ Xu Tao, an academic publishing in *Zhongguo zongjiao* 中国宗教 (*China Religion*), went a step further in dismissing these modes of worship as a “craze of emotional religion and magic rites” whose corrupting influence, he surmised, first leaked into China during the “Third Wave” Pentecostal movement of the 1980s.

The widespread accord about the existence of this mode of Christianity stands in stark contrast to the wide range of interpretations and labels that may be applied to it. This leads us to the question of terminology. What is meant by “Pentecostal” Christianity in China? Is this term useful and effective in describing a distinctive style of Chinese Christianity?

In much of the existing literature on contemporary Christianity, including Christianity in China, “Pentecostal” is used as a catchall for many diverse forms of Protestant Christianity characterized by the personal experience of charismata. Definitions of the term “Pentecostalism” are often broadly inclusive, such as Robert Hefner’s three-part characterization:

First, an emphasis on the achievement of a personalized and self-transforming relationship with Jesus Christ ... second, ritual performance that highlights the ever-present power of the Holy Spirit ... and, third, religious enthusiasm centered on the experience of charismata (“gifts of the Holy Spirit”), including prophecy, exorcism, miraculous healing, and speaking in tongues (glossolalia). Put simply, Pentecostalism is an affectively expressive, effervescent Christianity that takes literally the wondrous miracles described in the New Testament’s Acts of the Apostles (2:1-4), and proclaims their availability and importance for believers today.¹⁷

This definition emphasizes, above all, the reality of the Holy Spirit and its potential to be manifest in a person’s experiences.

¹⁴ Oblau, “Pentecostal by Default”, p. 335.

¹⁵ Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity in China”, p. 173.

¹⁶ Fang Zheng, “Mo ba ‘mixin’ dang ‘lingxing’” (“Do not equate ‘superstition’ with ‘spirituality’”), *Tianfeng*, December 2001, p. 16.

¹⁷ Robert W. Hefner, “The Unexpected Modern—Gender, Piety, and Politics in the Global Pentecostal Surge,” in Robert W. Hefner and Peter L. Berger, eds, *Global Pentecostalism in the 21st Century* (Bloomington, Indiana, 2013), pp. 1-36 (p. 2).

The term “Pentecostal” was first used at the turn of the 20th century to describe religious revivals such as the famous 1906 Azusa Street (Los Angeles) revival in which believers reported an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that caused them to speak in tongues, just as the early apostles had done on the Day of Pentecost in the Biblical book of Acts.¹⁸ The new church institutions that grew directly out of these revivals, such as the Assemblies of God, have been called “Classical Pentecostal” in reference to their historical roots in these early 20th century religious movements.

Since this time, the term “Pentecostal” has also been used to broadly indicate other religious movements emphasizing the personal experience of divine influence such as healing, exorcism, visions, particularistic protection, involuntary emotional outpourings, and/or glossolalia. This has frequently been the case in scholarship on Chinese Christianity. In some cases Chinese religious movements such as the True Jesus Church are indeed direct offshoots from or successors to the Classical Pentecostal movements, but in many other cases these religious phenomena arise from within other mainstream denominations or independently. The term “charismatic” has arisen to denote those churches and movements emphasizing gifts of the Holy Spirit (but not necessarily glossolalia) within older, established traditions such as Catholicism and Episcopalianism.¹⁹ At other times, the term “charismatic” is used more generally as an adjective describing religiosity affirming and practicing charismata.

Hence these two terms, “Pentecostal” and “charismatic”, can be used either to denote theologically distinctive, historically cohesive churches or religious movements, or in a more general sense, to describe churches with a “family resemblance” of certain shared practices, or even just the practices themselves. The difficulty of delineating the boundaries of “Pentecostalism” lies to a great extent in the fact that emphasis on charismata within Christianity was never the exclusive domain of early 20th century Classical Pentecostal churches but is in fact a recurring theme throughout the great stream of global Christian history (and indeed throughout the history of human religious experience).²⁰ In view of these populous historical precedents, to persist in labeling all churches emphasizing charismata with the broad label of “Pentecostal” or “proto-Pentecostal” is a bit like calling every form of four-wheeled transportation a Ford, be it

¹⁸ For a more complete account of North American Pentecostal movements see Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Reading, MA, 1995); David Reed, *“In Jesus’ Name”: The History and Beliefs of Oneness Pentecostals* (Dorset, UK, 2008).

¹⁹ Stephen J. Hunt, “Charismatic Movement,” in Adam Stewart, ed., *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity* (Dekalb, Illinois, 2012), p. 56; Allan Anderson, “Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions,” in Allan Anderson, ed., *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, in Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, André Droogers, and Cornelis van der Laan (Berkeley, 2010), pp. 13-29 (p. 19).

²⁰ For example, Amanda Porterfield’s study of healing in the history of Christianity argues that miracles of physical healing and exorcism have been a central and defining feature of Christianity since its inception. Amanda Porterfield, *Healing in the History of Christianity* (Oxford, 2005). Joseph Lee makes the same point in his article, “Christianity in Contemporary China: An Update,” *Journal of Church and State* 49.2 (spring 2007), 277-304. James Robinson’s work reveals healing, exorcism, and glossolalia in Scotland from 1830 to 1835 that were part of a wider transatlantic emphasis on charismata from 1830 to 1880. See James Robinson, *Divine Healing: The Formative Years, 1830-1880: Theological Roots in the Transatlantic World* (Eugene, Oregon, 2011). Numerous American antebellum religious historians have documented the prevalence of charismata, from Methodists’ common accounts of cathartic worship and divine visions to Mormons’ regular practices of healing and speaking and interpreting tongues. See Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *Charles Finney and the Spirit of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996); Richard Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York, 2005); John Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA, 2012); Christopher C. Jones, “The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith’s First Vision,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37.2 (2011), 88-114.

Model T, minivan, or oxcart (“proto-Ford”).

This is not to reject the existence of “Pentecostalism” as an early 20th century religious movement or as a global religious norm. What I am suggesting is that what is often described as “Pentecostal” in literature on Chinese Christianity is a modality of Christian belief, practice, and organization and not necessarily a church institution directly descended from early 20th-century “Classical Pentecostalism”, a standardized theological system, or a self-proclaimed religious identity.²¹ Therefore, in describing a mode of Christian religiosity that includes the experience of charismata, I will use the general term “charismatic” unless speaking of a church that either claims a historic link to Classical Pentecostalism or that prominently emphasizes the hallmark Pentecostal doctrines of the nonnegotiable connection between glossolalia and salvation.

Charismatic Christianity in a Chinese context

The significance of sorting out this taxonomic muddle with regard to Christian groups in China lies in the power of language to alienate, congratulate, condemn, or dismiss through subtle implication to multiple audiences. As Mayfair Yang, Rebecca Nedostup, and Vincent Goossaert have shown, in China at the beginning of the 20th century, new terminology delineating “religion” on the one hand or “superstition” on the other was the expression of a seismic shift in the hierarchies and assumptions surrounding religious practice at this time.²² Terminology has the same power today, inflecting onto a religious movement the values and understandings of those who use them. Imprecise terms can imply phenomena, theologies, and practices that are in fact absent.

One of the most obvious imprecisions with regard to the use of the term “pentecostal” to describe Chinese Christianity (in Chinese, “*wuxunjie*” 五旬節) is that this term is scarcely heard in the context of self-description. As Cao Nanlai puts it, “Pentecostalism as an imported concept has not become a conscious identity for the Chinese Christian community.”²³ Even in the church most likely to qualify as “Pentecostal” out of all Chinese churches, the True Jesus Church, church leaders acknowledge a historical connection with the early 20th century Pentecostal movement (五旬节运动) but speak of their church as simply the True Jesus Church. If speaking more generally, they would say that they were a Christian church. If pressed to describe their church’s unique characteristics, they might say that their church is “more Spirit-filled” 比较有圣灵.

It would be equally unnatural for members of the True Jesus Church to use the term “charismatic” (*ling’en* 灵恩) to describe their church, although they do use the term

²¹ It is possible that the use of the term “Pentecostal”, a term with its origins in a specific movement in the early 20th century, to apply to a range of age-old charismatic Christian practices throughout the 20th century, reflects increasingly rationalistic assumptions within modern scholarly discourse. It is useful to consider Mayfair Yang’s observations on William Cantwell Smith’s argument: the rise of the concept of “religion” is in some ways correlated with a decline in the practice of religion itself. Might not the rise and proliferation of the “pentecostal” classification likewise reflect a decline in scholars’ assumptions that the practice of spiritual gifts within Christianity are not to be taken for granted in the 20th century, but must be identified as belonging to a distinctive strain? See Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, “Introduction,” in Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang ed., *Chinese Religiosities*, pp. 1-42 (p. 13).

²² Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, “Introduction,” in Mayfair Mei-Hui Yang, ed., *Chinese Religiosities*, p. 1-42; Vincent Goossaert, “1898: The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?” *Journal of Asian Studies* 65.2 (May 2006), 307-35.

²³ Cao Nanlai, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity”, p. 151.

ling'en for their twice-yearly conferences, called Spiritual Convocations (*ling'en hui* 灵恩会, literally “Spirit-gifts meeting”). Perhaps one reason why this “Pentecostal” label has not been widely taken up by Chinese Christians themselves is that it sounds distinctly foreign, making it vulnerable to old anti-foreign critiques that Christianity is an agent of cultural imperialism. Another reason for this is that they see miracles such as healing, exorcism, visions, and tongues as stemming directly from the ontological reality described by the Bible, and not as tokens of their membership in an academic category of religion.

In another example of the complex and often contradictory world of Chinese charismatic Christianity, these practices can be found within both the registered TSPM churches and unregistered churches, whose memberships often overlap and whose organizational structures often mirror each other. For instance, large TSPM churches may have small youth worship meetings like the “house church” meetings of unregistered Christians. So-called “house churches” may be as big as or bigger in their worship spaces and membership than the Three-Self churches. Although it is not unusual to hear Pentecostalism being characterized as a “noninstitutional” form of Christianity, yet within China, Pentecostal churches often exist within larger national and transnational organizational structures.²⁴

Another Chinese word commonly used to describe charismata is “superstition” (*mixin* 迷信), a politically loaded term that effectively excludes the group it labels from both the fold of Christian orthodoxy and the realm of constitutionally protected religious activity. As Cao Nanlai puts it, “Various antisuperstition campaigns and the recent crackdown against heretical sects (especially Falungong) have contributed to a serious stigma associated with charismatic phenomena in society.”²⁵ Charismatic practices can draw the unwelcome eye of government officials on the lookout for “heterodox cults” (*xiejiao* 邪教).²⁶ The question of the state’s ability to define religious orthodoxy aside, it is true that Chinese history contains numerous historical precedents of religious movements that grew into full-scale political rebellions, such as the Taiping Rebellion and various millenarian uprisings of the late imperial period. The point is that to be labeled “superstitious”, or, even worse, “heterodox cult”, is to suffer not only theological judgment, but also potentially consequential political classification. Thus labeled, churches can then be actively suppressed through a campaign of propaganda, arrests, and demolitions. Hence in the realm of Chinese Christian terminology, in the best-case scenario an imprecise term can lead to theological misunderstanding, and in the worst-case scenario to outright political suppression.

Few of the problems and contradictions implied by this tangle of fuzzily defined terms for charismata are new because in fact charismatic Christianity is not a recent import from the West, but has deep historical roots in China.

An historical overview of charismatic modes in Chinese Christianity

²⁴ Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity”, p. 152.

²⁵ Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity”, p. 153.

²⁶ For a discussion of discourse on this category of *xiejiao* 邪教, see David Palmer, “Heretical Doctrines, Reactionary Secret Societies, Evil Cults: Labelling Heterodoxy in 20th Century China”, in Mayfair Yang ed., *Chinese Religiosities: The Vicissitudes of Modernity and State Formation* (Berkeley, 2012), pp. 113-34.

The vitality of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in China is related to its deep and broad historical roots. As Henrietta Harrison has pointed out, the earliest Christian missionaries to China in the early modern period were Catholics whose religious practices such as visions, healing, exorcism, visions, petitions for particularistic protection, and emotionally expressive worship overlapped not only with native Chinese religion but also with other popular Christianities in Europe. In her history of a Chinese Catholic village from 1620 to the present, she argues that the great tendency of many studies of Christianity in China has been to assume first and foremost that Christian practices and local religious culture were originally different and then to track the process of “acculturation” whereby as a foreign religion is absorbed into a culture, it gradually adopts elements of that culture. And yet, she observes, when we focus on lived religious experience in Chinese popular religion and Christianity, “we begin to see firstly that each of these great traditions contains an immense variety of different practices, beliefs, and ideas, and secondly that the two traditions sometimes overlap.”²⁷ For instance, she notes, most of the missionaries who came to the village of Cave Gully were Italian Franciscans. Certain practices such as group chanting of litanies and rosaries, village pilgrimages to pray for rain, and visionary trances not only resembled popular Buddhist or Daoist practices, “but would also have been deeply familiar to southern Italian Catholics a few generations ago.”²⁸ With the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the 19th century, despite the missionaries’ relative wariness of sacramental rituals, charismata could still be found in popular Christian discourse and practice, especially in the early 20th century. The Classical Pentecostal missionaries did not bring their religious message to a charismatic desert, but to a religious landscape long fertile.

For instance, Eugenio Menegon’s study of Chinese Catholics shows that from as early as the 17th century, Chinese Catholics competed with other local religionists in the arena of healings and exorcisms.²⁹ David Mungello’s study of Catholics in Shandong and southern Zhili provinces details prayers for particularistic protection (such as rainfall) in the 18th century.³⁰ Christian followers of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom in the mid-19th century often reported miraculous cures, and the Taiping leaders claimed to have received divine visions and oral communications.³¹ Ryan Dunch’s work on Protestants in Fujian shows that Christians in the late 19th century reported visions and engaged in rites to call down particularistic protection, such as rain in a time of drought.³² Lian Xi’s study of popular Chinese Protestantism illuminates a range of native-led Christianities, including Republican era churches such as the True Jesus Church and the Jesus Family, both of which engaged in charismatic practices, including glossolalia.³³ Daniel Bays’s pioneering study of revivals from 1900-37 includes accounts of charismatic, emotional worship.³⁴

²⁷ Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse*, p. 4.

²⁸ Harrison, *The Missionary’s Curse*, p.4.

²⁹ Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars*, pp. 208-30.

³⁰ David Mungello, *The Spirit and the Flesh in Shandong, 1650-1785* (New York, 2001).

³¹ Jonathan Spence, *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York, 1996).

³² Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China* (New Haven, 2001), pp. 7-15.

³³ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (New Haven, 2010).

³⁴ Daniel H. Bays, “Chinese Protestant Christianity Today,” *The China Quarterly* 174 (2003), 488-504 (494-95); Daniel H. Bays, “Christian Revival in China: 1900-1937,” in *Modern Christian Revivals*, Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer, eds (Champaign, 1993).

This charismatic mode of Christianity also existed within churches that were the pillars of the “liberal” mainline Protestant establishment. For example, a series of revivals swept China in early 1906, even prior to the famous revival in Los Angeles, California, in April 1906 that has historically been viewed as the earliest major occurrence of reported manifestations of the Holy Spirit that served as the catalyst for the international Pentecostal movement. In these early 1906 Chinese revivals, which occurred within Presbyterian congregations in places like Fuzhou 福州 (Fujian 福建), Ningbo 寧波 (Zhejiang 浙江), the rural Yuanzhuang 袁庄 (Shandong 山東), and Zhoujiakou 周家口 (Henan 河南), crowds of hundreds of worshippers respectively “wept tears”, were exhorted to “seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit”, “were filled with the great descent of the Holy Spirit” and displayed “bitter weeping . . . temporary muteness . . . [and] every kind of different manifestation, which pen cannot describe”.³⁵ In the same year, numerous miracles of healing, visions, and particularistic protection were also reported.³⁶ Such accounts of charismatic worship and practices continued to occur within Presbyterian (*zhanglaohui* 長老會), Baptist (*jinxinhui* 浸信會), China Inland Mission (*neidihui* 內地會), and multid denominational settings throughout the 1930s. Lian Xi’s book on popular Christianity has documented numerous revivals from the 1930s, but such charismatic worship experiences also took place in the 1910s and 1920s.³⁷ For example, I sampled seventeen issues of the Presbyterian weekly, *Tongwenbao* 通問報 (*The Chinese Christian Intelligencer*) between 1906 and 1931 using intervals of about one year (the intervals were not exactly evenly spaced because some issues were missing in some years). Of these seventeen sample issues, eight of them contained at least one report of a revival meeting. In some years there were as many as four revival reports per issue.

A couple of examples suffice to show the charismatic intensity that could exist within churches of the major Protestant establishment. A 1919 report of a three-day revival meeting in Shandong jointly presided over by a pastor from the Church of Christ in China (*zhonghua jidujiaohui* 中華基督教會) and a pastor from the Jinling Theological Seminary (*jinling shenxueyuan* 金陵神學院) describes an emotional audience in which people wept so dramatically that “the mournful sound filled the hall and shook the eardrums, in a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”³⁸ A 1926 account of a revival meeting of the China Inland Mission in Changshan 常山, Zhejiang, reports “an extraordinary feeling of the Spirit . . . People cried out loudly, wept, praised the Lord, and the Holy Spirit came down . . . It was the heart’s ‘wall of Jericho’ that was broken down.”³⁹

³⁵ *Tongwenbao* 通問報 (*The Chinese Christian Intelligencer*). Published by the Presbyterian Missions in China. 1906-1948 held in three *juan* (microfiche) by the Shanghai Library. January 25-February 22, 1906 (#182, p. 4, Microfiche [MF] 0017); January 25-February 22, 1906 (#183, cover page, MF 0023); January 25-February 22, 1906 (#186, p.3, MF 0049); #187 p. 12 (MF 0058).

³⁶ *Tongwenbao*, January 25-February 22, 1906 (#185, p. 4, MF 0041) [a neighborhood fire miraculously turns away from a pastor’s house]; April 24-May 22, 1906 (#195, p. 3, MF 0122) [an old woman healed through Christian conversion]; April 24-May 22, 1906 (#197, p. 10, MF 0134) [Danish minister healed of sickness]; April 24-May 22, 1906 (#199, p. 3, MF 0150) [man healed of tuberculosis]; April 24-May 22, 1906 (#203, p. 35, MF 0174) [sick woman sees vision and is directed to church members for healing].

³⁷ See Lian Xi’s *Redeemed by Fire*, which includes numerous accounts of 1930s revivals..

³⁸ *Tongwenbao*, July 1919 (#859, p. 6 [MF 0426]).

³⁹ *Tongwenbao*, March 1926 (#1193, p. 3 [MF 0833]).

The charismatic mode of Christianity described above dates to the early twentieth century but is very similar to the kinds of practices that twenty-first century observers of Chinese Protestantism have struggled to classify using a range of terms from “superstitious” to “hybrid” to “Pentecostal”. The overwhelming trend in existing scholarship on charismatic forms of Christianity in China has been to identify the charismatic mode as evidence that “Western” Christianity has become acculturated to “Chinese” popular religion over time, the denominational Christianity of the missionaries gradually absorbing Chinese popular religiosity to create a new, hybrid form of “Chinese Christianity”.⁴⁰ And yet, as we have seen above and as I have argued in my dissertation on the True Jesus Church, overlap between popular Christianity and popular native religion is to be expected and does not necessarily indicate essential continuity or convergence. It is reasonable that given the importance placed on efficacy (*ling* 靈) in the native Chinese environment, Chinese Christians would be anxious to demonstrate that their God, the “one true God”, had real power to answer prayers and petitions.

This same natural overlap in the realm of lived religious experience existed between distinctly Pentecostal forms of Christianity and the broader Protestant Christian tradition as well. For instance, just like participants in the charismatic movement led by James Irving, a minister of the Church of Scotland, from 1830-1835, believers within the True Jesus Church saw their visions, healing, and glossolalia as conforming to the pattern of miraculous narratives in the Bible.⁴¹ Just like the members of the primitivist Mormon movement who spoke in tongues in the 1830s and the Chinese leaders of the China Inland Mission who performed exorcisms in the late 19th century, charismatic Christians sought to directly emulate the acts of the Apostles and took charismatic manifestations as a sign of their divine favor.⁴² Given this broad historical and Biblical context of charismata within the Christian tradition, it would be a mistake to identify Christian movements as being “indigenized” or “Chinese” simply to the extent that they engage in practices such as healing, exorcism, visions, petitions for particularistic protection, involuntary emotionalism, or glossolalia.⁴³

Hence in the minds of charismatic Christians, calling on Jesus Christ to exorcise demons and rejecting the legitimacy of local popular gods did not reveal essential continuity with the popular religious tradition but rather—as Joel Robbins has put it so well—“rupture” from the local system. Robbins points out that the set of charismatic practices that make Pentecostalism distinctive, such as glossolalia, exorcism, possession, healing, and so on, “appear to constitute a global norm that does not allow for really significant modifications, but which often appear to observers as representing something

⁴⁰ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 9, 14-16; idem, “A Messianic Deliverance for Post-Dynastic China: The Launch of the True Jesus Church in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Modern China* 34.4 (October 2008) 407-44 (432-33); Daniel H. Bays, “Indigenous Protestant churches in China, 1900-1937: A Pentecostal case study,” in *Indigenous Responses to Western Christianity*, Steven Kaplan, ed. (New York, 1995), pp. 124-43 (pp. 138-39); Murray A. Rubinstein, *The Protestant Community on Modern Taiwan: Mission, Seminary, and Church* (Armonk, NY, 1991), p. 138; Deng Zhaoming, “Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations,” 438).

⁴¹ See James Robinson, *Divine Healing*.

⁴² John Turner, *Brigham Young, Pioneer Prophet*; Alwyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society* (Grand Rapids, 2007).

⁴³ The “continuity” or “acculturation” approach described above is not limited to descriptions of Chinese Christianity alone. See, for instance, Harvey Cox’s discussions of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea. And yet the dichotomy that Cox sets up between “Korean folk religion” and “Christianity” may not be as significant as the distinction between popular practice and formal theology. Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, pp. 218-28.

that has probably always been at the heart of local religious practice.”⁴⁴ In their embrace of practices of healing, exorcism, and tongues they saw themselves as being not “less Christian, more Chinese native religion” but as more Christian than the Western missionaries themselves, who ignored the clear Biblical precedents established by Christ and his apostles in favor of theologically liberal exhortations to moral and spiritual refinement and a reliance on modern science. The really significant distinction is not between “Chinese” and “Western” religion, but between popular practice and formal orthodoxy.

Acknowledging this natural overlap in the texts, beliefs, and practices of Christianity and Chinese religion, two broad and deep religious traditions, frees us from the tedious project of declaring precisely which cocktail of “isms” formed the hereditary makeup of this or that Christian (Protestant or Catholic) religious tradition or community, be it Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, sectarianism, millenarianism, Sabbatarianism, dispensationalism, fundamentalism, or Pentecostalism. While recognizing the crucial significance of local religious context, we can also locate the charismatic Christians within the great stream of Christian tradition. We can see how charismatics’ emphasis on the veracity and comprehensive authority of the Biblical text led to a culture of Christian discourse and practices that emphasized God’s miraculous presence in the everyday world.

Being aware of natural overlap also frees us from the burden of defining degrees of “real Christianity”, an implicit project that many existing studies attempt when they identify supernaturalism or an emphasis on Biblical healing miracles as being uniquely “Chinese” or somehow betraying an incomplete understanding of “Christian doctrine” due to a lack of education. As Richard Madsen points out, both traditions represented by static labels such as “Western” or “Chinese” exist in a state of dynamic—and often mutual—transformation.⁴⁵ Anthropologist of Christianity Fenella Cannell has argued that Western academics studying religion may have unconsciously internalized certain “orthodox” Christian theological positions such as the radical separation between body and spirit, causing some scholars to declare groups that blur these distinctions as heterodox or un-Christian when in fact these “heterodox positions are supported in numerous places throughout the Bible.” Were scholars to confront these assumptions about what makes a religious movement “real Christianity”, Cannell suggests, “[w]e might instead come to see these not just as local ‘resistance’, or as peripheral parts of ‘real Christianity’, but as alternative Christianities deeply rooted in the highly unstable syntheses which Christian orthodoxies themselves represent.”⁴⁶

These “highly unstable syntheses” within Christianity itself come to light when we evaluate the growing body of evidence that the phenomenon of charismatic Chinese Christianity is urban as well as rural, appeals to the educated as well as the uneducated, and can be found among the prosperous as well as the poor. Cao Nanlai’s study of gendered approaches to contemporary Christianity in Wenzhou 温州 shows tension between the practices of the largely female, low-to-middle-income, charismatically

⁴⁴ Joel Robbins, “On the paradoxes of global pentecostalism and the perils of continuity thinking,” *Religion* 33.3 (July 2003), 221-31.

⁴⁵ Madsen, “Signs and Wonders: Christianity and hybrid modernity in China,” *Christianity in Contemporary China: A Socio-cultural Perspective*, in Francis Kek Ghee Lim, ed. (Oxon and New York, 2013), pp. 17-30 (p. 19).

⁴⁶ Fenella Cannell, “The Christianity of Anthropology,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11.2 (2005), 335-56 (352).

oriented church membership and the male, well-to-do, theologically oriented church leaders. Male leaders tend to criticize the “low level” faith of women who participate in healings. And yet even male leaders who consider themselves to have a higher-quality approach to their religion through theological study also occasionally seek charismatic assistance from those women within the church seen as having special access to charismatic gifts.⁴⁷

Instead of “where the supernaturalism comes from,” therefore, a more interesting and fruitful inquiry to further our understanding of charismatic Christianity in China is that of how charismatic claims, experiences, and institutional forms have enabled people to contextualize and organize their lives during an era of bewildering change and dislocation.

Autonomous Christian communities

Since charismatic practices were widespread in China even before the arrival of Classical Pentecostal missionaries from North America, what did the Classical Pentecostals add to the equation? This is a complex question that requires further research, but my preliminary hypothesis is that the Pentecostals’ teaching that glossolalia (speaking in tongues) was the only valid evidence of the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” required for salvation heightened the emphasis on physical manifestations of the spiritual that was already present within charismatic Christian culture. This heightened emphasis—everyone *had* to speak in tongues in order to be saved—broadened the experience of charismata within Chinese Christians. While mainline Chinese Christians could experience the Holy Spirit at a once- or twice-yearly revival meeting, Pentecostals could be sure of their spiritual endowment every time they spoke in tongues, which could be once a day or at least once a week. This popularization and routinization of the experience of the Holy Spirit, one of the Bible’s most exclusive spiritual manifestations, further empowered local Chinese Christians as ecclesiastical and sacerdotal actors. Hence Classical Pentecostalism added fuel to the already-burning charismatic Chinese fire. As the charismatic Christian mode was infused with Pentecostal organizational forms, the combination of charismatic beliefs and practices combined with flexible local institutions allowed for a flourishing of native Chinese churches, transfiguring the landscape of Chinese Christianity that previously had been dominated by major Western missionary denominations.

Without a doubt, Chinese Christians were aware of reports of charismatic movements abroad. From 1903-06, sparks from internationally publicized charismatic revivals including the “Korean Pentecost” from 1903-07 and the Azusa Street revival of 1906 spread across China, igniting pockets of heightened emphasis on charismatic experience.⁴⁸ For instance, Canadian Presbyterian missionary Jonathan Goforth (1859-1936) learned of the revival in Korea, traveled there to observe events in 1907, and

⁴⁷ Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostalism”, pp. 158-63.

⁴⁸ Young-Hoon Lee, “The Korean Holy Spirit Movement in Relation to Pentecostalism,” in Anderson and Tang, short title, pp. 413-26; Hefner, p. 13; Anderson, “Revising Pentecostal History in Global Perspective,” in Anderson and Tang, pp. 118-40, p. 127; Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, MA, 2012), pp. 104-05; Darrin J. Rodgers, “Pentecostalism, Classical,” in Burgess, *Encyclopedia of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, pp. 359-63. Obgu Kalu discusses early 20th century charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity in Africa in *African Pentecostalism* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 1-22.

returned to China to spearhead evangelistic meetings that resulted in the “Manchurian revival” of 1908.⁴⁹ In another example of the transnational pull of charismatic experience, Bernt Berntsen (Chinese name 賁德新, 1863-1933), a Norwegian American missionary stationed in north China read one of the early newsletters of *The Apostolic Faith*, the newsletter of the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles. The accounts of Pentecostal tongues that he read so stirred him that he sailed to Los Angeles to experience the revival and the gift of tongues himself, then returned to China as a converted Pentecostal. He, his family, and numerous other “Apostolic faith missionaries” worked energetically to build a Pentecostal revival network in north China, which seems to have been particularly successful in certain mission stations in Hebei 河北 (such as Beijing 北京) and Shandong (such as the village of Mazhuang 馬莊 in Tai’an County 泰安). Apostolic Faith Church (*Xinxin Hui* 信心會) revival meetings in Shandong became the training ground for leaders of future Chinese charismatic movements, including Jing Dianying 敬奠瀛 (1890-1957), the founder of the Pentecostal commune called the Jesus Family (*Yesu Jiating* 耶穌家庭), and Zhang Lingsheng 張靈生 one of the early leaders of the True Jesus Church (*Zhen Yesu Jiaohui* 真耶穌教會).⁵⁰ The founder of the True Jesus Church, a peasant-turned-silk-merchant named Wei Enbo 魏恩波 (1876-1919), joined Berntsen’s Apostolic Faith Church in Beijing in 1916 before founding the True Jesus Church in May 1917.⁵¹

Because they depended on charismata and not on theological or institutional certification for their ecclesiastical authority, Chinese Pentecostal churches expanded organically and rapidly. A fully Pentecostal church due to its emphasis on glossolalia as the key to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and hence salvation, the True Jesus Church (TJC) expanded rapidly across China in the wake of its founding. Its converts were largely won from the pews of Western missionary congregations. The True Jesus Church was itself a prolific source of members for new churches that, according to the church’s own statistics, from 1919 to 1930 spun off at an average rate of 1.5 per year: the “Heavenly Call Church 天召會”, “the Lord Jesus Church” 主耶穌教會, “the New Church for Saving the World” 救世新教, “the Five Doctrines Church” 五條教規會, “the Christ Jesus Church” 基督耶穌教會, “the New Jerusalem Holy City Church” 新耶路撒冷聖城會, to name a few.⁵²

These TJC-spinoff churches formed but one current of many flowing into a widening sea of independent Chinese Christianity. Fortuitously coinciding with a decrease in Western missionary prestige due to rising nationalism,⁵³ but also energized by

⁴⁹ Daniel Bays, p. 104; Jonathan Goforth, *By my Spirit* (London, n.d.); Daniel Bays recommends Rev. James Webster, *Times of Blessing in Manchuria*, 4th edition (Shanghai, 1909), for firsthand accounts of the Manchurian revival.

⁵⁰ Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 67-70.

⁵¹ For more on Wei Enbo’s biography, see Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, “Pentecostal Crossings: The Transnational, Transdenominational Friendship of Bernt Berntsen and Wei Enbo,” paper given at “Global ReOrient: Chinese Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements in the Global East,” held at Purdue University on October 30-31, 2013, pending publication.

⁵² *Zhen Yesu jiaohui chuangli sanshi zhounian jinian zhuanke* 真耶穌教會創立三十週年紀念專刊, Wei Yisa, ed. (Nanjing, 1947), p. J9.

⁵³ Lian Xi, “A Messianic Deliverance.” This article characterizes the rise of the TJC as an expression of nationalism. While I agree that nationalism played a major role in spurring the growth of the TJC throughout China by making it easier for Wei Enbo and other TJC leaders to condemn Western missionaries for corrupt Christian practices and extravagant living, we must be careful not to reduce the affinity that people felt for the True Jesus Church to

the promise of primitivist purity and power through strict Biblical adherence and charismata, independent movements like Ni Tuosheng's (倪柝声, 1903-1972) Assembly Hall churches (*juhuisuo* 聚會所 also known as the "Little Flock" *xiaoqun* 小群 churches) and John Sung's (松尚節 1901-1944) fiery revival ministry flourished.⁵⁴

Charismatic practice did not always depend on charismatic leadership. Often charismatic practices provided an opportunity to affirm grassroots social cohesion and community ties. Among the numerous miracle stories published continuously in *The Chinese Christian Intelligencer*, a mainstream denominational weekly, from 1906-48, is the 1928 account in which a young girl in Zhejiang province "came back from the dead" after those present at a revival meeting prayed for her; there is also the 1947 story in which a Christian's family member became feverish and incoherent until a group of Christians went into the mountains and prayed for him from dawn to dusk, healing him.⁵⁵

Western missionaries had an ambivalent reaction to charismatic Chinese Christianity. On the one hand, the appeal of charismatic worship as evidence of divine power is evident from missionaries' reports of congregants' emotionally intense participation in the Cangzhou 滄州 Revival of 1905.⁵⁶ Arnold F. Bryson, a missionary with the London Missionary Society, reported on "the wonderful manifestations of the Holy Spirit" such as cathartic communal prayer, "a paroxysm of sobbing", and so on.⁵⁷ On the other hand, such charismatic expressions sometimes went beyond what Western missionaries felt were the proper bounds for worship. For instance, when another North China charismatic movement called the Spiritual Gifts Society (*ling'en hui* 靈恩會) centered in Shandong province swept through many of the congregations of the U.S. Presbyterian North Mission in the 1930s, many missionaries expressed annoyance at the "pandemonium", tongues, and trances frequent in worship.⁵⁸ A key subtext here is Western missionaries' anxiety over their loss of control over Chinese Christian churches. To be sure, Western missionaries around the turn of the twentieth century had expressed a desire to increasingly hand leadership duties over to native Chinese leaders in order to allow for more rapid growth and financial self-sufficiency, but this increased growth and independence could be a double-edged sword if native leaders and congregations did not conform to the missionaries' expectations for proper Christian spirituality.

Deng Zhaoming has astutely noted that charismata-focused church institutions provided a form of Christian religious expression that was loose enough to allow for the emergence of a church that was not run by Westerners. What was especially significant about Classical Pentecostal movements was

nationalism pure and simple. In one of the church's foundational documents, for instance, Wei declared that those who promoted nationalism were servants of the devil (because they were distracted in their focus from Jesus' teachings and works and because of the great destructions and loss of human life brought about by so-called Christian countries in the name of nationalism).

⁵⁴ Bays, *New History*, pp. 132-34; Joseph T.H. Lee, "Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement in Maoist China", *Church History* 74.1 (March 2005), 68-96; Lian, *Redeemed by Fire*, pp. 131-54.

⁵⁵ *Tongwenbap*, February 1928 (#1282, p. 3); December 1947 (#1811, p. 6).

⁵⁶ English-speaking missionaries Romanized this city in Hebei Province's name as Ts'ang Chow.

⁵⁷ Report for the year 1905 by London Missionary Society missionary Arnold F. Bryson (MF 694). See also D.S. Murray's report for 1905 (MF 694), and a report for 1906 by Edith Murray (MF 697). Council for World Mission Archives, MFC 266.00951 L846CN, held in the Special Collections and Archives of Hong Kong Baptist University.

⁵⁸ Bays, *New History*, pp. 134-35.

their stress on the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the resulting de-emphasis on educated (read Western educated) ordained clergy. One need only experience the power of the Holy Spirit and then he or she was free to evangelize and start a movement.⁵⁹

Similarly, a theology of Biblical adherence was liberating for independent Chinese Christian churches because it provided an authoritative basis for defining Christianity that was free of Western theological or cultural traditions. In a Chinese cultural context, an appeal to the Bible was especially effective because of the special cultural reverence given written scriptural texts. In sum, Chinese charismatics' rejection of hierarchy, theology, and creeds in favor of Biblical literalism and the direct experience of the Holy Spirit allowed them to flexibly access resources of Christian authority and divine power without having to depend on Western missionary mediators or organizational structures.

Thus the potential for charismata-oriented Christianity in China was always latent, but the flexible institutional forms introduced by the early 20th century Classical Pentecostals held the key to the proliferation of grassroots Christianity around China. It was through this early 20th century surge in independent churches that charismatic practices and institutional forms became widespread within Chinese Christianity, especially at the level of popular practice.

In this new era, which coincided with numerous modern transformations in Chinese society (especially in large cities), Christian communities became not only the domain of social elites such as functionaries of wealthy foreign institutions and members of the rising new professional class, but also grassroots believers and popular leaders who were in many cases just as internationally connected as Christian elites, but on a smaller scale. Just as major Protestant denominations and the Catholic Jesuit order had pioneered modern mass mechanized printing technologies and techniques to print Bibles and newspapers in cities like Hong Kong and Shanghai, independent Chinese Christian organizations printed nationally and internationally distributed periodicals like the early Classical Pentecostal convert Mok Lai Chi's *Pentecostal Truth* (*Wuxunjie Zhenli* 五旬節真理) and the True Jesus Church's *Holy Spirit Times* (*Shenglingbao* 聖靈報). These publications seemed to have been remarkably effective in spreading not only charismatic or Pentecostal beliefs, but practices and experiences as well.⁶⁰ Hence these early 20th century Classical Pentecostal churches were both reactionaries against certain rationalized aspects of modernity in their bold espousal of charismatic practices and modernizing revolutionaries through their highly developed print culture and aspirations for influence on a global scale.

All in all, during the Republican Era charismatic Christianities seem to have flourished within certain centers across China, especially in the treaty port cities, the Jiangnan region, rural areas Shandong and Henan provinces, and Fujian. Daniel Bays estimates that the True Jesus Church "was already very likely the second largest Protestant church in China, second only to the union CCC [Church of Christ in China]"

⁵⁹ Deng, "Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations", p. 356.

⁶⁰ Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye, "A Religious Rhetoric of Competing Modernities: Christian Print Culture in Late Qing China," in Song Gang, ed., *Reshaping the Boundaries: Ming-Qing Chinese Encounters with Western Culture* (Hong Kong, forthcoming 2015).

by the onset of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937.⁶¹ It appears that the True Jesus Church was a bit of a rarity in maintaining a unified church institution that did not completely spin off into repeating cycles of sectarian division and reproduction. Informally organized modes of charismatic Christianity must have been relatively common within grassroots practice in China during this era, historically obscured by the high-rising church and hospital edifices built by Western missionary denominations. During the Maoist era, however, “high-rise” (prominently institutionalized, vertically oriented) institutions would prove to be extremely vulnerable, while the “low-rise” (ad hoc, flexible, and horizontal) institutions such as those belonging to charismatic modes of Christianity would survive.

Private horizontal associational structures during the Maoist era

From charismatic independent churches to the more mainline Methodists, all Chinese Protestant churches shared a similar fate in the 1950s. They were first compelled to make the choice between coming together under the state umbrella organization, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, or face suppression. In the early 1950s, the party-state did succeed in “decapitating” the three major Chinese independent churches: the True Jesus Church (Pentecostal), the Assembly Hall or “Little Flock”), and the Jesus Family (Pentecostal). Wei Yisa (魏以撒), son of church founder Wei Enbo and head of the True Jesus Church, and Jing Dianying, founder of the Jesus Family, were both denounced and imprisoned in 1951.⁶² Ni Tuosheng, leader of the Assembly Hall churches, fended off denunciations from within his own flock in 1951 but was imprisoned the following year.⁶³ Jing and Ni died in prison a few years later.

It seems that the weightiest charge leveled against these leaders of China’s most developed native Christian institutions was their guilt by association with foreign missionaries, which is ironic considering the fact that all three of them prided themselves on their independence from foreign supervision. In the early 1950s it seems that charismatic Christians were not denounced or imprisoned for practices such as healing or exorcism. Records show that charismatic practices were still widespread within the True Jesus Church and indeed within popular religious life in China as a whole during the 1950s, though Communist officials tried hard to root out “superstition”.⁶⁴

During the politically charged years of the Cultural Revolution from 1966-76, however, all forms of religious practice and organization were either forced underground or eradicated. Chen-Yang Kao says of the Cultural Revolution event that it “demolished organized religion and transformed the local religious field into a cultural space that featured supernaturalism, individualistic practice and female religiosity.”⁶⁵ While, as we have seen, charismatic practices were already well-distributed throughout Chinese Christianity by the time of the Cultural Revolution, it is certainly true that low-rise

⁶¹ Bays, *New History*, 130.

⁶² Bays, *New History*, p. 165; Francis P. Jones, ed., *Documents of the Three-Self Movement: source materials for the study of the Protestant church in Communist China* (New York, 1963), pp. 60-65.

⁶³ Joseph Tse-Hei Lee, “Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement”, 87-88.

⁶⁴ Steve A. Smith, “Local Cadres Confront the Supernatural: The Politics of Holy Water (*Shenshui*) in the PRC, 1949-1966,” *China Quarterly* 186 (Dec. 2006), 999-1022.

⁶⁵ Kao, “The House-Church Identity and Preservation of Pentecostal-Style Protestantism in China,” in Francis Khek Gee Lim, ed., *Christianity in China: A Socio-cultural Perspective* (Routledge: Oxon and New York, 2013) p. 207-219 (p. 216).

networks for healing, prayer, or other private forms of worship were structurally resilient forms of church association that could survive while built-up high-rise institutional edifices buckled and snapped under pressure.

Ironically, during this time those who had the least formal ecclesiastical status, older women, were found to be those most capable of holding the church together as leaders. Because no one cared much about where they went or what they thought, these women were free to visit others in need of healing and hold prayer meetings when men who had been church leaders could not.⁶⁶

One feature of contemporary Chinese charismatic Christianity that draws comment from almost all scholarly observers is the heavy female representation at the grassroots level. In the wider world of scholarship on women in religion, numerous studies have set out to explain women's participation in and even contentment with patriarchal Christian traditions.⁶⁷ Over time, the framework of "oppression versus liberation" has been replaced with what Marie Griffith, a historian of women's religious movements, calls "richer and more complicated frameworks for interpreting female religious activity and women's power within organizational bounds."⁶⁸ Some have argued that women trapped within patriarchal religious traditions find innovative ways to subvert male domination.⁶⁹ Others have suggested that social or cultural benefits, such as being involved in a caring community, or having a stable nuclear family, form the core of the positive meaning that women derive from their religious participation, while the formal exclusion of women from ecclesiastical hierarchies is a peripheral issue.⁷⁰ Still others show that in some contexts, especially those outside North America, patriarchal religions' approach to gender roles may actually be seen as relatively progressive or liberating for women, either in contrast to established gender traditions that are even more conservative, or through their emphasis on high standards of moral behavior for men.⁷¹ Chen-Yang Kao has argued that Pentecostal Christianity was attractive to women because it expanded their range of devotional behaviors and relationships.⁷² The overall

⁶⁶ Interviews with "Mr. Qiu", "Ms. Jia" (both pseudonyms), and members of the True Jesus Church in March 2010, in a rural county in southern China, conducted by Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye.

⁶⁷ See, for example, the article by Elizabeth Weiss Ozorak, "The Power, but not the Glory: How Women Empower Themselves Through Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35.1 (Mar 1996), 17-29. In a similar vein, and speaking specifically about Pentecostal women, Harvey Cox agrees with Elizabeth Brusco that "[f]or women, the Pentecostal message provided the best way they could see to effect a genuine change in their family relations, to get their men to forgo some of the macho posturing the popular culture encourages, and to reorder the priorities on how the limited family income was spent" (Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, pp. 136-37; Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo: Evangelical Conversion and Gender in Columbia* (Austin, Texas, 2010).

⁶⁸ R. Marie Griffith, *God's Daughters: Evangelical Women and the Power of Submission* (Berkeley, 1997).

⁶⁹ Most of the work on Pentecostalism and women is contemporary and focuses on women in societies that are very different from Republican era China. On the question of how American women negotiate Pentecostal patriarchy in particular, see Elaine Lawless, "Rescripting Their Lives and Narratives: Spiritual Life Stories of Pentecostal Preachers," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 7.1 (1991), 53-71; "Shouting for the Lord: the Power of Women's Speech in the Pentecostal Religious Service," *Journal of American Folklore* 96, no. 382 (1983), 434-59.

⁷⁰ See Ozorak; also Sally K. Gallagher, Christian Smith, "Symbolic Traditionalism and Pragmatic Egalitarianism: Contemporary Evangelicals, Families, and Gender," *Gender and Society* 13.2 (April 1999), 211-33.

⁷¹ Salvatore Cucchiari's study of Pentecostalism in Sicily suggests that Pentecostalism actually provides a more ambiguous form of patriarchy than Catholicism, the dominant religion. Salvatore Cucchiari, "Between shame and sanctification: patriarchy and its transformation in Sicilian Pentecostalism," in *American Ethnologist* 17.4 (November 1990), 687-707.

⁷² Chen-Yang Kao has argued that the Cultural Revolution created a decentralized, feminized religious sphere that gave women new choices for religious involvement. I agree that Christianity certainly expanded Chinese women's devotional repertoire, though I believe that this occurred well before the Cultural Revolution. Chen-Yang Kao, "The

trend in recent work on women and religion is to give weight to women's everyday religious practice instead of simply focusing on the formal codes and structures of patriarchal power. This emphasis on the significance of practice is helpful in approaching the experience of women Pentecostals in China, particularly when we consider that charismata-oriented practice promised women direct access to divine power. To Chinese charismatic women, this everyday expectation of the divine may have been a more tangible or meaningful form of power than formal responsibility within an ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The post-Mao era

On the other end of the Cultural Revolution, the only form of Christianity apparently left standing (though stooping very low) in 1976 was the charismatic mode focused on the private experience of divine power. Theologically systematized, hierarchically centralized, publicly promulgated Christianity would eventually revive, but this institutional rebuilding took time and was subject to the party-state's evolving official policies governing religious activities. Churches were renewed from the bottom up, and in many places—though certainly not everywhere—the new institutional structures rising anew across the Chinese landscape enclosed congregations with a robust grassroots tradition of Christian charismatic practice. As Richard Madsen has noted, highly institutionalized Christian churches were not the only victims of the Maoist era; other religious institutions such as Buddhist monasteries and local temples were decimated. In a study of a county in the province of Guizhou, Duan Qi of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences has found that areas where temples were destroyed during the Cultural Revolution are now Christian while areas where temples were preserved are having a strong revival of folk religion.⁷³

Some scholars might use this example to argue that many who now swell the ranks of charismatic Christian communities in China might just as well have been popular religionists worshipping Guandi or Mazu, and this could certainly be true. As Yang Fenggang has pointed out, when presented with a small supply, religious “consumers” often engage in substitution.⁷⁴ I do not think that it is accurate, however, to go as far as Tony Lambert's argument that charismatic Christians who practice exorcism exist in “a twilight world of folk-religion with a thin veneer of Christianity” and simply “continue the practices of folk-religion using Christian terminology.”⁷⁵ As we have seen, exorcistic beliefs and practices do not belong exclusively to Chinese popular religion, but are also a mode of popular Christianity. Like plants with extensive underground root systems regenerating after a forest fire, after the end of the Cultural Revolution and a general relaxation of controls over religious life, charismatic Christian modes emerged once again in China in an initial stage of revived popular practice and cohesive

Cultural Revolution and the Emergence of Pentecostal-style Protestantism in China,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 24.2 (May 2009), 171-88.

⁷³ Duan Qi, paper presented at a conference at Fudan University, 2009, cited in Madsen, “Signs and Wonders,” p.23.

⁷⁴ See Yang Fenggang's extensive use of the “market” economic model to discuss China's religious landscape in Yang, *Religion in China*.

⁷⁵ Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*, new ed. (Oxford, 2006), p. 122.

communities.⁷⁶ The regeneration of local communities provided the critical mass of congregants that laid a foundation for more developed institutional structures such as national house church networks, officially registered congregations, national seminaries, and charitable Christian organizations.⁷⁷

Since the 1990s, these high-rise institutional structures have emerged again. For instance, all preachers and ministers in churches that exist under the state-sanctioned umbrella of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) are required to undergo a theological training course at one of the state-sanctioned national seminaries. Churches exist within the TSPM's national hierarchy and must to a certain extent adapt their teachings and practices to nationally promulgated standards. This does not mean, however, that all churches have dissolved into standardized postdenominationalism. For example, in many cases congregations with a distinctive identity and heritage such as revived congregations of the True Jesus Church register as a TSPM church but maintain their unique practices. In the post-Mao era congregations of the True Jesus Church have largely retained their core practices, including glossolalia, and their exclusivist Pentecostal doctrine of salvation through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In some places, instead of the mandated "postdenominational" sign saying "Church", the name "True Jesus Church" is proudly displayed. Other TSPM congregations may be largely descended from the Jesus Family movement, or the Seventh-Day Adventists, with these distinctive charismatic "flavors" clearly distinguishable. In other places, such as the Three-Self church in Hefei that I described at the beginning of the chapter, there may simply be a strong local tradition of charismata.

To what extent is today's charismatic Christianity in China an outgrowth of these deep historical roots and to what extent is it imported from outside China? One sympathetic account of the covert evangelizing of American missionary Dennis Balcombe in the 1980s portrays him as being instrumental in converting a number of prominent leaders within some of China's largest house church networks to Classical Pentecostalism; some of these groups seem to have retained their Pentecostal doctrine and practices to this day.⁷⁸ Cao Nanlai's research suggests that the charismatic practices of ethnic Chinese churches in places like Singapore can also have an effect on PRC communities where these strong connections exist.⁷⁹

Given the widespread and robust presence of charismatic Christian modes throughout Chinese history, it seems unreasonable to say that today's runaway growth in charismatic Christianity is entirely due to the efforts of a handful of Western evangelists since the 1980s or the attractiveness of overseas Pentecostal megachurches today. However, it is certainly true that the borders of charismatic Christianity in China have always been porous. For instance, very early on following the founding of the True Jesus Church, itself a direct descendent from the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, Chinese evangelists took their Pentecostal message to overseas Chinese communities in Singapore, the Philippines, and Indonesia. Today in the southern region of China, many True Jesus Church congregations maintain close relations with Taiwan, where True Jesus

⁷⁶ For a detailed account of how charismatic practices sustained the True Jesus Church throughout the Cultural Revolution and sparked its nationwide resurgence in the 1970s, see Inouye, 2010.

⁷⁷ See Lee, "Christianity in Contemporary China: An Update."

⁷⁸ David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing*, pp. 273-78; Luke Wesley, "Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal?" *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7.2 (2004), 225-54.

⁷⁹ Cao Nanlai, "Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity", pp. 165-69.

Church congregations unfettered by the kinds of political controls that have existed in the PRC since the 1950s have developed a mature administrative center with a global reach. Hymnbooks, hymn recordings, and other sophisticated religious resources trickle in from Taiwan. Students who go overseas to study may return to China with evangelical or charismatic sensibilities and introduce these modes of religiosity into their local worship circles.

Because of the fluid, continually reforming nature of charismatic Christian institutions, it is difficult to track strains of influence over long periods of time. It seems safe to say that many of the charismatic seeds strewn in China have indeed come from overseas, but that many more were already endemic to the landscape of Bible-centered Chinese Christianity.

Explanations for charismatic Christianity's current popularity

What is distinctive and attractive about the mode of charismatic Christianity in China today? There are three possible keys to charismatic Christianity's ongoing success: first, the continued advantages of low-rise religious institutional structures made possible by charismatic practices and Bible-centered theology in China's highly supervised religious environment; second, the compelling "evidence" of charismatic experience in a contemporary culture overrun by fakes and cognitive dissonance; third, the adaptable mechanisms by which it transfers charismatic force to the project of overcoming the moral dilemmas and ideological vagaries of the modern world.

Low-rise institutional structures

The low-rise institutions (i.e. flexible, "polycephalous" institutional forms) of charismatic Christianity are well-suited to the current Chinese religious environment.⁸⁰ Large, structurally complex, vertically oriented religious institutions expose themselves to political scrutiny. Charismatic Christian churches, because of their emphasis on individual experience and Biblical adherence, do not necessarily have to depend on centralized institutional structures (although the culture is quite hierarchical). This minimalist organizational structure is less likely to attract negative government attention. All that is needed to legitimate a worship service is a group of worshippers. Additional elements such as Bibles and hymnbooks are also important, but the total institutional profile is very low. With this cellular organization, even if one group is identified by government authorities as undesirable and subsequently broken up, other groups like it can easily form. Richard Madsen describes charismatic organization as "modes of community based on expansive social networks rather than localized settlements."⁸¹

These low-rise charismatic structures also exist within the state-sponsored church. For instance, in the opening anecdote about the state-sanctioned worship service in Hefei, the informal prayer groups that formed regularly in the wake of the service are

⁸⁰ Gotthard Oblau helpfully applies this term used to describe global Pentecostal movements, "polycephalous", to China. Oblau, "Pentecostal by Default", p. 337.

⁸¹ Madsen, "Anti-Modern Theology and Pre-Modern Practice: Catholic Indigenization from Below in Modern China", in Goossaert, Kiely, and Lagerwey, *Modern Chinese Religion II*, p. 00.

low-rise institutions. Gotthard Oblau characterizes the strata of state-sanctioned Protestant Christianity in China this way:

The charismatic structure from below is rural, dominated by volunteer workers of little formal education with mainly women in leadership roles. The bureaucratic structure from above, in contrast, is mostly urban, dominated by well-educated people with many theologians and mostly men in leading positions. While groups within the charismatic structure are mainly Pentecostal ... preaching and teaching in the realm of the bureaucratic structure is dominated by the modern rationalism of evangelical or, at the very top, liberal theology.⁸²

As Cao Nanlai has shown with his work on the split between charismatically oriented, uneducated women volunteers and theologically oriented, wealthy “boss” male leaders in Protestant churches in the bustling port city of Wenzhou, the lower stratum of charismatic Christianity is not limited to rural areas, but also characterizes urban Christianity.⁸³

Even charismatic Christian groups that aspire to grow very large tend to do so through a process of horizontal diffusion that does not prominently identify a top national leadership. Certain large charismatic organizations, such as national house church networks, run their own seminaries and often have tacit government approval. Notably, despite their large congregations, local officials will turn a blind eye to their activities. Other groups like the revived congregations of the True Jesus Church may register with the government under the umbrella of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, which requires preachers to receive theological training at one of the national Three-Self Patriotic Movement seminaries. In a religious environment in which it is illegal to be a professional religious leader without state approval, low-rise charismatic Christianity offers a useful institutional toolkit for entrepreneurial religious amateurs that does not necessarily require theological training or government approval.

“No Fakes”: *charismata provide “evidence” of divine power*

Without a doubt, faith healing and other charismata play a major role in Protestant evangelization in contemporary China. Deng Zhaoming describes faith healing as “the most dominant factor in the spread of Protestant Christianity in China today.”⁸⁴ In a society characterized in a recent poll by “a lack of convictions” and “habitual doubt”, in which fake “Praga” handbags (a knockoff of the luxury brand “Prada”) can be sold for a song and a wildly popular smartphone application helps keep consumers abreast of the latest tainted food scandals, the popularity of charismatic modes of Christianity is in part due to many religionists’ hunger for evidence that their faith is real.⁸⁵ This desire to

⁸² Oblau, “Pentecostal by Default”, p. 339.

⁸³ Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity”, pp. 149-75.

⁸⁴ Deng, “Indigenous Chinese Pentecostal Denominations”, p. 354.

⁸⁵ “Dangqian shehui cunzai de shida bingzheng” 当前社会存在的十大病症, *Renmin Ribao* 人民日报, http://rnrshare.people.com.cn/rnrshare/?itemid=7_8898&type=3&from=timeline&isappinstalled=0, accessed October 1, 2014; Mary Beth Griggs, “High-tech Chopsticks Developed to Combat Food Safety Issues in China,” *Smithsonian.com*, September 5, 2014, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/high-tech-chopsticks-developed-combat-food-safety-issues-china-180952627/?no-ist>, accessed October 31, 2014; Bridget O’Donnell, “New iPhone app lets you track China’s latest food scandals,” *Shanghaiist.com*, <http://shanghaiist.com/2012/06/19/iphone-food-scandal-app.php>, accessed October 31, 2014. The iPhone app was downloaded over 200,000 times within the first week of its

verify the veracity of their religion doubtless fits into a larger context of general skepticism about the value of other highly-promoted items, from milk powder to “core socialist values”.⁸⁶ Instead of theological exposition or moral exhortation from religious officials, both of which may sound all too similar to political ideology and state propaganda, charismatic Christians prefer to give greatest credence to word-of-mouth accounts (“testimonies”) of religious efficacy—a sign that their belief in the Christian God really works to make their lives better.

Describing the growth of a house church movement in Fujian province, Chen-Yang Kao recorded the prominent role of charismata in the church’s expansion:

Their Christian faith was characterized by their experiences that praying to Jesus produced efficacious results. Healing, exorcism, visions, dreams and prophecies were the major elements of their testimonies. From the late 1970s onwards, this new-born Protestant group grew rapidly and expanded to other villages in the H area. Reports associate this growth with some extraordinary incidents. In numerous stories, Christians came to pray for some sickly or demon-possessed persons after doctors, Taoist priests and shamans failed to deal with the affliction, and successful healing of such a person was viewed as proof of their God being the most powerful one. Consequently, the healed persons’ families, relatives, friends, and neighbors would turn to the Christian God.⁸⁷

In this account it is worthwhile noting that in the wake of these miraculous manifestations, the close personal acquaintances of the healed person were most likely to convert. Conversion of people within a circle of personal acquaintances is not only due to laws restricting public proselytization, but also to the networks of personal trust within which the miracle story was disseminated. New converts were not being swayed by high church officials or televangelists, but by personal accounts from peers they knew and trusted. This tendency of religious conversions to follow networks of preexisting social relationships is not unique to Chinese charismatic Christianity but has been observed as a general feature of both Chinese popular religious cults and charismatic Christian movements worldwide.

Gotthard Oblau’s work reminds us that these charismata-driven conversions also exist beneath the umbrella of the state-sanctioned church. He reports that

in rural areas generally at least half of all conversions are motivated by healing experiences that are either personal or witnessed in the family. In many local places, church people claim a ratio as high as 90%.⁸⁸

Although it would be difficult to compare healing claims—and even more difficult, of course, to verify those claims—made by competing Protestant organizations in China, it seems clear that there is an element of competition, with more charismatically oriented

launching. I am not sure these web refs are necessary (and, they likely won’t be accessible any more when our volume becomes a textbook...)

⁸⁶ “Socialist core values”, *shihui zhuyi hexin jiazhi*, are currently the focus of a nationwide state propaganda campaign in the PRC that seeks to link socialism to moral values such as justice, love, honesty, respect for elders, and so on.

⁸⁷ Chen-yang Kao, “Preservation of Pentecostal-Style Protestantism in China”, pp. 209-10.

⁸⁸ Oblau, “Pentecostal by Default?”, pp. 418-19.

churches pointing to instances of miracles as a way of demonstrating their authenticity (often vis-à-vis the more liberal theological orientation found at the upper levels of the state-sponsored churches). Many converts to the True Jesus Church say that after investigating various churches they joined the True Jesus Church because it has more miracles than other churches 神迹比较多. In a similar vein, reporting on house-church Christians in Fujian, Chen-yang Kao writes:

Followers of the house church attributed the success of their church to their unofficial and autonomous status, while they regarded TSPM as a compromising church. This is clearly stated by my house church informants: since their church conforms more to God's teachings, God shows His approval by granting them 'spiritual gifts' such as faith healing and exorcism, and hence the growth of their church surpasses that of the secularly oriented TSPM church.⁸⁹

These accusations of a “compromised” Three-Self movement from churches who take pains to maintain a separate, emphatically charismatic identity resonate with the current anxieties of Chinese society. In a way unregistered churches are accusing the state-sponsored churches of providing a “fake” or “tainted” sort of Christianity. Just as savvy consumers avoid fake luxury handbags or tainted food products, these charismatic Christians are concerned with avoiding fake or tainted religion, because only genuine religion can produce robust and beneficial effects.

In making this comparison to the culture of “fakeness” in Chinese consumer society today, I am not trying to equate Christians' religious beliefs and practices with savvy modern consumerism.⁹⁰ From the dawn of the Christian movement, converts and potential converts have expended tremendous energy in pursuit of the assurance that their faith was not in vain. Many of the miraculous accounts in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles are in precisely this vein of physical efficacy proving a spiritual point. My point is to show that in today's social environment of “habitual doubt”, a mode of Christian religiosity that can be verified through actual experience and transmitted by word of mouth through trusted networks can be perceived as extremely valuable by virtue of being genuine. By the same token, this standard of efficacy can also be a double-edged sword; evidence or even rumors of failed or faked efficacy can be very damaging to a church's reputation.

Modernity and morality

In this volume, Richard Madsen suggests that we can see charismatic modes of Christianity as a consoling remedy “for people disillusioned by modern statist or neo-liberal development schemes.” He argues that the current popularity of charismatic modes of Christianity is related to “the modern Western reaction against modernist Christianity—the various forms of ‘fundamentalist’ and especially Pentecostal Christianity.”⁹¹ At the same time, he notes, this rejection of modernism does not

⁸⁹ Kao, “Preservation of Pentecostal-Style Protestantism in China”, pp. 207-08.

⁹⁰ One problem with “market” models of religious adherence is that they tend to subsume people's genuine, vital desires for religious truth under the apparatus of rational choice, resulting in oversimplification and sometimes a failure to grasp the very substance of the religious activity that they seek to describe.

⁹¹ Madsen, “Anti-Modern Theology”, p. 00.

necessarily prevent Christian institutions like the Catholic Church from becoming modernized. For instance, in the modern era the centralized Catholic hierarchy has exerted increased control over “idiosyncratic indigenous pieties”.⁹²

This point about how a rejection of “modernism” (a certain ideological framework) does not equal a withdrawal from the diverse, global, and often contradictory processes of modernity is well taken. In many ways Protestant charismatic organizations have been at the vanguard of some “modern” trends, such as the early 20th century boom in printing technology and print culture and the growing societywide critique of religious “superstition”. And yet, they simultaneously dug in their heels to resist other trends, such as rationalistic atheism.⁹³ For instance, the vulnerability of True Jesus Church glossolalia to accusations of superstition has not prevented the conversions of a growing contingent of university students and young professionals. Today even Christians who firmly insist on the existence of healing miracles are much more likely to take an injured person to a hospital and pray for her in the hospital than they are to forego medical treatment altogether and simply pray. For these Christians, the charismatic mode is not a corral separating them from science and rational discourse whose sides they will refuse to overleap, but a particular gait that they strategically adopt as they traverse the landscape of the modern world.

Far from being confined to a narrowly defined sphere of “religiosity”, charismatic Christians in the reform era apply their master Christian narrative to every aspect of their lives: not just the devotional, but also the secular; not just the “spiritual”, but also the “scientific”. This charismatic mode of Christianity thus simultaneously takes “miraculous”, “mundane”, and “modern” forms. For example, at a Spiritual Convocation (*ling’enhui* 灵恩会) meeting of the True Jesus Church in a large city in 2009, a student from the prestigious local university, Chen Wei, described an event that occurred in the mid-1990s. According to Chen’s story, at a rural market, a little seven year-old boy ran away while his mother was distracted and accidentally fell into a shrimp pond. By the time his parents found him, he was lying in the mud at the bottom of the pond. He had no pulse and no sign of life. They took him to the hospital, where an EKG revealed no heart activity. The father began to weep uncontrollably. The mother, however, was a Christian, and had heard that God had the power to bring people back from the dead. She prayed for over three hours. After another hour or so, by which time the boy had been without a pulse for over five hours, his heart suddenly started to beat. He began to speak, saying that he wanted to watch television. The doctors were unable to deny that something miraculous had happened, since they had been present the entire time. “Fourteen years went by fast,” concluded Chen Wei, looking out at the crowd from behind the microphone. “I was that little seven year-old boy. Glory be to God.”⁹⁴ In this story, the event was not miraculous by virtue of belonging to a realm apart from science but by virtue of having been verified by scientific measures such as physical descriptions, the careful accounting of the passage of time, the EKG, the presence of the doctors.⁹⁵ The fact

⁹² Ibid, “Anti-Modern Theology”, p. 00.

⁹³ See the True Jesus Church church graveyard regulations banning those who engage in “superstitious” funerary practices such as pounding gongs, burning paper money, or setting off fireworks, *Zhen Yesu Jiaohui, 30th Anniversary Publication*, p. 12.

⁹⁴ “Chen Wei” (pseudonym), 2009, Spiritual Convocation meeting of the True Jesus Church in a first-tier city.

⁹⁵ Similar arguments about miracles and modern science are made in Jacalyn Duffin, “The Doctor Was Surprised; or, How to Diagnose a Miracle,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 81.4 (winter 2007): 699-729; Ruth Harris, *Lourdes*:

that the story's first-person narrator was a student at one of China's most competitive universities also bolstered its credibility with the congregants, many of whom were university students themselves.

Hence the miracle stories that members of the True Jesus Church tell are not simply—to borrow a phrase from Robert Orsi—“the recasting of mundane experience in another ‘symbolic’ or ‘religious’ key.”⁹⁶ Rather in their telling they are intended to offer evidence of the true scope of reality in which this reality's fullest possibilities can be known through the true Christianity found only within the True Jesus Church. Chen Wei's story is just one of many examples of charismatic Chinese Christians' robust and simultaneous embrace of the miraculous as well as the modern dimensions of everyday life at the beginning of the 21st century.⁹⁷

The veracity of God's existence and divine power within the church culture in which charismatic Christians partake also strengthens their trust in Christianity as a moral ideology and their certainty that good and evil will be justly repaid and that God is mindful of them. In contrast to the crass materialism and dog-eat-dog competitiveness that they encounter in Chinese society, within the horizontal social networks of charismatic churches they are bound together through shared experiences, texts, and assembly. The practice and discourse of charismata maintains the boundaries of the community, building trust through shared vulnerability and mutual affirmation. Within these networks of mutual experience, trust, and moral demonstrativeness, moral capital can be recognized and cultivated. As Lily Lee Tsai has demonstrated, the exclusive nature of church communities often prevents government officials from being “embedded” within the community and hence leads to clashes of interest. However, this potential alienation of local government officials aside, the intangible value of the church as what Tsai calls a solidary group—a group “based on shared moral obligations as well as shared interest” to its members is clear.⁹⁸ In a society bankrupt of trust, charismatic churches can be like small community credit cooperatives, a safe place where resources of goodwill and morality can be deposited and put to good use.

In many ways charismatic churches in China act as an alternative to state-sanctioned forms of Christianity or as a refuge from larger trends in society. However, this should not lead us to assume that charismatic Christians tend to reject or feel at odds with this state or society altogether. In the first place, as Ryan Dunch, Yang Fenggang, and Xing Fuzeng have already pointed out, the antagonistic relationship between the state and civic organizations does not necessarily exist in China, and demands for autonomy do not necessarily lead to political opposition to the party-state.⁹⁹ In fact, as Cao Nanlai

Body and Spirit in a Secular Age (Harmondsworth, 1999); Suzanne K. Kaufman, *Consuming Visions: Mass Culture and the Lourdes Shrine* (Ithaca, 2005). Duffin's article, for example, argues that physician testimony has been a critical part of the Vatican's investigation into miracles taken as evidence of sainthood since the 17th century. The prognosis must be hopeless, and the recovery must be a great surprise to the doctor, to verify a healing miracle has occurred.

⁹⁶ Robert Orsi, *Thank You, St. Jude* (New Haven, 1996), p. 186.

⁹⁷ A substantial body of religious studies literature refuting the secularization thesis has accumulated over the past decade or so. See, for example, Rodney Stark, “Secularization, R.I.P.,” in *Sociology of Religion* 60.3 (1999), 249-73, and Harvey Cox and Jan Swyngedouw, “The Myth of the Twentieth Century: The Rise and Fall of Secularization,” in *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 27.1/2 (spring 2000), 1-13.

⁹⁸ Lily Tsai, “Holding Government Accountable through Information Institutions: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China,” in *Accountability through Public Opinion: From Inertia to Public Action*, Sina Odugbemi and Taeku Lee, eds (Washington, DC, 2011), pp. 307-18 (p. 309).

⁹⁹ Ryan Dunch, “Protestant Christianity in China Today: Fragile, Fragmented, Flourishing,” in Stephen Uhalley, Jr., and Xiaoxin Wu, eds, *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (Armonk, NY, 2001), pp. 195-216;

has observed, many charismatic Christians are intensely nationalistic. They long for Chinese Christians to be recognized as a force to be reckoned with, a desire that is often linked to a desire for China to be a “powerful country”.¹⁰⁰ Within the True Jesus Church, members take particular pride in the fact that in many church missionary congregations in Africa, native Africans now subscribe to their China-rooted Christian church, which they regard as the one true form of Christianity in all the world. Within the network of state-sanctioned Three-Self churches, including congregations with a strong independent identity like those of the True Jesus Church, at the level of the lay practitioner religious freedom is completely unrestricted. While the local church leadership may have a complicated relationship with local government officials, the average registered church member generally experiences few obvious restrictions on her individual religious practice.

This is not to say that none of the charismatic independent churches ever raises voices of political protest against the state. With regular frequency in China, unregistered church buildings are demolished or partially demolished, often in the face of large protests. Advocacy organizations meticulously document the demolitions and relay the questioning voices of church members.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

The prevalence of the charismatic mode of Christianity in contemporary China is a testament both to its deep historical roots and extreme adaptability. This charismatic mode is native to both the founding Christian narratives and also to the Chinese religious environment. The international influx of missionaries of the international Pentecostal movement that began in 1906 and resurged in the 1980s quickened the flow, but was not the only source, of this great stream of charismatic Christian experience in China. What Pentecostalism brought to Chinese Christianity was a ringing affirmation of the Christian authority derived from charismatic experience, as opposed to theological training or ecclesiastical hierarchy. In a sense it has been charismatic Christianity’s relatively conservative “Bible-only” interpretation of Christianity that is precisely the source of its dynamism and innovation. By focusing on the diverse and often contradictory narratives in the Biblical text and taking miraculous Biblical accounts as models for modern life, charismatic Chinese Christians have found religious resources adaptable and sturdy enough to construct individual meaning and community institutions amidst the storms of the twentieth century. Today, from tongues-speaking Pentecostals to faith healing house church members to exorcising Three-Self congregants, Chinese Christians continue to draw on charismatic modes to form communities, affirm divine realities, and thread between the labyrinthine practical and moral challenges of China in the twenty-first century.

Fenggang Yang, “Civil Society and the Role of Christianity in China: A Preliminary Reflection,” *Civil Society as Democratic Practice: Solidarity and Subsidiarity*, Antonio F. Perez, Semou Pathé Gueye, and Fenggang Yang, eds (Washington, DC, 2005), pp. 197-212; Xing Fuzeng, “Church-State Relations in Contemporary China and the Development of Protestant Christianity,” in *China Study Journal* 18.3 (2003), 19-48.

¹⁰⁰ Cao, “Gender, Modernity, and Pentecostal Christianity”, pp. 170-75.

¹⁰¹ For example, ChinaAid, a religious rights lobbying group, is based in Midland, Texas, <http://www.chinaaid.org> and regularly publishes newsletters containing news of church demolitions and arrests of house church Christians.