

YANFEI SUN

The Eschatological Resolution and the Reconstruction Of Christianity: Conversion to Christianity among Mainland Chinese Students in the United States
(Under the Direction of LINDA M. GRANT)

The collective conversion to Christianity of mainland Chinese students in America has been noticeable since the early 1990s. My empirical study shows that the social-cultural context of mainland China is the point of departure to explain this religious movement. Psychic deprivation and moral crisis in contemporary Chinese society are among the most important factors that have led Chinese students to seek religious resolution. Upon examining how the barriers that have prevented Chinese intellectuals from accepting Christianity have been cleared up and analyzing why Buddhism is less influential among the Chinese student community, I suggested that Christianity, after the active and effective reconstruction by the Chinese Christian organizations, became compatible with the scientific, rational and modernistic ideology of mainland Chinese students. It is on this ground that Christianity is accepted while Buddhism is rejected by Chinese students. Thus, the importance of frame alignment is highlighted.

INDEX WORDS: Sociology, Conversion, Psychic Deprivation, Disruption of moral order, Frame Alignment, the Reconstruction of Christianity, Moral crisis in China, Buddhism, Mainland Chinese students in America, Chinese Christians

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL RESOLUTION AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF
CHRISTIANITY: CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY AMONG MAINLAND
CHINESE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

by

YANFEI SUN

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YANFEI SUN

Approved:

Major Professor: Linda M. Grant

Committee: James J. Dowd
Mark Cooney

Electronic Version Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
December 2001

For my grandparents and parents

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBSG: The Chinese Bible Study Group

CCC: The Chinese Christian Church

CCP: The Chinese Communist Party

CSA: The Chinese Student Association

CSF: The Chinese Student Fellowship

ISO: The International Student Outreach

LCC: The Lakeside Christian Church

PRC: The People's Republic of China

SBS: The Student Buddhist Society

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Following 1847, the year when Yung Ming and two other young men were brought over by the American missionary, Chinese students came to the United States in a steady stream until the establishment of People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (Committee on Survey of Chinese Students in American Colleges and Universities 1954). It was not until President Nixon's 1972 visit to China and the subsequent rapprochement between the two countries that the stream resumed its flow (Orleans 1988). Starting from 1980s, the "going abroad craze" has been quite a phenomenon on Chinese campuses, as studying abroad became one of the most important channels of escape from disappointing economic and political realities for the college graduates (Zhao 1996). According to *Open Doors 2000*, the annual report on international education published by the Institute of International Education (IIE), there were 54,466 Chinese students¹ enrolled in American higher education institutions in the 1999-2000 academic year, surpassing any other international student group. At present, there are 128 American colleges and universities that have at least 100 Chinese students in attendance, and 75 percent are graduate students.² Upon graduation, the majority of Chinese students desire to remain in the United States and adjust to permanent resident status (Orleans 1988). Typically, Chinese students studying in America graduated from Chinese first-tier college and were among the best and brightest in their class. It is without exaggeration to dub them as the cream of Chinese society. As a result of the low ratio of returnees, Chinese suffered a

¹ Chinese students in this thesis refer specifically to mainland Chinese students, not including Chinese students from Taiwan or Hong Kong or other areas.

² Source: Knight Ridder News Service.

“brain drain,” as did many developing countries (Zweig and Chen 1995). In spite of such a huge presence of Chinese students in America, sociological study of this group is very limited in either breadth or depth. The bulk of the previous research focuses on the issue of acculturation (e.g., Fong 1961; Klein, Miller and Alexander 1981; Henderson et al. 1993; Chen 1998).

The past decade witnessed a great surge of collective conversion to Christianity³ among Chinese students and scholars in America. The year of 1989 was suggested as the watershed (Chuang 1995; Yang 1998; Rawson 1999). The June 4th Incident, better known to the West as Tiananmen Massacre, was the turning point for this religious movement. Before 1989, few of Chinese students went to churches, let alone converted to Christianity. The 1989 tragedy turned many Chinese intellectuals in America into seekers of religious consolation and salvation. With their growing interests in Christianity, tens of thousands of the students have flocked into churches, Chinese Bible Study Groups (CBSG) and fellowships (Yang 1999). Their enthusiasm inspired the formation of evangelical organization and ministries by the Chinese Christians and the American churches targeting this group (Yang 1998). A survey report provided by *Overseas Campus*, the most widely read magazine among Chinese Christians in North America, reveals that up to August 2000 there were at least 216 churches and CBSGs that were comprised mainly of Chinese students and scholars in the United States. The churches concentrate in metropolitan cities. They are theologically conservative and assert a higher degree of organizational independence (Yang 1999). Most of the CBSGs locate in the college towns and play an active role in evangelizing Chinese students (Chuang 1995). The evangelization mechanism also includes regional and national seminars, conferences, retreats, and summer camps organized by the Chinese Christians. *Overseas Campus*

³ It would be more precise to refer to this sociological phenomenon as “conversion to Protestantism” instead of “conversion to Christianity”, since the overwhelming majority of the Chinese convert to Protestant Christianity.

published its first issue in Los Angeles in 1992. Since the late 1980s a number of evangelistic retreats have been held to train Chinese Christian leaders. In the year of 1996, Rev. Stephen Tong (Tang Congrong) founded the Reformed Institute for Christianity and 21st Century in America. A number of mainland Chinese scholars were among its first students. A number of Chinese scholars also entered seminaries in North America and later became influential pastors or evangelists among the overseas Chinese community, among whom are Yuan Zhimin, Fan Xuede and Feng Bingcheng (Li Cheng). The openness for Christianity among the Chinese and the intensive evangelization engendered the so-called “Christianity fever” among mainland Chinese intellectuals in America in the 1990s. According to the statistics provided by the Chinese Christian Mission (*zhongguo xintu budaohui*) in 2000, approximately 10 percent of the mainland Chinese in America have converted to Christianity. Since students and scholars comprise the majority of the mainland Chinese in America, we can speculate that the percentage of students and scholars who converted to Christianity might be roughly around 10 percent too. At present, Christianity is the most practiced religion among mainland Chinese students in the United States.

This study intends to look closely at the conversion to Christianity of Chinese students and answer the following questions: What made the students open to Christianity? What influenced them to convert to Christianity instead of other religions?

It would be illuminating if we try to place this conversion movement in a broader context. After the Cultural Revolution, China adopted more lax religion policies. There have been revivals of institutionalized religions and emergence of some quasi-religious movements. One noticeable phenomenon is the rapid growth of Protestant Christianity since 1980s. This spread markedly faster than any other religions, so much so that it was acknowledged by Chinese research institutions as “Christianity fever.” Estimates of the total number of Chinese Protestants range from the official figure of 10 to 12 million to ten times that figure (Dunch 2000; Lambert 1989, 1991). Protestant population are mostly

concentrated in three distinct areas: the coastal provinces of Fujian, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, and Shandong, which were the centers of missionary work before 1949; the provinces in central China, especially Henan and Anhui where the “Christianity fever” took place; and among the minority peoples of southwest China, particularly in Yunnan and Guizhou. The majority of Chinese Protestants are in rural areas, where the characteristics of the converts have been summed up by as the “four manys”: many old people, many women, many sick, and many illiterate. Studies on urban Protestants reveal similar patterns (Dunch 2000; see also Hunter and Chan 1993). Although there are reports that churches in Beijing and Shanghai are sometimes packed by university students (Hunter and Rimmington 1992; Hunter and Chan 1993), the majority of the young intellectuals⁴ in China remain indifferent or resistant to the increasing presence of Christianity in Chinese society. One question then crops up: Why do young Chinese intellectuals on the two sides of the Pacific Ocean show different attitudes towards Christianity? Or, to word the question differently, what has caused the dramatic change of attitude towards Christianity for Chinese students in America?

Historically, Chinese intellectuals had a rich anti-Christian tradition (Cohen [1963] 1967). Ever since the Jesuits brought Catholicism to China around the turn of the 17th century, Chinese intellectuals have steadfastly and vehemently rejected Christianity for different reasons at different historical periods. In 17C, they denounced Christianity because it was considered disruptive to traditional Chinese social order and contradictory to traditional Chinese culture, especially the orthodox Confucianism (Cohen [1963] 1967); Starting from the mid 19C, Christianity was repudiated by Chinese intellectuals because the ascending nationalist leadership in China resented its association with the Western invasion (Cohen [1963] 1967; Lutz 1988); Another essential reason that Chinese intellectuals rejected Christianity is that it was regarded as the antithesis of science and

⁴ The term “intellectual” is used very broadly in China to include anyone with even some college education.

modernity (Levenson 1968). The last theme became salient in the student Anti-Christian Movement in the 1920s and remains relevant today. My questions therefore are: Why do the obstacles that had prevented Chinese intellectuals from accepting Christianity no longer exist, or are of little concern for Chinese students studying in America today? How were they removed?

Before addressing these questions, I will review the rich literature on religious conversion in the sociological tradition and state my research methods.

CHAPTER 2

THE SOCIOLOGY OF CONVERSION

In this chapter, we will first review several major competing theories of religious conversion, and then proceed to discuss critically some prior research that has been done on the conversion of the Chinese to Christianity in America.

A 1999 article by Lewis Rambo lists 14 theories of religious conversion from the disciplines of anthropology, psychology and sociology (Rambo 1999). However, most of the theories in that article are not very sociological in nature. In addition, the overview is very sketchy. So far, the most comprehensive overview of conversion from sociology is still the one offered by Snow and Machalek in 1984. Religious conversion has been among the most frequent topics in sociology of religion. The study of conversion has been triggered by many “new” religious movements that pervaded America in the 1960s and the next two decades (e.g., Lofland and Stark 1965; Lofland 1977; Snow 1976; Heirich 1977; Balch 1980). Most of the research has been focused on the causes of conversion.

DEPRIVATION THEORY

Deprivation theory is the long-established point of view on why people join cults and sects (Clark 1937; Linton 1943; Wilson 1959; Glock and Stark 1965; Balch and Taylor 1977). It combines “assessment of the particular appeals offered by a group’s ideology with an analysis of the kinds of deprivations for which this ideology offers relief” (Stark and Bainbridge 1980:1377). Deprivation, by definition, is “any and all of the ways that an individual or group may be, or feel disadvantaged in comparison either

to other individuals or groups or to an internalized set of standards.” (Glock and Stark 1965:246). There are five types of deprivation: economic, social, organismic, ethical, and psychic (1965). Although deprivation theory explains much, it is not sufficient to account for why only small fraction of the people who suffer deprivation and are attracted to the ideology actually join the group (Stark and Bainbridge 1980. For a comprehensive critique of this theory, see Wuthnow 1987:152-154).

SOCIAL NETWORK

Deprivation theory was supplemented by sociologists’ recognition of the importance of social network in recruiting. Lofland and Stark, based on the study of the earlier American devotees of the Unification Church (popularly known today as the Moonies), constructed the well-known and widely tested model of conversion, which identifies a sequence of factors that lead a person from a nonmember up to a committed devotee. “For conversion,” the model suggests, “a person must (1) experience enduring, acutely felt tensions, (2) within a religious problem-solving perspective, (3) which lead him to define himself as a religious seeker, (4) encountering the [religious movement] at a turning point in his life, (5) wherein an affective bond is formed (or pre-exists) with one or more converts, (6) where extra-cult attachments are absent or neutralized, and (7) where if he is to become a deployable agent, he is exposed to intensive interaction” (Lofland and Stark 1965:874). The model reveals that conversion frequently moved through pre-existing extramovement friendship pairs or nets. Aware of the appeal of affective bond, the cult employed it as a strategy to win potential converts. This technique of seeking prospective converts by encapsulating them with intensive love and affection was known as “love bombing” (Lofland 1977:308). More often than not, people moved into the Moonie commune not because of the appeal of its ideology but because of their attachment to group members. Acceptance of the ideology and transformation of worldview, or commitment at both verbal and behavioral level, came only after a period of intensive interaction with cult members.

The Lofland-Stark model has been widely cited and tested by sociologists studying conversion. Snow and Phillips's (1980) study on *Nichiren Shoshu* Buddhist movement, while calling into question the necessity of the other factors and posing a most powerful challenge to the generalizability of the entire model, not only supports but accentuates the essential importance of interpersonal bond and intensive interaction to conversion. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge's (1980) study finds that interpersonal bond plays a significant role not only in conversion to cult and sect membership but in commitment to conventional faiths as well. Testing the model with ten cases of conversion in different groups, Arthur Greil and David Rudy (1984) find the same two factors to be indispensable. Other subsequent research also corroborates the significance of these two factors (Roof and McKinney 1987; Cornwall 1987).

However, to focus solely on social networks and interpersonal bond as the key to understanding conversion patterns can yield an overly mechanistic analysis (Wallis and Bruce 1982; Snow et al. 1986). Furthermore, micromobilization is insufficient to explain collective conversion movement.

CONVERT AS AN ACTIVE AGENT

In the Lofland-Stark's conversion model, the convert is for the most part a passive figure pulled by various social forces beyond his/her control, be it intensive interaction or "love-bombing." A number of sociologists argue that the agent—the potential convert—plays a more active role in the process of conversion, making choices and seeking conversion (Balch 1979) or even changing the face of the religion to which they convert (Ng 2000). Based on several empirical studies on participation in social movements, including religious movements, Snow et al. contend that a convert seeks to align his or her conceptual worldview with that of a religious group as a prerequisite for participation (1986).

In spite of the plethora of literature on conversion, the part and parcel of it was constructed on the basis of empirical studies of the conversion to "deviant" cult or

unconventional religious movement. Whether these findings can be generalized to conversion to mainstream religion, or to immigrants' conversion to the dominant religion of the "new country," is much understudied. Another critique is that previous research largely overlooked the macro-level social-cultural contexts in which the conversion takes place (see Yang 1998).

PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON CHINESE CONVERSION IN AMERICA

In recent years, the burgeoning phenomenon of Chinese conversion to Christianity in America began to attract the attention of sociologists. Fenggang Yang is among the first to provide an explanation from the sociological perspective (Yang 1998). Based on his in-depth ethnography in a Chinese church in Washington D.C., where he himself received baptism, as well as intensive interviews with the congregants, Yang rejects the argument that the need for economic benefits, and/or the need for assimilation to the dominant culture of the host country, and/or the need for ethnic belonging as explanations for conversion. According to him, social and cultural changes in China are the most important factor. The turbulent process of modernization in China and the forced immigration of Chinese to the United States have caused many traumatic experiences for the immigrants. With the erosion and destruction of Chinese cultural traditions, they cling to Christianity to anchor their lives. The institutional factor, i.e. evangelical missionaries in Asia, campus evangelical organizations in North America, and conservative Chinese churches and organizations in the US, is included as one of the factors in Yang's explanation, but of secondary importance.

One big question is about the generalizability of Yang's findings. Yang's primary research subjects are well-educated, professional middle-class Chinese immigrants. Although Yang does not mention the age range of his interviewees, the examples he cites are mostly middle-agers or elders. There is a huge difference in demographic characteristics as well as life experience between Yang's research subjects and Chinese

students now studying in the American graduate schools. Whether Yang's findings can be extended to the Chinese student population is still to be researched. For instance, Yang insists that the Chinese immigrants turned into religious seekers because of their traumatic experience in wars, political campaigns, the Cultural Revolution, and the recent Tiananmen Massacre as well as the experience of forced immigration. However, the majority of Chinese students currently enrolled in the American higher educational institutions, who are under the age of 35 (born after 1966), had not experienced the tribulations of wars or political campaigns. The Cultural Revolution is only a vague memory to them. The younger students under the age of 30 (born after 1971) were not in college in the year of 1989, and thus were less involved in the Student Democratic Movement and less traumatized by the Tiananmen Massacre.

Certain social-cultural conditions may give rise to the surge of religiosity at certain historical periods. But how do we explain why some of the Chinese converted while some did not? To find why, it would be necessary to include non-converts as research subjects. However, Yang did not study nonconverts, so the design of his study did not permit him to address this question.

Kwai Huang Ng (2000) uses the conversion of Chinese immigrants to conservative Protestantism as an entry point to investigate the intricate relationship between religion and ethnicity. His 18-month ethnography of a Chinese church in a metropolitan city in the Midwest yields some intriguing findings. He finds that the Chinese congregants perceive God as a tutelary god who provides practical blessings and guidance instead of a savior who cleanses one's sin. Such an image of God fulfils the psychological needs typical of immigrants in a foreign land where they often find themselves powerless and helpless. Conversion is reinterpreted as a response to divine tutelage. Consequently, the Chinese converts fashion the "foreign religion" to which they convert into something reminiscent of the Chinese popular religion that traditionally emphasizes practical guardianship and concrete blessings. Ng (2000:18) therefore

concludes that immigrant converts “do not simply convert passively to Christianity; but also actively convert Christianity into a faith that resonates with their own cultural values and sensibilities.” Hunter and Chan in their study of the Protestants in China also find that a major reason for conversion among the Chinese is that their petitionary prayers to God for healing, protection or wealth have been answered. Ng’s findings is concordant with anthropological studies of conversion to world religion among African, Asian and Latin American societies which find that converts often incorporate new form of worship into an already existing indigenous religion (e.g., Wolf 1958; Ikenga-Metuh 1987; Jordan 1993). Conversion is thus not only about submission, but also about innovation.

Despite the complex and intriguing portrait of the Chinese conversion that Ng’s paper reveals, the phenomenon demands a more thorough investigation. First of all, Ng’s paper overlooks the social-cultural context in which this religious movement is happening. Second, although Ng’s research subjects include some Chinese graduate students and one of the examples he cites in his paper is a student, how his finding can be generalized to the mainland Chinese student population in America is subject to question. Although the early Chinese immigrants retained many beliefs and practices of Chinese folk religion in the host country, the overwhelming majority of Chinese graduate students, before their conversion to Christianity, were atheists. Chinese folk religion is to them a despicable “superstition” that they do not want to associate with. Therefore, it is not likely that they integrated an indigenous religion into the “new” religion in an innovative manner. Since the students had little exposure to Christianity prior to conversion, I would like to suggest that they simply took for granted that what they encountered in the Chinese immigrant church was what Christianity ought to be. Third, Ng suggested that Chinese immigrants suffered psychological deprivation. But that does not necessarily lead them to conversion of Christianity. Why did they choose Christianity, instead of other religions that were available among the Chinese community in the United States, say the Chinese folk religions?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

I collected my data from a large state university in the Southeast with approximately 300 mainland Chinese graduate students enrolled. As for the religious configuration, it is estimated that about 14 percent of Chinese students had accepted Christianity as their faith in the United States⁵; around 5 out of 300 identified themselves as Buddhists; The rest had no religious affiliations. The Chinese Christian Church⁶ (CCC) in the university town was my major ethnographic field site. From 1999 to 2000, I attended the CCC on a weekly basis. I participated in their Friday evening student fellowship, Sunday morning English Bible class, and Sunday worship, as well as attended various social gatherings. Another field site of mine, the Lakeside Christian Church (LCC), sponsored the Chinese Student Fellowship (CSF). I joined their Saturday evening Bible studies, Sunday worship, and other activities on 9 occasions. In the following, I describe the two field sites in greater detail.

THE CCC

The church does not have its own building. It holds its regular activities in the building that belongs to the Campus Christian Student Union. Formerly a Chinese Bible Study Group, it was established around mid 1970s by a group of students from Taiwan with help of some American residents in this university town. Its membership was mainly

⁵ A few words about how I arrived at the 14 percent. I interviewed the leaders of both the CCC and the CSF to get the number of mainland Chinese students who have been baptized in the last five years. To that number, I added 2 more students who attended American churches other than the CCC or the CSF. I then divided the figure by the total population of mainland Chinese students currently enrolled in the university.

⁶ The names of all churches and individuals in this thesis are all pseudonyms.

comprised of Taiwanese students from the inception. At that time, the minister or the elders of the Chinese Church in the nearby big city would drive every Sunday afternoon to deliver sermons to the group. During 1987 and 1988, the Sunday worship was temporarily discontinued as many students joined Sunday worships in American churches and as the Chinese church in the big city urged the Bible Study Group to prepare its own sermons. From 1991 to 1995, there were approximately 25 students from Hong Kong who formed a Cantonese Fellowship. After 1995, the student population from Hong Kong declined, and the Cantonese Fellowship became defunct. Before 1988, few mainland Chinese joined in. 1989 was clearly a turning point. Many Taiwanese joined mainland Chinese students in the university to voice their support for the student democratic movement that took place in mainland China. The tragic Tiananmen Massacre invoked sympathy towards the mainland Chinese on the part of the Taiwanese Christians. The animosity and apathy that existed between mainland Chinese and Taiwanese because of antagonistic political stances was melting away. More and more mainland Chinese began to participate in the activities sponsored by the CBSG. Since 1998, mainland Chinese have already become the majority in the group, although Taiwanese still predominated in leadership roles. In the same year, the CBSG changed its name to the present “Chinese Christian Church.” For the church, 1998 was especially a strong growth year, when nearly 20 students accepted Jesus Christ at the church. During the year 1999-2000 when I conducted my fieldwork, attendants of this church were mainly comprised of students, post-doctoral fellows, visiting scholars from mainland China, professionals originally from Taiwan⁷, and their family members. The mainland Chinese and Taiwanese in the CCC maintain a very cordial relationship. Politics, especially the tension between the PRC and Taiwan, is determinedly avoided in conversations.

⁷ Including university faculties and staffs, and people working in government agencies or industries.

The evolution of the CCC from a CBSG is very much consistent with the pattern of many Chinese churches all over America (Yang 1999:6). Like many other Chinese churches, it is conservative, evangelistic, nondenominational and independent (Yang 1999:7; see also Ren 2000). During the time of my participant observation, the church did not have a minister. Its strong connection with some American churches, however, enabled it to arrange those who have received Jesus in the CCC to get baptized in an American church.

The President and various group leaders of the CCC are named by a nomination council that consists of several senior church members and one or two new members. Taiwanese professionals assume the leadership of the church. There are 10 groups of co-workers, namely the Student Fellowship, the Adult Fellowship, the Children Sunday Bible class, the Education Group, the Out-reach Group, the Communication and Transportation Group, the Logistics Group, Treasurer, Music and Library. The Student Fellowship is comprised of students, post-doctoral fellows and their spouses, while the Adult Fellowship of professionals consists of visiting scholars and their spouses. Both groups meet on Friday evenings. For the Student Fellowship, the members will select a book in the Bible to study and assign each chapter to one of the members. The student who has the assignment will prepare the chapter beforehand. His/her responsibility is to steer the study session and invoke some discussions. Usually, a senior church member who is knowledgeable enough about the Bible to answer difficult questions and solve disputes is also present. A typical Friday evening is attended by 10 students or so. To attract more students, the Student Fellowship occasionally holds a potluck party at the house of a senior church member. This practice fluctuates according to the will of the majority. One semester, a potluck party was held once a month. Another semester saw only two such occasions. The activities of the Adult Fellowship are more flexible and versatile. Hymn signing, video watching, and presentations are often interspersed with serious Bible studies.

During university semesters, church attendance remains around 60 on a typical Sunday. There are four Bible classes in session from 10 to 11am. Two are in English, taught by American volunteers. Two are in Mandarin Chinese, led by senior church members. The Taiwanese in the CCC are almost as equally fluent in Mandarin Chinese as the mainland Chinese. Mandarin Chinese is therefore used as the conversational language within the church. The English Bible classes are attended by students, post-doctoral students as well as their spouses. Usually Gospels are studied in the classes. The Chinese Bible classes, mostly attended by middle-aged or older people, present itself in a more lively style. Study materials are from the New Testaments as well as the Old Testaments. Videos are employed as teaching materials.

At 11am, with the piano in sanctuary flowing out melodious and peaceful music, people are walking into the sanctuary. The two stained glass windows are the only eye-catching ornaments in the sanctuary, which can easily contain 150 people. The moveable chairs are arranged into three blocks of pews, in front of which is the pulpit. There are two desks at the very rear of the sanctuary, on which stacks of Bibles and Hymnal books as well as a donation box are placed. Two or three ushers standing behind the two desks are inserting a slip of paper into the Hymnal book and then handing out the Bible and the Holy Hymnal to people. This slip of paper lists the general schedule of church activities, the contact information, the worship order for that day, the co-workers on duty, the total donations received last week and attendance of last Sunday. There are two kinds of Bibles, one in simplified Chinese characters used by the Mainlanders, one in complicated traditional Chinese characters used by people from Taiwan or Hong Kong. Some people bring their own Bibles. The Holy Hymnal contains 527 traditional hymns. Sunday worship starts with hymn singings, followed by recitation of a poem from Psalms, and recitation of the Apostles' Creed. After the second hymn, the congregation is asked to read verses in the Bible on which the sermon is based. The sermon is alternately given by two senior church members from Taiwan in Mandarin Chinese. It is often an expository

of Biblical doctrines with advice on their application in real life. Chinese cultural values and customs are often alluded to in their sermons. The 40-minute long sermon is followed by the third hymn. After that, the presider customarily asks for newcomers in the pews. After s/he stands up and introduces herself/himself, the congregants will give the newcomer warm welcoming applause. An usher then approaches the first-time visitor and asks her/him to fill out a personal information card. After the president gives a brief report, the presider will conclude the worship with a prayer. With the rise of familiar music, everybody stands up, singing the doxology. They then sit down again and pray in silence. In a moment, the solemn sanctuary becomes vivacious as people stand up and engage in greetings and conversations with each other. Several people walk to the back desks and slip a check into the slot of the donation box. This Chinese Church is solely supported by the offerings of its members. The Sunday worship ends around 12:30pm. But most people linger in the hall, socializing with one another until 1:00am. In general, the Sunday worship is very formalized and lacks climax. The atmosphere is very “lukewarm,” as one Chinese student put it.

Every year, the CCC hosts a reception for new students and a Thanksgiving dinner. Usually around 200 people show up at such an occasion. Probably only the Chinese New Year party hosted by the Chinese Student Association (CSA) can be comparable in the number of the Chinese attendees. Throughout the year, the CCC invite Chinese pastors or preachers to come and preach.

THE CSF

The American church LCS was founded in 1980. Like the CCC, it is a non-denominational church. It has a registered membership of around 1000. The majority of the congregants are residents of this college town. In January 1998, its International Student Outreach (ISO) started the Chinese Student Fellowship (CSF). As of 2001, the CSF is the only fellowship that ISO has for international students. Mark, the leader of the CSF, explained that the initiation of this fellowship is a response to the growing

enthusiasm for Christianity among Chinese students. According to him, no other international student groups show similar degree of interest in Christianity. The CSF has a core group of 15 to 18 members who are regularly involved in its activities. There is also a “perimeter group” (Mark’s words) of 20 to 25 people who attend the activities once every month or once every other month. In its short 3 and a half-year history, the CSF has led altogether 30 Chinese students to the baptismal pool. The meeting of the CSF on every Saturday evening usually attracts 15 to 25 students. Compared to the Friday evening Student Fellowship in the CCC, the CSF has a more versatile learning style. Sometimes they study a book in the New Testament by chapters. Other times the entire meeting is devoted to questions and answers. The CSF frequently organizes holiday celebrations, picnics, and trips. It also helps the CSA to hold celebration parties for traditional Chinese festivals, such as the New Year’s Eve and the Lantern Festival.

Having attended the Sunday service at the CCC for half a year, I was quite taken aback the first time I walked into the LCC’s sanctuary. Its Sunday service stands as strikingly different from that of the CCC. It has two services at different time periods on Sundays, each attended by 300 or 400 people. The congregants stand up, singing lively modern hymns one after another. They hold hands with people seated nearby and clap their hands while singing. There are spontaneous prayers by the pastor and the congregants. The prayer time is often emotionally charged. Some people cannot help weeping; Others stretch their arms towards the altar. The prayer is often echoed by loud “yes!”, “Amen” or “Oh, Lord, have mercy!” After the pastor delivers the sermon, some people go and kneel down before the altar. Compared to the CCC, the Sunday worship at the LCC represents a more typically “evangelical” style. Chinese students who attend the Sunday service never venture to speak out their prayers in public or kneel down before the altar. But they are at ease singing the hymns and clapping hands. Some with more out-going personalities would hold up their arms while others pray.

Besides doing participant observation with the CCC and the CSF, I once attended a regional Chinese Christian Conference at a retreat center in Alabama. I also occasionally participated in a small Bible study group of three Chinese students led by an American missionary on the campus.

THE STUDENT BUDDHIST SOCIETY (SBS)

In order to investigate the reasons why still more Chinese students distance themselves away from Christianity, I decided to pick a non-Christian group in order to do participant observation. The Student Buddhist Society (SBS), in which I myself was a member⁸, naturally came to my mind. My choice is not merely a matter of convenience, but because Buddhism is the most common Chinese traditional religion and a competing religion to Christianity among the overseas Chinese. I will further describe the SBS in Chapter 6.

INTERVIEWS

In addition to participant observation, I also conducted semi-structured or unstructured interviews with 29 people. The length of the interviews was mostly between

⁸ I believe it important to reveal enough about myself, especially my own religious orientation, so that the readers can better judge “what I saw, what I missed, and what I misconstrued” (Peshkin, 1986:15). I acquired my Buddhist identity back in China. While I was doing my participant observation among Chinese Christians, my religious identity rendered some disquieting at first and later interesting experiences. At the initial stage of negotiating access to the Christian churches, I was asked about my religious orientation. My reply drew different reactions ranging from curiosity, surprise, to suspicion. The Chinese Christians were supportive and cooperative with my research. However, the more important goal for them was to save my soul. I met intense proselytization, especially during the first half period of my fieldwork. Some avid Christians enjoyed debating with me about Buddhism. Their condemnation of Buddhism as “idol worship” or “false doctrine” sometimes would disturb me. At first, I remained uncomfortably silent in public occasions but ventured out to be an apologist of Buddhism in private conversations with Christians. After the initial period, I became more self-conscious of my researcher identity and was far less perturbed. If my fieldwork had any impact on my own religion at all, it would be that my Buddhist identity was strengthened. I was chastised that my heart was “as hard as rock.” I was spurned that I could not understand the true reasons of conversion if I only treated it as a research object. I believe that as an outsider my interpretation of this phenomenon has many limitations. “Yet who does not approach a phenomenon with limitations of some sort resulting from their personal life history?” asked Alan Peshkin, a Jewish social scientist who did participant observation in a Christian fundamentalist school (1986:18). On the other hand, I also believe that being outsider also renders me a unique perspective not otherwise available to an insider.

1 and 2 hours. A few of the interviews were as long as 3 to 4 hours. My interviewees include the lay leader of the CCC, the leader of the CSF, Chinese students who have become Christians in America, Chinese students who expressed strong interest in Christianity but have not yet received baptism at the time of the interview, and those who basically stayed away from the church or showed little interest in accepting Christianity. I made acquaintances with most of the Christian interviewees and those interested in Christianity during my participation in church activities. For some of them, I had the opportunity to observe the entire process of their conversion, from the first time they walked into the church to the time when they accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior and to the time when they received baptism. Therefore, much of the information obtained from the interview can be cross-checked by my own observation. I knew most of the non-Christian interviewees before the interviews. Some of the interviewees were recruited through the snowball method. I asked the interviewees to refer me to other Chinese students who might be relevant to my research. Sometimes the interviewees voluntarily recommended people who they thought would make an interesting case for my study.

Table 1. Student Interviewees*

	Christians who already received baptism	Those interested in converting to Christianity but not ready to receive baptism	Those who show little interest in accepting Christianity	Total
Male	6	4	7	17
Female	4	2	4	10
Total	10	6	11	27

*Including one post-doctoral fellow. Because his experience as a graduate student is preponderate in the interview, I categorized him as one of the student interviewees.

The age range of the student interviewees is from 23 to 32. They started their elementary education after the Cultural Revolution. Ten of them majored in humanities or social sciences, 17 in natural sciences. Among the interviewees, one was a post-

doctoral fellow, 2 recently graduated and started to work, but the rest were graduate students at the time of the interview. Except for 2 students from other universities, all the other 25 respondents were from the large state university where I did my fieldwork. Among the 25 interviewees, however, 3 had transferred to this school from another school in America. Their interviews were focused on those years in their first school in America when their conversion happened or when they had the first most intensive exposure to Christianity. The post-doctoral fellow also related his experience from his time as a graduate student in another school. All these add diversity to the sample of the research and make the research findings more representative.

Except for the interview with Mark which was done in English, all the other interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, the native tongue of the Chinese interviewees. For the first 5 interviews, I translated them into English while transcribing but only discovered that the richness of the Chinese expressions and the nuances of meaning suffered a considerable loss after translation. I then started to transcribe the rest interviews in the original tongue. Such doing proved to have an additional merit, i.e. the laborious transcribing process was sped up to a great extent.

None of the interviewees identified himself/herself as a Christian before coming to America. Four students had more exposure to Christianity compared to the rest of the interviewees. One grew up in a city with strong Christian influence. He had prayed to God since elementary school. Two of the students had been befriended by American English teachers who spread the Christian message to them in private conversations. One student had read the New Testament thoroughly and thought highly of the moral values of Jesus' teachings. Except for these four students, the rest of the interviewees had very superficial contact with Christianity back in China. Some students had read Bible stories primarily as reading materials to learn English. Others had attended a Christian church on a Christmas Eve when they were in college. It was a fad among Chinese college students to celebrate Christmas Eve in a church. Most of the students went to church out of

curiosity or even admiration for Western culture. It would be misleading to conclude that the church goings of young college students on Christmas Eve or even other days indicated their interest in the religion itself.

For this study, I also analyzed various articles in the widely circulated magazine *Overseas Campus* published by Chinese Christians in North America and influential books written by Chinese pastors or evangelists in North America. The latter included Yuan Zhimin's *Shenzhou hanhui lu (China's Confession)*, Li Cheng's *Youzi ying (Song of a Prodigal: Beckoned by Eternity)* and Wei Yan's *Kexue yu xinyang (Science and Faith: A Letter to Friends in the Chinese Intelligentsia)*. I will analyze them in Chapter 5 to illustrate how Christianity has been deconstructed and reconstructed by the Chinese Christian evangelists.

DEFINITION OF CONVERSION

Before proceeding with the analysis, I will define conversion first. The conceptualization of conversion remains a debated issue. Snow and Machalek, after examining the definition of conversion in pervious literature, suggest that conversion is more fundamental than a change in values, beliefs and identities. For them, conversion "entails the displacement of one universe of discourse by another or the ascendance of a formerly peripheral universe of discourse to the status of a primary authority" (Snow and Machelek 1984:170). In an empirical study, public demonstrations of conversion are frequently used as indicators.

Within the churches where I did the participant observation, conversion often takes the tangible form of two steps. The person first professes that s/he accepts Jesus Christ as her/his Savior. The Chinese phrase for this important step is "*juezhi*." *Jue* means to decide and *zhi* means orientation. *Juezhi* together means that one has decided to choose Christianity as his/her life orientation. It usually is demonstrated as one answers the call from the preacher or s/he approaches the minister or the lay leader to express her/his

willingness to accept Jesus as her/his Savior. *Juezhi* is consummated when the person says a typical prayer like this, “Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life and receive You as my Savior and Lord.” After *juezhi*, the person is expected to receive baptism. One interesting phenomenon that I observed among Chinese students is that many hesitated to receive baptism, even long after *juezhi*. Some had undergone *juezhi* several times without having been baptized. Chinese students took baptism very seriously: *juezhi* might be inspired by the moment, but baptism, instead of being a ritual to confirm the newfound faith, symbolizes the determination of breaking with former identities, the complete transformation of one’s Worldview, and the willingness to fully commit to the Christian way of life. Inasmuch as that baptism is perceived to entail such rich symbolic meanings, the students are reluctant to embrace it. But once they agree to receive it, most of them would undergo the conversion in the sense of Snow and Machelek’s definition. For this study, I treat baptism as the empirical indicator of conversion.

CHAPTER 4

SEARCHING FOR ESTOCHALOGICAL RESOLUTION

SEEKING FOR A MEANINGFUL SELF

On campuses all across America, mainland Chinese students display great enthusiasm towards Christianity. Compared to other international student groups in the United States, the mainland China student group is the most responsive to the Christian Gospel message. However, the religious effervescence among Chinese students in America is not an isolated phenomenon. Mainland China at the same time is experiencing an extraordinary surge of religiosity. This religious verve is reflected in the revival of Buddhism and folk religion. The Chinese folk religion is a syncretic religion, which blends Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian elements. Taoism is a bifurcated phenomenon. It includes the quietistic philosophy which derives from classics that bear the name of *Lao Zi (Lao Tzu)* and *Zhuang Zi (Chuang Tzu)* and an array of popular or folk religious practices and pantheistic worship. The line of distinction between Taoism and folk religion is historically blurred. The religious enthusiasm is also manifested in the dynamic growth of Christianity, especially of Protestant Christianity, since the communist reign ended its systematic persecution towards religious believers in 1979. There are no informed and consistent statistics about the total population of Chinese Protestants. The government sanctioned figure of 10 to 12 million is clearly an underestimated one, because it does not include the large population of underground Christians who meet in independent and underground house churches and have not registered in the official Three Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) churches. Some Christian organizations outside China claim the total number of Chinese Protestants is ten

times the official figure. The religious ferment in Chinese society is also embodied in the para-religious movement since 1980s, from the Qigong Boom (see Zhu and Penny 1994) to the astounding rise of Falun Gong. The central doctrine of Falun Gong is a blend of Buddhist teaching, Taoist practice and qigong. Founded in 1992, Falun Gong soon swept the entire nation. Before the government crackdown in April 1999, it had 39 provincial branches with 1,900 lower-level "guidance stations" and 23,000 practice sites. The official estimation is that Falun Gong had acquired 2 million adherents while the group itself claimed 100 million practitioners (*McCarthy* 1999. Vol.154. No.6:48-50). The surge of religiosity inside China is a reflection of the widespread and growing undercurrent of tension in Chinese society. Many people, experiencing the fragmentation, disorientation, and dislocation of the self, are seeking a religious resolution, for the meaning and purpose of life when that resolution becomes available and acceptable.

In the interviews with students who became committed to Christianity as well as the testimonies⁹ that I collected from Christian magazines and Christian websites, many of them mentioned how meaningless and rootless their life used to be before accepting Christianity as their faith. Several of the interviewees who were on their way to conversion or eager to explore Christianity expressed desperation, due to the emptiness of life and their hope that Christianity might fill the void.

"I am this kind of person—How much I want to find a goal that I can devote to, a way that I can walk for the rest of my life," said Li wistfully in the interview. The 27 year-old Ph.D. student in Computer Science expressed enthusiasm in Christianity at the time of the interview but had not yet undergone *juezhi*. He was in a pensive mood when speaking about the past.

Li grew up in a poor family in a small town in Southwest China. An A+ student in high school, he was exempted from the required College Entrance Examination and was

⁹ Efforts have been made in selecting the cases to ensure that conversions had happened at the time when the witness studying as a graduate student in the United States.

directly recruited into a top-notch university in Shanghai. However, excitement and bewilderment in the initial stage was soon replaced by disappointment and unhappiness, which would characterize his college life. Competition in his class was inhumanly fierce. Having little similarity with his better-off, metropolitan, and perhaps also snobbish classmates, he had difficulty in making close friends. He wanted to adapt to the dominant culture, to be like his more carefree and more “cool” classmates, but was frustrated by the existence of an invisible wall. “The repressive four years” saw him alternating between self-humiliation and self-glorification. The feeling that he had lost himself repeatedly bothered him: The past no longer had a tight hold on him; the present was all confusing and “quite dull”; the future remained frightfully obscure—he had little idea about what he was going to do in the future. In his graduation year, he experienced social injustice and inequality. Like any other student from less developed regions, he wanted to find a job in Shanghai instead of going back to hometown. However, due to the discriminatory job placement policy towards students from other provinces, he eventually ended up in a small factory in his hometown. Failure to stay in Shanghai was regarded as a stigma, and he refused to accept it. Therefore, in the following year, he struggled to make his way back to Shanghai or Beijing. He changed jobs four times during this period. Frustration, self-pity, humiliation, and distress sometimes overwhelmed him. Nevertheless, he knew that he had no one to rely on but himself. So he picked up courage and fought on. One year after his graduation, panicked by the feeling that he was going to stuck in his situation forever, he quit his job abruptly. With one single suitcase and 500 yuan (approximately US\$60) in his pocket, he went up to Beijing and embarked on his adventure. How he was stricken by the maddening helplessness and loneliness one evening when standing on a flyover and watching cars rushing and going out of sight became part of his harrowing memory. Li found a job in a Taiwan-based company and worked there for almost a year. Then he successfully passed exams and entered a graduate program in a university in Beijing. But he did not stay there to get his Master’s

degree. Destined to be a sojourner, he moved on. A year later, he came to America for his graduate study. However, the kind of restlessness and angst haunted him more than ever before. In China, he was too engrossed in personal struggle and success to be self-conscious of his restlessness and angst. It was in the United States that he finally had a feeling of settling down and started to ponder on his state of mind. His contemplation about spiritual needs was also triggered by the exposure to Christianity. The following is excerpted from an e-mail that he wrote to me to discuss spirituality after he had attended an American church three weeks in a row:

Half a year has passed since my arrival in the US. I have been disturbed by lots of issues. I want to be a real professional instead of just making a living. But lots of times, I can't feel any sincere enthusiasm towards my study and research. I also worried about lots of material issues. There are times when I was so obsessed by what I have lost or don't have that I sank into a state of depression. I am living a life with no will power, no self-discipline, just like going with the wind. No excitement. Feeling no sincerity. No appreciation for anything. Dead. Desperate.

His going to the church was a happenstance but his being captivated by Christianity was not. His immediate motivation to go to the church was to find some "old warm-hearted people" there to teach him American cooking. Serendipitously, he found that Christian teachings might be salubrious to his psyche:

Attending church gave me some exposure to spiritual issues. What I found interesting there are: Loving your enemies, talking with God, faith in God, prayer. All of these from Christianity started me to think differently, though I still have doubts.... Hope I can find eternal strong spiritual power from Christianity. Hope to be a spiritual person, because in some ways, I am touched by lots of seemingly subtle things which are not popular in the mundane world.

Li's experience wonderfully reflects how various social forces in the unsettling contemporary Chinese society have impinged on the self. Coming from the tradition-imbued small town to the center of China's modernization, he suffered "cultural shock," the intensity of which was no less than what he later experienced in America. The simple worldview and values that he acquired during his adolescence were shaken as he encountered the pluralistic modern culture. He consequently underwent a self-identity

crisis. The self-disorientation and self-fragmentation were intensified during the three years after graduation when he endured many ordeals. And yet he loathed this state of being and wanted to change it. As he said himself, he was hankering for a goal that he could devote to and a way that he could walk for the rest of his life. In other words, he was seeking for an eschatological resolution for his problematic existence as perceived by himself. By eschatological resolution, we mean “socially constructed attitudes towards or images of a future that provides an end-state for the individual, group, society, world, or cosmos” (Weigert 1988:273).

When I look at the cases of the 16 Christian converts and those who were interested in conversion, I find the majority of them had similar backgrounds to Li's, i.e., growing up in a village or a town and entering into a college in a metropolis. For some of them with whom I had the opportunity to conduct a life history interview, I find a striking similarity between their life experience and Li's. For example, Fang, a Forestry Ph.D. student, converted to Christianity in his second year. He grew up in the countryside. Superb scores in the College Entrance Exams enabled him to enter a college in Shanghai. After “idling” four years in college, he was placed in a township village enterprise in his home province and worked there for three years. He helped his family pay off the debt and built a new house and then reentered his university for his Master's degree. Before coming to America, he worked for another three years in Shanghai. During the time, his on-again-off-again relationship with a Shanghai girl was a constant source of his frustration. He sighed in the interview, “During those years, I felt life was full of haphazard factors. In this capricious ocean of Fate, humans are like a tiny boat, buffeted by the billows and tossed to an arbitrary place. So many things were beyond my control. For many times, I lost the sense of direction altogether; I floated with the waves.”

What Li, Fang, and many other students experienced would be labeled as alienation by classical sociologists. The classical critique on modernization is that it produces profound alienation, which sees that “modern man as uprooted, alone, without

secure status, cut off from community or any system of clear moral purpose” (Nisbet 1966:265). As Durkheim saw it, industrialization, revolutions, rapid social changes demolished the traditional social institutions and communities that used to bind man together and provide him with meaning and purpose for his life and justify his suffering. Release from community and tradition results in intolerable aloneness, anxiety, depression, disillusionment and despair (Durkheim 1951). As “the forces of industrialization, urbanization, the rapidity of social changes have increasingly dislodged the self from its moorings in social status, rank, and religious doctrine” (Gecas 1994:143-144), the result is self-dislocation and self-disorientation. The prototypical modern self is the fragmented self, which “is radically bereft of coherence and continuity, an extreme expression of dissociation” (Lifton 1993). In China, however, the disruption of traditions, industrialization, and urbanization all took place in a much shorter period than in most of the Western countries. As Hunter and Rimmington point out,

Disruption of the old traditions was profound in Europe and the USA, but the effects were at least mitigated by the relatively gentle pace of change. In many countries this took place over two or three centuries, allowing new forms of civil society to emerge and stabilize. The process has been more sudden and the consequences often more severe where agrarian societies have been catapulted into rapid industrialization in the span of a few generations, often as a result of a modernizing elite implementing changes from above. (1992:12)

What characterizes China in the past three decades is massive social change. The historically unprecedented social changes have frayed social and moral fabrics, leaving people immensely confused and disoriented. The impact of social changes was more intensely felt by students like Li and Fang, who moved from more traditional rural areas to modern metropolis for college education. As old values and norms were disrupted, there is nothing there to replace them. The following case can illustrate the pervasive anomie in contemporary Chinese society.

Ye, a Ph.D. student in Food and Nutrition, said she used to be very pessimistic until she discovered Jesus Christ and accepted Him as her personal savior. Even at an

early age, she oft-times indulged herself in thinking questions like: What do we live for? What's the meaning of existence? The more she brooded over these questions, the more perplexed and disillusioned she became. She gradually came to be aware of the intrinsic nothingness of everything. Everything she did, including getting good grades, doing well in her job and going abroad to pursue graduate study, was to please her parents or to allow herself float with the so-called "social tide." The only *raison d'être* was the attachment to her beloved ones. Ye realized that even that tie could not be lasting. She was tempted by suicidal thoughts. Once she said to her boyfriend, who later became her husband, "If my parents die and you die, I will sure commit suicide." Her parents, both professors at a university, were at their wits' end with their daughter's pessimism. Her father once gave her a psychology book, in hopes that the psychological explanation could enlighten her, but of course that did not work. She discussed her despair with her peers, even consulted with the Communist Party secretary in her school. But they were not able to help her out. Through various conversations, she only learned that other people, including the Party secretary, also saw life as being meaningless, messy, and bitter. The only difference was that while she was greatly troubled by the status quo, they seemed to accept it as normalcy. Her happy marriage temporarily dispersed her gloom. However, after she parted from her husband and came to America by herself, she was repossessed with immense melancholy and hopelessness. Once again, those old questions came upon her. It was under this state of mind that Ye encountered Christianity. She received Christ in the CCC three months after she came to America. She said to me during the interview, "Now my life has a purpose. I live well and do things well because I want to glorify Lord."

Back in China, Ye seemingly had everything that would make others consider her to be lucky. An exemplary student in school, a successful career woman in her job, she had caring parents and a loving husband. Still, she needed some transcendental meaning system that would enable her to make sense of life and thus steer her steadfastly in the

life course. Without that to sustain her, she felt the self would be easily drifting away or falling apart. This insecure feeling terrified her. She engaged in a series of serious quests. However, contemporary Chinese society is inadequate to provide young intellectuals like Ye with easy access to profound value systems. Confucian tradition, which had always been the basis of the moral universe of Chinese society and the principle according to which the society was organized, declined together with the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). It received a most violent assault in the iconoclast May Fourth Movement in 1919. But it was during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that Confucianism, together with other traditional value systems, including Buddhism, Taoism and folk religions, were uprooted both institutionally and ideologically. Although in the 1980s, the government started to promote certain teachings of Confucianism which presumably would be useful to maintain social order and status quo (Zhang and Schwartz 1997), this kind of official rhetoric tended to be ignored by the public as another hypocritical, half-hearted at best, campaign to construct “socialist spiritual civilization” which comes and goes, leaving no one’s heart touched. Confucianism, therefore, remains associated mainly with research topics in academia or tourist attractions in Qufu¹⁰ (Hunter and Rimmington 1992). In its heydays in the ancient Chinese history, Buddhism inspired the intellectual elites to aspire for spiritual purification and transcendence over the world. After going through secularization, declination, persecution as well as devastation during the Cultural Revolution (Welch 1972) and revival since 1980s, the teachings of Buddhism is now largely confined to monasteries in mainland China. Although the intellectuals are aware of the place of Buddhism in Chinese culture, most of them know little about Buddhist philosophy and regard the common practice of Buddhism with disdain and tend to equate it with superstition¹¹. For her 27 years in China, Ye had never had any real exposure to

¹⁰ Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, was enshrined by later emperors. The destination of the pilgrimage of the literati in ancient China, it is a tourist attraction today.

¹¹ More will be discussed on this topic in Chapter 6.

the two value systems, nor had it ever occurred to her that she could seek Confucianism or Buddhism as refuges. She did try to approach Communism for the meaning of life, but even the Party secretary did not take the ideology seriously. Communism to him is an occupation to make a living. It is nothing more than vacuous rhetoric of the ruling political party. Things used to be different. Even since the Communist party came to power in 1949, Communism was made a quasi-religious dogma to support the state, with the Party resembling a church which has its deified figures, holy places, martyrs, sacred books, holidays, rituals and spectacles. Especially during the early period of Cultural Revolution, the whole nation was swept by the religious-style fervor. However, by the end of the Cultural Revolution, the juggernaut of communism collapsed as people became disillusioned with it. Nowadays, Communism has little hold on Chinese society. Few Chinese believe that Marxism has any particular value as an analytical tool for understanding the society, still less as a worldview to guide life (Hunter and Rimmington 1992). Chinese society is devoid of cultural and values systems to provide transcendental meaning and purpose for life, as the popular term “spiritual vacuum” justifiably conveys. Ennui and emptiness, listlessness and restlessness, sagging morale and pessimistic despair, unscrupulous egoism and moral confusion characterize the state of mind, especially that of the young generation, inside China (Hunter and Rimmington 1992). It is under this context of anomie or “spiritual vacuum” that spiritual fervor arises among the Chinese at home and abroad.

SEEKING FOR THE MORAL HORIZON

Contemporary Chinese society is also characterized by acute moral crisis. With the onslaught of economic reform since 1980, people were inundated by the swirling currents of materialism that are demoralizing and suffocating at once. Avarice, deceit, sycophancy, corruption, gambling, prostitution, violence, and crime infest Chinese

society today (Hunter and Rimmington 1992). Moral corruption corrodes every levels of the society.

In a picnic organized by the CCC, I took part in a conversation on morality, which like any discussion on this issue was infused with indignation and resentment at the present conditions in China. After the lunch, some students played Frisbee on the lawn, and some played tennis in the court. Five people sat together under the shade tree chatting. Bi became a Christian when he was a M.S. student in a university in Detroit. Now a Ph.D. student in statistics, he was one of the leaders of the student fellowship of the CCC. Guo, a student in Physics, was Bi's roommate. Guo was not a Christian at the time. Hong, a man in his early thirties, was not a student but was considering applying for schools. Hong and his wife immigrated to the United States just a month ago. Influenced by his father, a professor with the university and a respected Christian in the CCC, Hong had a very high opinion of Christianity but was not ready to identify himself as a Christian. Huang, a second-year student in Economics, was not a Christian. However, she sometimes would participate in the social activities organized by the CCC or the CSF. Wu, a first-year student in Food and Nutrition, attended the English Bible class regularly. I jotted down notes while the conversation was going on and transcribed the notes later when I went home. The following is part of their conversation based on my field notes:

Guo: Christians, mainly Protestants, have a very optimistic attitude towards life. It might be because that they want to glorify God through their personal efforts. I appreciate their life philosophy. To me, it is upbeat, optimistic and energizing.

Hong (*nod*): I agree. Although I am not a Christian yet, I feel I can learn much from these Christians. They are not only optimistic, but also self-disciplined. And, they are always kind to people. They have a loving heart. I once heard a story. Quite a moving one. Maybe you guys have heard it before.

Zhang: Tell us.

Hong: Well. A young man was traveling alone in the West. His car was broken. And there was no human residence in sight. Fortunately, a car passed by and the driver, an old man, helped him to repair his car. The young man was so thankful to the old man. He waved good-bye to the old man and hit on the road again.

However, he discovered that the old man's car was following him. He was confused and a little bit frightened. He was wondering, "Why is he following me? If he wants to rob me, why didn't he do it when my car was broken?" The old man followed him until they reached a town. You know what? The old man followed him because he was afraid that the young man's car might be broken again. He followed him to look after him. And the young man was a total stranger to him. The old man was a Christian.

(We were listening attentively.)

Wu *(sigh)*: Compared to the moral standards in our country, this story touches my heart all the more and makes me think....

Hong: I just came from China. Have you guys heard the accident in Jiuzhaigou¹²?

Guo and Bi *(simultaneously)*: Only a little bit.

(The rest of us looked at Hong quizzically, waiting him to tell us about the accident.)

Hong: A tourist group went from Chengdu¹³ to Jiuzhaigou. Days of heavy rain made the treacherous roads all the more dangerous. Right besides the roads were the cliffs of thousands meters high. The Mingjiang River was rushing in the gorge. If you ever traveled in Sichuan or Yunnan, you'd know how frightening it is. The jeep was trudging on the muddy roads. Suddenly, there was an abrupt turn ahead. It was too late for the driver to react properly. The jeep plunged into the billowing Minjiang River. All the people in car were devoured by the currents. The terrible accident would have never happened if there had been something to caution the driver about the abrupt turn. Later, it was found that the caution board was taken away by the local peasants. After the accident, the whole village were engaged in salvaging the bodies. There was even division of labor among them.

Wu: Similar reports can be found in *Southern Weekend*¹⁴ (*Nanfang zhoumo*). Reading those reports makes me depressed. Reality in China is depressing. You got the feeling that the whole society, the moral fabrics of the whole society are rotten.

(The conversation of the next half an hour or so focused on many instances of moral decadence in China. The discussion was charged with both indignation and resignation.)

¹² A famous national park in Sichuan Province, China.

¹³ The capital city of Sichuan Province.

¹⁴ A widely circulated newspaper published in the southern Guangdong Province, famous for its detailed exposure of official malfeasance and corruption, social inequality caused by economic reforms and other sensitive topics. It is said by many to be the only "conscientious" newspaper in China. In June 2001, senior editorial staff of *Southern Weekend* were removed from their positions amid official severe criticism of the paper's coverage (*South China Morning Post*, July 6, 2001).

Bi: People always say it is the market economy that caused the overflow of materialism, which in turn caused moral decadence. I don't quite buy it. Look at America. It is a capitalist society. Materialism is also rampant here. But when I came to America, what surprised me most was that I discovered that the moral standard in American society was much higher than that of our society. Everything is kept in an orderly fashion. And people are usually more gentle, friendly, polite, considerate and accommodating. We can say that people here are more law-abiding because of the more sound legal system. But many things in the moral sphere are beyond the sphere of law. Law can't make people upright and everything. I'd say it is Christianity that speaks most directly to people's conscience. It is the key that makes American society moral and civilized.

Hong (*pensive*): Maybe China needs Christianity too.

Guo: Well, religion does provide moral constraints. The best kind of moral constraints. And a society needs that. Now communism is a total hypocrisy from head to toe. It can't do that job for China. Maybe Christianity is the hope of tomorrow.

That China was experiencing a profound moral crisis was a shared view and a common concern among the discussion participants. The students lamented the lack of moral order in Chinese society and thought it was the very cause of the moral decay. However, they did not think the solutions were readily available in Chinese society itself. Their observation of the higher moral standard of American society, especially that of the Christians, led them to draw the conclusion or incline to the accept the opinion that Christianity was the source of America's moral integrity and the remedy to China's moral crisis.

From 1949 up to 1979, while obliterating the Confucian ethics that regulated Chinese society for thousands of years, the Communist Party propagated the Maoist vision of morality that emphasized self-sacrifice, hard work and sexual purity. A certain kind of asceticism as well as idealism existed in the society during that period of time (Madsen 1981; Hunter and Chan 1993). However, the socialist ethos was shattered and amorality started to prevail by the end of the Cultural Revolution. The economic reform started the reign of materialism over Chinese society since 1980s (He 1998). Officials'

using power to exchange for money became a nationwide phenomenon. As the conduct of the officials mocks the core values that the public authority sanctions and enforces, the legitimacy of the government was corroded. After the Tiananmen Massacre, the government lost moral authority altogether (Hunter and Chan 1992. See also Zhao 2000). Instrumentalism and commoditization also has colonized the realm of personal relations and replaced both friendship and comradeship as primary characteristics (Gold 1985). There are a growing disregard for law and regulation, a crisis of mutual trust, and a proliferation of unscrupulous egocentric behaviors (He 1998). The indices of social disarray, such as violent crime rates¹⁵, divorce rates, drug addiction, pornography and prostitution, are all soaring. “Social pathology,” the term coined by Gertrude Himmelfarb (1998:5) to describe the lamentable moral decay in America, is what China is experiencing.

Nevertheless, the Chinese are extremely sensitive to moral conduct. As Richard Wilson says, “few societies have been as self-consciously moral as the Chinese” (1981:1). Exhortations for moral behavior are abundant in discourses in both traditional and modern China. While the students deplored the widespread moral corruption in Chinese society, they realized that the spread of moral vices were due to lack of constraints in the society. There is a consensus among Chinese intellectuals that the present state represents moral chaos. With the morality so depraved and the society “demon-possessed”, China needs a powerful force analogous to the “Great Awakening” to stir the soul of the nation and to exorcize the demon. Extraordinary problems need extraordinary solutions. Either in the interviews or during casual conversations with Chinese students or scholars, their answers to my question—“Do you think that China

¹⁵ According to the report of *Washington Post* (January 21, 1999), China was experiencing its fifth peak of criminal activity since 1949 and the incidences of crimes were running about eight times than a decade ago.

needs religion or something similar to religion?”—were mostly affirmative. Their response to moral decay and social disarray is reminiscent of what Bellah suggests in his 1992 book *Broken Covenant*. Bellah (1970:171) notes that the great majority of Americans shared certain common elements of religious orientation that “played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere.” He calls this set of beliefs, symbols and rituals that constitute that the public religious dimension “civil religion.” Civil religion is external covenant. The covenant, according to Bellah, has been broken down. Its demise has caused the nation subject to the dominance of technical reason, the compulsive preoccupation with success, control by unresponsive bureaucracies, materialism as well as weakened ties of families and neighborhoods. All these have undermined the morality of American society and stripped Americans of tradition. In his model of remedy, Bellah suggests that the first step is to reaffirm external covenant, including the civil religion in the classic forms. However, external covenant is insufficient, because it protects only negative freedom—it only defends the individual against encroachment. Bellah insists that the remedy lies in building up internal covenant. Positive freedom (or public freedom)—to fulfill the individual in the common good—is the essence of internal covenant and the end of religious and ethical revivals and reawakening. Bellah is critical of technical solution and public policy. For him, the bureaucrats who design the policies are cut off from the larger religious and moral context. They have not solved the problem of moral decay but created new ones. The spiritually most sensitive Americans feel that the contemporary problems of our society cannot be tackled by technical solutions from the government and they turn to the world’s

religions to find the central vision. These various religious movements challenge the dominant liberal utilitarian culture, but they are inadequate to address the problem because their concern or vision is personal, local, and yet many of our problems can only be dealt with at the national level. Bellah, therefore, calls forth a national movement that has a political, intellectual and religious side. Among them, religion is the core. Although Bellah's analysis is of American society, his following words would elicit strong empathy from the Chinese Christians:

No one has changed a great nation without appealing to its soul, without stimulating a national idealism...Culture is the key to revolution; religion is the key to culture. (1992:162)

While appalled by the pervasive moral depravity, mainland Chinese students did not think that their generation was exempt from it. They admitted that they too were contaminated. Qian, a student in Political Science, recalled how everyone in his class competed with one another for better job allocation in the year of their graduation. Sycophancy, deceit, bribery and backbiting were not uncommon among these young college graduates. Ke, a Psychology student, also spoke remorsefully of the crazy days in her graduation year. Having worked in a government ministry for five years, she observed that the young bureaucrats were often more "brazen" than the older ones. Deep inside is a strongly felt moral impotence. The students said that they often lacked moral strength to follow their consciences only. Too often there was self-interest entangled in. Too often they compromised. Furthermore, values and norms changed dramatically in less than two decades. What the students learned in elementary school was no longer commendable or acceptable when they were in college. In the midst of profound moral confusion, the students are looking for some moral horizon.

As young as he was, 22-year-old Ma spoke of the morality of Chinese society with an overtone of bitterness and poignancy,

People in China treat each other with little sincerity. They are nice to you because they find you useful to them at the moment. What can I say? People are rude and harsh. Coldness and indifference was what you would feel should you live in a city. People sometimes fight for rather trivial things.

Ma said that one of the most important reasons that he was attracted to the church is that “the church people are so nice.... And I can see that their kindness is genuine. Sometimes they go extra miles to help people. They look like people of integrity.”

The first Christian whom Ye had met in her life was her oral English teacher in a summer English training class in China. Like many American teachers in Chinese universities, Rosemary was an underground missionary. Ye said, “She impressed me as different from other people. She is a person of principles. It seems to me that she always knew her way in life—No hesitation but full of determination. I admired her. The kind of steadfastness is what I lacked and what I wanted so much to have. I was wondering why she could act like this. Later I learned that she was a Christian.” The good impression that Rosemary left on Ye was one of the reasons that Ye could appreciate Christianity and convert to it shortly after she came to America.

Li said in the interview that one of the primary reasons that he was attracted to Christianity was that the Ten Commandments provide moral absolutes for him to adhere to. He was particularly appreciative of the Christian teaching “to love your enemies,” which he extolled as the highest kind of morality. Furthermore, he said that the Christians were decent, upright people whom he wished he could emulate. His statement was echoed by many of my interviewees. In a Friday evening Student Fellowship at the CCC, Du, a post-doctoral fellow, said she read Lin Yu-tang’s book *From Pagan to Christian*¹⁶ and agreed very much with him that the most attractive thing about Christianity was not the doctrines but the saintly personality of Christians (see Lin 1960:232-233). Dai, an MBA student in a Midwestern state university praised an American Christian in the

¹⁶ Lin Yu-tang was a renowned contemporary Chinese writer and a Christian. He wrote on his experience with religions in a book with the title of *From Pagan to Christian*.

CBSG as almost morally impeccable and said that he was willing to follow his role model.

At a potluck party organized by the CSF, a young couple, Xu and Chen, both Christians, talked about their happy marriage and attributed it to their common belief in Christianity. Xu said he used to be rather quick-tempered and that would usually lead to tiffs and quarrels. After the conversion, he became a much milder person. When disputes arose, he and his wife would remind each other of relevant teachings in the Bible. They would then become quiet, each confessing to God. For Chinese students, Christianity not only provides the moral constraints to the individual, but also helps to preserve family values and enhance family harmony. Thirty year-old Fang could appreciate this function of Christianity too. He witnessed many problematic marriages around him and he once had had a bitter love relationship, so much so that he even lost interest in marriage for a time. It was in the CCC that Fang found the ideal marriage model that he longed for. The Christian families seemed free of the problems that plague the families in China today, such as extramarital affairs and a soaring divorce rate (Zang 1999).

I would argue that the Christian church among the Chinese community, besides functioning as a caring community or surrogate family (see Yang 1999:86-87), is first and foremost a moral community. It promotes discussions on justice and morality, and instructs on love, and advocates righteousness as well as adherence to absolute moral precepts. Some Christians provide role models in the fog of moral confusion. Christianity therefore fulfills the needs of the students who are seeking for a moral horizon.

EXISTENTIAL RESOLUTION FOR NON-CHRISTIANS STUDENTS

Weigert suggests that in the face of “ambivalence and moral abulia” (1988:273) generated by modernity there are two responses from people seeking an authentic self and moral good. One is the eschatological response; the other is the existential response.

To embrace the eschatological resolution is to embrace an emotional object, “a privileged vision from the past that becomes normative for the future” (1988:276). The eschatological resolution enables the person to achieve an authenticity by living in a simplified moral universe. To live existentially is to live authentically in a pluralistic universe by recognizing the freedom to create moral good through personally responsible decisions (Weigert 1988:273). Chinese students who convert to Christianity or show strong interest in Christianity embrace Christianity as the eschatological resolution to their personal problems and the social problems of contemporary Chinese society as well. For the 11 interviewees who expressed little interest in converting to Christianity at the time of interview, one interviewee, Tang, whose case is to be discussed in Chapter 6, was a Buddhist; six other interviewees demonstrated distinctive existentialist worldviews.

Xue, a MBA student, had lived with the family of a Methodist minister during her first one and a half years in America. The family was very helpful and treated her as a family member. But there was one thing that persistently made her uneasy—The family would take her to church every Sunday. She felt it was a pure waste of her time but was too timid to refuse the invitations. While the minister was giving a sermon, she sat quietly in the pew and wrote letters to her parents in China. She quipped in the interview, “That was the only way I could be productive in the church.” Although they never pushed her, she still felt the pressure to attend church and convert to Christianity, so much so that she eventually decided to move out. Xue described herself as a pragmatic and happy-go-lucky person. She had well thought-out plans for the next twenty years: “I know what kind of house I will buy, what kind of car I will drive, and what kind of life I will live. I know I will be successful in my career. At least, I will make a lot of money. And my biggest wish is to let my parents live the kind of life they want to live. I’ll pamper them just like they once pampered me. I’ll take them to travel around the world.”

Her life was not without difficulties. Her first two years in the United States had been miserable: Coursework was excruciating; personal life was problematic; she was

terribly homesick. Worse still, she had a car accident. But her jovial temperament enabled her to remain spirited even in times of adversity. She said it was part of a growing experience and she would not indulge in the bitterness of her experience as long as she had learned the lessons. Xue recognized that life was complex, but was not discouraged. She reveled in many “trivialities” of life. A good bargain would make her genuinely happy as a kid. “The meaning of life?!” She made an exaggerated facial expression of astonishment, “Why ask such a big question? You know I am a simple person.” A second later, she remarked, “The meaning of life is to live happily no matter what. We live our life only once. After that, we are dead forever. And while taking good care of yourself, you also treat others nicely.” Asked to comment on religion, she smiled, shaking her head slightly, “Religion and my life are in different realms. Those metaphysical things just do not matter to me.”

Compared to the existentialists, the Christians or those who had displayed interest in converting to Christianity were more inclined to define the social reality as chaotic and were more likely to be concerned with identity confusion and moral impotence. They showed much stronger desire for a simple moral universe and hoped the powerful conversion experience would deliver them from chaos (Lifton 1993). The existentialists, on the other hand, tended to adopt a more flexible view towards reality. They recognized the pluralistic, fragmentary, and chaotic nature of the social environment in which they were living, but were comfortable with it. They had an optimistic view toward human nature and their own ability to create moral good. Examining the life histories of existentialists and Christians or prospective Christians, I find the two groups were almost equally distributed in terms of problems they had encountered. Stressful coursework, loneliness, acculturation problems, as well as frustrated love relationships¹⁷ were

¹⁷ Without any probing, 4 out of the 13 unmarried male interviewees (31 percent) voluntarily brought forth the topic of troubled love relationships and the consequent emotional crisis. They experienced break-ups with their girlfriends during their first year in America. It would not be inappropriate to speculate that the

recurring themes in the life stories of the Christians and non-Christians alike. Nevertheless, I do find two characteristics of the group of existentialists that were not shared with the group of Christian converts. The six existentialists all grew up and received their education in big cities. Compared to the Christian converts, the average age of the existentialists was younger. Except for one, five of the six students were younger than 28 at the time of the interview. I speculate that the metropolitan background and younger age made them more adaptive to the pluralistic modern or even postmodern culture. Consequently, the all-encompassing worldview and a simplified moral horizon for anchorage that Christianity could offer were less appealing to them. However, the small sample does not warrant me to draw any conclusion.

Not all the non-Christians were existentialists. Quite a few of them also expressed a longing for an eschatological resolution. For instance, Fu, a Computer Science major, said that although he did not convert, he sometimes envied those who easily believed in God and had firm faith thereafter: “Life would then be simpler for them. Anything that they can’t decide, they can ask God to guide them. Anything that they don’t understand, they can explain it as God’s will. Anything that they fail to do by themselves, they can resort to prayers.” When Fang preached to his former college classmates who were also studying in America, they argued with him, using their scientific knowledge and mocked his “surrender” to Christianity. But occasionally some of them sighed, “Wouldn’t it be nice if there is such a God as you said?”

Overall, the mentality for an eschatological resolution is exceedingly strong among Chinese students.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

actual percentage of people who experienced similar relational problems would be even higher. This high percentage suggests that the overseas Chinese students are a group subject to emotional upheavals.

The “coerced modernization” (Yang 1998:237) has created unprecedented massive social changes in China. The young generation who are now in their twenties or thirties experienced the sudden shift of values and norms within only two decades during which consumerism superseded asceticism. With the decline of traditional value systems and the bankruptcy of Communism, Chinese society is devoid of moral codes to counter the unbridled materialism and consumerism. Self-fragmentation and moral abulia are what this era has imprinted on the students. Between the existential response and the eschatological response to the identity crisis and moral crisis (Weigert 1988), Chinese students have a strong propensity to embrace an all-encompassing and simple resolution.

A powerful crisis needs a powerful resolution. The social changes are too dazzling. The students feel that they are too weak, too vulnerable to construct an authentic self through personally responsible decisions in a pluralistic and confusing moral universe. They are buffeted about by unmanageable historical forces and social uncertainties. Instead of drawing from within, they need a force from without to empower them, to guide them in the treacherous sea, and to endow them with a profound self-identity.

The contemporary world becomes growingly pluralistic and complex to those Chinese students who grew up in a relatively unified, simple moral universe. Several of my interviewees spoke nostalgically about their pre-college years when their goal was tangible and identity clearly defined. Therefore, when the eschatological resolution became available and acceptable, it had great appeal to the students.

It is in America that students began to ponder on the fundamental issues concerning the meaning of life and self-identity. As the novelist Jia Pingwa noted, “restlessness” (*fuzao*) had become China’s overriding national characteristic. In China, the students were so preoccupied with individual struggles and success that they hardly devoted attention to those issues. It is in the United States that the students had the rare feeling of settling down. Furthermore, life became much simpler in the United States.

The simplified social networks required much less time and attention. As a result, they felt that they could have the time and luxury to contemplate on philosophical and spiritual questions. There is no doubt that their exposure to Christianity also prompted them to think over these issues. Students felt that there was a spiritual void to fill and the need to find an anchorage for life.

Students' initial motivation to attend the church, however, usually was not the perceived potential of Christianity to fulfill their quest for a meaningful self and moral horizon. In the initial period, they were most likely to attend the church because of social networks, the need for reciprocity, a response to a loving community, the need for free food and other practical assistance that the church provides, or curiosity about Christianity.

A number of students attended the activities of the CCC and the CSF when urged by their husband or wife, friend or acquaintance who was a member of the organization. Lofland and Stark's (1977) study on the Moonies reveals that conversion frequently moved through pre-existing extra-movement social network.

In my study, I find that reciprocity played a big role in the new students' participating in the church activities. The CCC and the CSF helped the new students settle down in their initial stay in America, the time when they needed help most. When they received an invitation to attend the church, the new students felt obligated to comply. The MBA student Xue had gone to church for about one and a half year because her Christian landlord kindly insisted, although she thought church-going a waste of time and made good use of the sermon to produce long letters to China. The first year Chemistry student Ma did exactly the same thing. He attended the Sunday services in the CCC fairly frequently in his first semester. At a Sunday worship, he studied textbook in the pew while the sermon was being preached. "Why don't you stay home to study?" I whispered to him. "They called us and offered pick-ups. It is embarrassing to decline." He whispered back. Later in a phone conversation, he further explained it me,

Mr. Yan called me every Sunday morning and provided the transportation. I almost feel an obligation to go. But you know, sometimes I am busy and sometimes I am lazy. Everybody can be lazy sometimes. At those times, I just don't want to go to the Church early in Sunday morning. When they called me, I felt so embarrassed to say no, because I had no good excuse. When I did pluck my courage to decline the invite, I felt guilty.

Wang went to church because he felt he could not refuse the invitations from the Christians who helped him greatly and treated in a friendly manner. He mentioned he had an obligation to reciprocate this cordiality. This mentality of reciprocity was so overwhelming and rooted in him that he used the word "guilty" to describe what he felt when he failed the Christians' expectation. These two cases are caricatures that highlight the influence of reciprocity norm among Chinese students. Americans may perceive reciprocity as a social reality that one cannot avoid, but they may well shrug it off when it is in their way of autonomy, as said by Sun Lung-kee,

To entrap a person in a network of reciprocity even before he is born, which predetermines some if not all of his future choices and moves, threatening his 'total' control (or the illusion of such control) of his own surroundings, is simply not in the spirit of Americans (1991:36).

For the Chinese, however, reciprocity is institutionalized as a formal obligation. If they fail to live up to it, not only will they experience a powerful feeling of shame and guilt but also social censure. Reciprocity (*bao* or *pao*) has occupied such an essential niche in Chinese culture that Francis L. K. Hsu regards it as a major cultural institution undergirding morals and virtues in Chinese society (1971:453). Although there might be variation of the norm of reciprocity in the overseas Chinese community, it is still very relevant and vibrant especially among those who departed from China not long ago (Dong and Salaff 2000). Therefore, conformity with the norm is expected.

Fenggang Yang (1999:46) finds that a loving community attracts many of the Chinese immigrants to the church. This theme is evident in my study too. Student Fang said to me that before he joined the church he could not find a single person in the entire campus to talk with. Compared to the time in China when he was surrounded by a bunch

of “very interesting buddies,” he felt very lonely. Going to the church fulfilled his psychological need. He said going to the CCC and playing badminton were the two excitements in his life in America. The MBA student Dai from the Midwestern state university said Friday was the happiest day for him in a week because that evening he could “dine, chat, sing, relax, learn and socialize” at the CBSG. The Christian organization acted as a big proxy family for students who participated in its activities. A sense of being cared about could be felt during the prayer time when people prayed for one another. The unsolicited prayers were most moving. A sense of belonging was cultivated especially when the student advanced from a mere taker to a giver, i.e., when s/he involved herself/himself in providing services to the church, such as taking a turn to leading Bible discussions, preparing food for a potluck, etc.

The Christian organizations have economic functions too. Besides assisting the new students to settle down, they organized picnics, potlucks, and festival celebrations where the free food was provided. The CSF also organized free tours to the nearby city or even to Washington D.C.

Chinese students were also motivated to attend the church because of their curiosity about Christianity. For Chinese students who had little exposure to Christianity back in China, it was shrouded in mystery. When the students learned that Christianity occupies a very important niche in American society and many of their country folks converted to Christianity here, their curiosity compelled them to go to the church to find out what Christianity was about.

The aforementioned reasons can motivate the students to attend the church in the initial period, but are not sufficient for conversion to happen. In the following, I would like to argue that if there is no emergent inner need for a religion, these motivations are not very likely to sustain church-going practice, or to evoke conversion.

Today’s Chinese students are more financially stable and more adaptive to the foreign environment than their predecessors. The economic functions of the Christian

organization are less appreciated. Students who participate in church activities because of free food or a free trip but do not attend serious Bible study are few. If there are any, they are usually ridiculed for breaching the norm of reciprocity.

If there is nothing else that pops up in their participating in the church activities, students who attend because of curiosity would stop going once their curiosity is satisfied.

The importance of pre-existing, extra-movement social network perhaps is more salient in the recruiting of cults or sects that are at marginal status of the society. In the case of Chinese students' conversion to Christianity, Christianity is quite established among the community. Furthermore, the new students, upon their arrival at America, hardly knew anyone within the community. More often than not, instead of joining the church through pre-existing friendship, the students formed interpersonal relationships through participating in church activities together.

The norm of reciprocity does compel the new students who receive helps from the Christians to go to church. The first month of the semesters usually found an increase in the attendance of the CCC because many new students joined in. After the initial period, however, when receiving less help, the new students felt less obligated to attend the church. Over time, more and more students no longer felt obligated and stopped church-going altogether.

There were non-religious organizations among Chinese students in the university where I carried out my research, such as the Chinese Student Association, the Badminton Club, or the Soccer Team. Affectionate interpersonal bonds were also formed among members of these organizations. There are, however, two major differences between these organizations and the Christian organizations. First of all, the Christian organizations were very outreaching. They actively employed loving and caring as a strategy in proselytizing the students. Secondly, I would argue that the Christian organizations were first and foremost a moral community besides a loving and caring

community. It is precisely this characteristic that made those students chose the Christian organization instead of others and sustained the church-going practice of the students. Students went to the Bible study group or fellowship not only to seek for friendship but for a moral horizon. Loving was mentioned by the Christian converts as a virtue that they wished they could acquire. The Christian organizations provided moral codes and role models that appealed greatly to the students who experienced moral confusion and moral abulia.

More importantly, religious conversion is not at the same plane of economic, utilitarian or social motivations. As Geertz points out, every religion contains two essential elements: ethos—the moral and aesthetic aspects—and worldview—the cognitive and existential aspect (1973:126-127). Conversion thus entails transformation of both worldview and ethos. To account for religious conversion, we have to look for reasons that relate to these two aspects.

In conclusion, the social conditions in contemporary Chinese society, primarily the pervasive anomie and the moral confusion, result in psychohistorical dislocation (Lifton 1967) and consequently a yearning for an eschatological resolution. However, contemporary Chinese society offers little to fulfill this need. For mainland Chinese students in America, Christianity fulfills their quest for the eschatological resolution.

But three questions remain to be answered: (1) Historically, Chinese intellectuals have been very resistant to Christianity. What factors have caused the dissipation of the antagonism? (2) Why did Chinese students who would not have received Christianity in mainland China convert in America? (3) Why other religions or value systems, such as the indigenous religions to Chinese, do not have similar appeal and gain comparable popularity among Chinese students in America? The first and second questions are to be discussed in Chapter 5, while Chapter 6 will address the third question.

CHAPTER 5

THE DECONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

Today, young Chinese intellectuals opt for an eschatological resolution to personal problems as well as social crisis. But this does not necessarily lead them to convert to Christianity when it is within reach or even when it is preached to them with great intensity. The “Christianity fever” in mainland China in the 1980s was restricted to the socially disadvantaged groups. Intellectuals remain mostly impenetrable to its influence, despite the emergence of the phenomenon of “Cultural Christians” who showed research interest in Christianity and emphasized its culture values and historical significance (Zhuo 2000).

The rejection of Christianity among the educated class in China has historical roots. Examining the history of missionary activities in China since 1583 when the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci arrived in China up to the 1950s when missionary efforts came to a halt following the Communist takeover, we would easily notice that Chinese intellectuals, with few exceptions, steadfastly rejected Christianity. Oft-times, more than remaining indifferent, they instigated anti-Christian riots or movements. As Paul Cohen powerfully reveals, the anti-Christian tradition could date back at least as far as the early 17th century. The Chinese scholar-officials examined and criticized Christianity from the standpoint of Chinese culture and labeled Catholicism as heterodoxy versus the orthodox Confucianism. Christianity was heterodox, because it contradicted certain fixed cultural norms, denounced traditional Chinese religions, and placed itself above them (Cohen [1963] 1967:33). What was behind the cultural confrontation was the Sinocentrism that was typical of Chinese intellectuals. Following the Rites Controversy, Christianity was

banned by Emperor Yongzheng in 1724. It was not until the early 19th century that the Christian missionary zeal was rekindled. An unprecedented upsurge of Christian missionary undertakings was partly facilitated by the political-military backing from the Western powers. The missionary enterprise was inextricably connected with the Western invasion from the very beginning. As John Fairbank comment,

[The missionary] had the chance to preach and innovate in China only because he was part of the Western invasion. Gunfire and the unequal treaties initially gave him his privileged status and opportunity. (1974:3)

From 1840s and on, therefore, the opposition of the Chinese educated class to Christianity was not only engendered by threatened Chinese cultural identity, but also by anti-foreignism with nationalism being its matured modern form (Cohen [1963] 1967).

I will devote a few words to each of the two themes. When traditional Chinese cultures and values, especially Confucianism, were under the assault from the West, Chinese intellectuals came to their defense. To resist total surrender to Westernization, neo-traditionalists, such as Liang Qichao in his late years, Liang Shuming and Xiong Shili rediscovered values in Confucianism and, of less importance, Buddhism. The slogan of “the materialistic West, the spiritual East” embodied a newfound Chinese spiritual superiority (Furth 1976; see also Schwartz 1976). Even the few Chinese Christians made up for their Christian connections by retaining an attachment to Confucianism (Cohen 1974:224). The inroads of Western religion and cultures made the Chineseness of Confucianism more salient and a source of “cultural nationalism”. Arthur Schlesinger points out, “as nationalism spread through the non-Western world, its edge of bitterness came in the end more from cultural than from political or economic wounds” (1974:365). In this sense, Chinese cultural identity was irrevocably intertwined with nationalism.

After the May Fourth Movement when nationalism ascended to the central stage of Chinese society¹⁸, the motivation to oppose Christianity from the perspective of culture yielded to the motivation of nationalism. The student Anti-Christian Movement in the 1920-1922 was precisely an expression of the emotionalized nationalism and anti-imperialism (Lutz 1988:11). Students and political activists accused the Chinese Christian converts of losing national character (West 1974:233). Nationalists used Christian missionary activities as a common enemy and a rallying point (Lutz 1988). The denationalization charge caused an identity crisis among the Chinese Christians, and many ended their affiliation with the church. The Anti-Christian Movement effectively limited the growth and influence of Christianity from 1920s and onwards. Another most noticeable thing in this movement is the rising discourse of scientism and modernity in critiques of Christianity by Chinese intellectuals. Science was championed as the proper basis of a new spirit for modern man, the only way to reach modernity and hence the standard to evaluate everything else. Along with other religions, Christianity was regarded as superstitious and outmoded in a modern world ruled by science, the decaying elements in Western civilization (Cohen 1965:40). The difference between the anti-Christian literature of the 17th century and the 20th century China was best summed up by the following words of Levenson:

“In the seventeenth century, Chinese opposed Christianity as un-traditional. In twentieth-century China, especially after the first World War, the principal anti-Christian cry was that Christianity was un-modern. In the early instance, then, Christianity was criticized for not being Confucian; this was a criticism proper to Chinese civilization. In the later instance, Christianity was criticized for not being scientific; and this was a criticism from western civilization (Levenson 1968:I, 123).

¹⁸ The different concerns of anti-Christian movements in different historical periods revealed the transformation of culturalism that dominated traditional China to the modern nationalism. For the most subtle and influential elaboration on the “culturalism to nationalism thesis”, please see Joseph Levenson’s *Liang Ch’I-ch’ao and the Mind of Modern China* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1953) and *Confucian China and its Modern fate: A Trilogy* Vol. 1 (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1968).

In a nutshell, during the missionary history in China since the 17th century, Chinese cultural identity, nationalism, modernity and scientism¹⁹ had been the three major obstacles for Chinese intellectuals to accept Christianity, and the three standpoints from which they launched their attacks. The Communist government's position towards Christianity, with which students have been indoctrinated through textbooks and mass media, reflects the inheritance from the Anti-Christian Movements in the 1920s. First of all, Christianity, like any other religion, is viewed as only slightly better than superstition. The orthodox Marxist view regards religion as “the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life” (To use Engels' words). Religion is therefore contradictory to science and rationality. As technology and science advance and when human race can control its destiny, religion would wither and eventually die out. Secondly, Christianity is seen as part and parcel of Western imperialist onslaught on China, an expression of cultural imperialism (Shen and Zhu 1998).

The following analyzes why some of the obstructions are no longer barriers for young Chinese intellectuals in America to accept Christianity. It also discusses how some of the obstacles have been removed due to the collective efforts of deconstruction and reconstruction by the Chinese Christian preachers in America.

CHRISTIANITY AND CHINESE CULTURAL IDENTITY

Confucianism and the Chinese strong sense of cultural superiority once greatly frustrated the proselytization by Christian missionaries. This perhaps is best captured in the proud reply to a missionary by a Chinese scholar in the 19th century, “I assure you I would rather go to hell with [Confucius] than with Jesus to heaven” (Cohen [1963] 1967:80). Today, however, they are no longer barriers for the majority of Chinese intellectuals in accepting Christianity. Confucianism, as well as other traditional Chinese

¹⁹ Scientism was defined by Joseph Levenson as “the assumption that all aspects of the universe are knowable through the methods of natural science” (Levenson, 1968: XV)

belief systems—after the attacks since the iconoclastic May Fourth, but especially during the Cultural Revolution—were devastated. Although contemporary Chinese society still retains many vestiges of Confucianism and Buddhism, few intellectuals in mainland China would identify themselves with these traditional value systems. Myron Cohen points out this lack of cultural identity of the Chinese today:

In modern China, the cultural apparatus, so to speak, allowing one to identify with the Chinese nation, no longer exists....What I am saying is that the traditional beliefs in China, labeled feudal superstition, provided a premodern form of identification with a clearly conceived Chinese nation. The Chinese had a traditional system which identified the Chinese nation, gave it dimensions, gave it a place in the world.... It was a total configuration that linked the people to the nation.... This was destroyed by the same individuals who created modern Chinese nationalism, which has had the ironic effect of not providing a replacement. (1994:63).

Being a Chinese today does not entail identification with traditional Chinese culture. None of the Christian converts among my interviewees, prior to their decision to convert to Christianity in America, felt obliged to explore traditional Chinese belief systems first. That the conversion to Christianity would be a betrayal to the Chinese cultural heritage, an issue that perturbed the scholars in late traditional times and a concern that bothered the intellectuals in the early 20th century, seldom occur to China's young intellectuals today. I asked the 11 non-Christian interviewees about their reasons for not converting to Christianity. Only 2 of them spoke about Chinese cultural identity as a barrier for them.

Students like Jin were a small minority among Chinese students. This Mass Communication Ph.D. student was well versed in traditional Chinese literature. Influenced by his grandfather who was an old-time scholar, he read widely from traditional Chinese literary works and was especially fascinated by Daoist philosophy. In the interview, he recited several paragraphs in the Daoist classics *Zhuangzi* in an impassioned voice and commented that the “hassle-free” Daoist state was what he pursued. “Follow the natural course” (*shunqi ziran*), an idiom characteristic of Daoist

philosophy, was his maxim. “I can live a happy life by my own efforts and have no need for Christianity,” said Jin. He had little appreciation for Western culture. To him, Christianity was a Western religion and he had no intent to embrace it.

Fu, after associating himself with an American missionary for one and a half year, still regarded Christianity as a foreign religion and contrary to his Chinese identity. The following is an excerpt from the interview transcript:

Sun: Have you ever thought of becoming a Christian?

Fu: Yes, I have. But it just flashed and immediately I tossed out the idea.

Sun: Why?

Fu: Because I am a Chinese! The feeling of being a Chinese has been so deeply rooted in me. I mean it is at my subconscious level. It was born in me.

Sun: Are you saying that you think of Christianity as a foreign religion?

Fu: Of course. I would rather accept a Chinese religion. There is a cultural resonance there.

He said indigenous Chinese religion would be his preference were he to become a religious devotee. Yet Fu’s identification with Chinese culture, however authentic, remained nebulous, as he immediately admitted his ignorance about the traditional culture. What Fu had was an affinity for the Chinese cultural tradition but with little cognitive understanding or moral binding. He was no more familiar with the Chinese traditional value systems than his more indifferent peers.

The sense of cultural superiority was entrenched in minds of Chinese intellectuals from the 17th century to the mid 19th century, and reasserted by the more tradition-minded intellectuals in the late 19th century to the early 20th century in face of Western onslaught. Chinese students today, however, have little empathy for this cultural complex. In actuality, some of them have slipped to the other end of the spectrum—cultural inferiority. China’s underdeveloped economy, repressive political system, but especially the deplorable morality and incivility of Chinese society, have left the students extremely disappointed and disillusioned. Their pessimism have led them to embrace cultural explanations which impute the current problems to the traditional Chinese culture or the

“ugly” Chinese national character (*zhonghua minzu liegenxin*), a term made popular by the book *The Ugly Chinaman* by the Taiwanese writer Bo Yang.

The lack of cultural identity and the sense of cultural inferiority can be seen from the students’ reaction to a television series called *China’s Soul (Shenzhou)*, scripted and directed by Yuan Zhiming. A former leader in China’s 1989 democratic movement and one of the scriptwriters of the highly controversial political television series *River Elegy (Heshang)*²⁰, Yuan converted to Christianity when he was a political refugee in the United States. He entered seminary and became an influential preacher among the Chinese community in North America. Yuan wrote *China’s Confession (Shenzhou chanhuilu)* in 1998. The television series *China’s Soul* based on the book made his views widely known among the overseas Chinese. Like *River Elegy*, *China’s Confession* hails the blue civilization—Western culture—as the remedy for China’s backwardness. But *China’s Confession* goes further to embrace the religion of the West. The most important theme that *China’s Confession* conveys is that Christianity is the core of Western culture as well as the foundation of modernity and democracy, and the hope for China’s salvation. Yuan reinterpreted Chinese history from a framework of China’s relationship with God, dividing its history into four stages: the age of piety, the age of wisdom, the age of humanism and the age of restoration. In Yuan’s book, the sacred symbols of Chinese civilization, dragon and Yellow River, were denounced with most ferocity. Yuan especially condemned dragon as the very source of degeneration of China, the very evil source that seduced the Chinese away from the worship of God. In fact, he identified the dragon with the serpent in the Eden.

In the university where I did my research, both the CCC and the CSF had shown this television series on various occasions. When the CSF showed it for the first time to

²⁰ *River Elegy* is a six-part television series on Chinese cultural roots and ethos that broadcasted in China in 1988. It charged the traditional culture for China’s current problems and advocated radical and total Westernization. Its message sparked a nationwide debate on tradition and modernity, China and West.

Chinese students, around 40 Chinese, including Christians and non-Christians, watched it together at the Student Activity Center. No one left in the middle of the 3 hour-long show. In fact, the audience presence and response was so good that the CSF decided to show it again in the following week. I participated in the discussion on this television series organized by the CSF. In addition, I also interviewed 4 non-Christian students who had watched the series. Overall, the Christians, with few exceptions, embraced Yuan's interpretation with enthusiasm. The non-Christians thought some of Yuan's viewpoints thought-provoking. Although they disagreed with some of his points, none of them expressed indignation or outrage at Yuan's bold interpretation of Chinese history or his denigration, so to speak, of the sacred symbols of Chinese civilization.

The little cultural resistance to the proselytization of Christianity from Chinese students in America owes not only to the peripheralization of traditional cultural identity (Cohen 1993:88), but also to the reconstruction of ancient Chinese culture on the part of Chinese Christian preachers. One of their approaches is to relate Christianity to ancient Chinese history and culture. For example, *China's Confession* appropriates ancient Chinese legends, poems as well as historical records to authenticate Yuan's argument that the Chinese had worshipped a monolithic God prior to the 11th century BC. The ancient Chinese legends are analogized to Genesis. It is claimed that China was originally a nation under God and only later turned away from Him. Accordingly, the Chinese's acceptance of Christianity should not be called conversion, but restoration.

Another book of Yuan, *Lao Zi vs. the Bible* (1997) reinterprets the Daoist classic *Dao De Jing* and asserts the parallels between Daoism and Christianity. According to Yuan, *Dao De Jing* is God's revelation to the Chinese people: Lao Tzu's Dao is God and the description of a saintly figure in the book nothing but the prognostication of Jesus Christ. The *Overseas Campus* is abundant with articles reinterpreting Chinese culture in the light of Christianity, e.g., Chuang Tzukung's "*Qicheng zhuanhe: Jidujiao yu Zhongguo wenhua zhi huitong*" (*The Integration between Chinese Culture and*

Christianity) (2000, Vol. 41), Qu Feng's "*Cong Shangdi dao tian: Qiantan shangdi xinyang zai gudai zhongguo de mishi*" (*From God to Heaven: How Ancient China Turned Away from Worshipping God*) (2001, Vol. 45). All these reconstruction works aim to remove the contradiction between Chinese cultural identity and Christian identity.

The use of Chinese glyphomancy is another effort to contextualize Christianity. Many Chinese characters consist of more than one graphic element, each denoting some specific meaning. The art of separating these graphic elements to discover an esoteric meaning in the character is referred to as glyphomancy (Jordan 1993:287). Certain Chinese characters were analyzed in this fashion to find indications of God's revelation similar to that in Genesis. For example, the word *lan* (婪), meaning "greedy," is made of 林, meaning "two trees" and 女, meaning "woman." It is said that the two trees are respectively the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. The woman, Eve, reached her hand for the fruit from the tree of knowledge because she desired to be like her own creator. Another commonly cited example is the word *chuan* (船), meaning "boat." It consists of three parts: 舟 also meaning "boat," 八 meaning "eight," and 口 meaning "the mouth of a person." The word *chuan*, therefore, reflects the biblical account that Noah, with another seven members of his family escaped the flood in the arc²¹. By demonstrating the congruence of Christianity and the wisdom of Chinese antiquity, the use of glyphomancy intends to "resolve the ambivalence about Christian foreignness" (Jordan 1993:289). Glyphomancy was not a late invention by the Chinese preachers in America, but a long legacy of the missionary ventures in China.

²¹ For more examples and a fuller account of the use of glyphomancy in evangelizing to the Chinese, please refer to Ralph Covell's book *Confucius, The Buddha, and Christ: A History of the Gospel in Chinese*, 1986: 206-208. David Jordan's article "The Glyphomancy Factor: Observations on Chinese Conversion" in *Conversion to Christianity: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Greater Transformation*, starting from the use of glyphomancy in the spread of Christian gospel among Taiwanese, aptly demonstrates the additive, and inclusive quality of Chinese religion. This is termed by him as the glyphomancy factor.

Nevertheless they are the ones most responsible for making it known among the overseas Chinese community of today.

The sinification of Christianity is also indicated by the increasing number of Chinese preachers, Chinese Christian converts, and Chinese Christian publications, etc. (Yang 1998:251). As Christianity now is the predominant religion among the overseas Chinese community, few would query the foreignness of the belief. A more significant but also subtler manifestation of the sinification of Christianity is the Chinese Christians' "artful reinterpretation of some aspects of the Christian faith with reference to their own culture"(Ng 2000). As Ng's paper aptly demonstrates, the protection and blessings that the belief in God brings about is emphatically the theme in much preaching and many testimonies. The prayer meeting in the CCC was full of prayers on practical matters, such as getting the driver's license, passing a qualification exam, laboratory results, visa application of the spouse in China, etc. The protestant God is seen as a miraculous and tutelary god, his functions much similar to a Chinese guardian god in the folk religion, yet more powerful and comprehensive (Ng 2000).

THE RECONCILIATION BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND CHRISTIANITY

Nationalism once was the major driving force behind the Anti-Christianity Movement in the 1920s. In the historical period when Christianity was inextricably interwoven with Western imperialism, the loyalty to the Chinese nation of a Chinese Christian was subject to serious questioning.

While being a Chinese nowadays is largely devoid of any cultural content, Chinese identity of today is deeply rooted in nationalism. If there is one ideology or sentiment that can unite the Chinese, it would be nationalism (see Cohen 1993, Barmé, 1996). Modern Chinese nationalism emerged during a time of national crisis. It was motivated by the poignant feeling that China was lagging behind and was being bullied by the Western powers as well as the conviction that China must be "prosperous and strong" (Cohen 1993:101). Chinese nationalism entered its high tide around 1919, and

was built into the establishment of the PRC in 1949. The new regime was heartily supported by intellectuals in its early years because the Communist China restored national unity and fulfilled nationalistic aspirations. Throughout the history of the PRC, nationalism permeated into its goals, policies, and behaviors (Townsend 1996). By the 1990s, as Barmé observed, nationalism functioned “as a form of consensus beyond the bounds of official culture” (Barmé 1996:185). From the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and onward, students have always been the spearhead of nationalistic protests and demonstrations. After the 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, tens of thousands of infuriated Chinese students demonstrated at the U.S. Embassy and Consulates in China, and hurled paint and stones at the buildings. There is an equally strong if not stronger nationalistic sentiment among overseas Chinese students. When living abroad, many of them realized their Chinese identity for the first time. Frustrations in an alien land made them yearn all the more for a stronger Chinese nation (Hsu 1993).

Now the question is: Since nationalism has such a prevalent and strong presence among the overseas Chinese students, is it a barrier for them to convert to Christianity? I asked my interviewees whether they would reject Christianity because its historical association with Western imperialism. Not a single interviewee responded affirmatively. Even Fu, who resisted Christianity on the basis of Chinese cultural identity, insisted that the essence of a religion should not be judged on its connection with politics.

Contemporary Chinese intellectuals are fairly comfortable with things of foreign import. The youthful students, in particular, are open-minded about everything foreign. The xenophobic type of nationalism—the Boxer mentality—is deemed most despicable. Even the *New Thread* (*Xin yu si*), a popular electronic magazine (www.xys.org) among the overseas Chinese students and scholars committed itself to the anti-superstition, anti-cult and anti-Christianity cause from the scientific and humanistic stance, rarely invoked nationalism as the rationale to battle against Christianity.

As the Western powers no longer pose immediate threats to the Chinese nation, the association between Western imperialism and Christianity has declined over time. Chinese students tend to sever Christianity from the specific historical context and judge it based on the universal message of Christianity that transcends national and ethnic boundaries. What happened is not simply a matter of historical amnesia. Many factors operated together to the removal of the stigma of “the tool of Western imperialism” that has been stamped on Christianity since 1920s, among which is the deconstruction and reconstruction efforts of the Chinese preachers in America. Since 1980s, the reevaluation of Christian mission history in China has received increasing scholarly attention in mainland China. The contributions of Christian missionaries to education, medicine and social services of China have been recognized in these studies. The academics argued that Western missionaries should not be condemned wholesale (Shen and Zhu, 1998; Zhuo, 2001). Nevertheless, their views are largely confined within academia. The deconstruction by Chinese evangelists was far more complete and comprehensive in North America. Through various effective information channels, the exoneration of Christianity is diffused to the overseas Chinese community. *Overseas Campus* has published various articles in this regard. For instance, the two articles titled respectively “*Huai lishi yige gongdao: Jianlun xifang chuanjiaoshi zai hua de gongxian*” (*Doing Justice to History: An account of the Historical contribution of the Western Missionaries in China*) (2001, Vol. 47) and “*Jidujiao shi diguozhuyi de qinglue gongju ma?*” (*Is Christianity the Tool of Western Imperialism?*) (1996, Vol.18) enumerate the contributions of missionaries to China’s modernization, portray the missionaries as faithful servants of God, compassionate sympathizers of the Chinese people, and righteous protestants against Western imperialism. The articles explicitly point out that the mission history was extrapolated and distorted by the CCP to serve its political interest. For most Chinese students, information of this kind revealed the other side of the

coin that was unheard of, that was against what they learned from textbooks and the CCP's propaganda.

When there are two competing persuasions both claiming the possession of historical truth, which one would the students give credence to? Many students would align themselves with the Christian persuasion. For Chinese students, the CCP's demonization of the Christian missionary in the modern Chinese history was yet another "nasty" example of the CCP's political manipulation. They felt bitter resentment about being fooled and cheated by the CCP, although they had long subjected the CCP indoctrination and propaganda to skepticism, cynicism or repudiation. When asked about what he thought about the thesis of Christianity as the tool of imperialism, one interviewee blurted out, "Even though I didn't know much about the real history, I knew I couldn't take what the CCP said as the truth. I knew it when I was in college." Another interviewee told me, "Didn't you hear people say that everything in the *People's Daily*²² (*Renmin ribao*) is false except the dates?" In short, the low credibility of the CCP's discourse strengthened the persuasiveness of the competing Christian discourse.

The students' simmering sentiment of nationalism is not a barrier for them to accept Christianity because Christianity is not longer viewed as the antithesis of nationalism. Indeed, this kind of the nationalism should not be equated with the loyalty to the party, government or state. Merle Goldman, Perry Link and Su Wei delineate for us the major transformation in Chinese intellectuals' quest for national identity since the end of the Cultural Revolution. Students and intellectuals came increasingly to draw distinctions between their love for the country and people and their love of the Party, the leadership and the socialist system. Nothing is more succinct and yet revealing of this split than the slogan in the Tiananmen demonstrations which read "We love our country, but we hate our government" (Goldman et al. 1993). It is more appropriate to call this

²² The official mouthpiece of the CCP.

kind of nationalism patriotism, or love for the country that does not necessarily entails the support for the government. In today's China, being patriotic means committing to the goals of a strong and prosperous, modern and democratic China. The CCP can no longer effectively appropriate patriotism and condemned its enemies as unpatriotic. In fact, being patriotic requires some criticism of what the CCP stands for, since a concerned Chinese is expected to notice that some behaviors of the CCP are detrimental to the goals. The patriotic discourse is salient in the evangelizing efforts of the Christian Christians. Christianity is promoted not only as the cure to the social evils of Chinese society, but also as the source of modernity and democracy of which China is in dire need.

Rev. Stephen Tong, an Indonesian preacher of Chinese descent and a most influential thinker among the Chinese Christian community worldwide, asks provocatively,

The May Fourth Movement cried, 'Democracy! Freedom!' And the June Fourth Movement cried, 'Democracy! Freedom!' What does this speak to us? It shows that all the efforts for the last seventy years have been abortive. What does this failure means to us? It means that we had not found the key to [democracy and freedom]. If you have tried many ways, why don't you try [the way] of Jesus Christ? (1991:25)

Yuan Zhiming echoes the Rev. Tong in his book *China's Confession*. He exclaims passionately,

Oh China! If you believe you can learn from Western prosperity but not Western democracy or if you believe you can learn from Western prosperity and democracy but not God, then you are committing an egregious mistake! (1998, XI)

Yuan repeatedly states that Western science and technology as well as democracy are only derivatives of the Christian belief. He says,

Just as the traditional Chinese society is an organic entity, the traditional Western economy, politics and religion also form an organic entity which is rooted in Jesus and which, through Christian civilization, demonstrates the holy relationship between God and man. The increasingly serious political and spiritual crises which are brought about by the takeoff of the Chinese economy are fundamentally due to China's lack of such a holy essence of life. (1998, VII)

Yuan describes modern Chinese history since the Opium War in 1840 as a long journey of China's learning from the West. Devastated by war defeats and consequent unequal treaties as well as diplomatic failures, Chinese intellectuals, with their wounded national pride, sought to reinvigorate China through implanting Western science and technology in Chinese soil. Then they stepped a little further to adopt Western economic system, and finally a Western political system. Few discovered that the soul of Western civilization was Christianity. As long as Christianity is not established as the Chinese cultural core, all the efforts to make China prosperous and strong would be of little effect. Yuan asserts that only Christianity can save China and bring modernity and democracy to China in the place where others have failed.

This patriotic discourse has great appeal to the nationalistic Chinese students. Student Bi said that one thing attracted him to Christianity was that the Christians were very patriotic. On various gatherings of the CCC and the CSF, Yuan Zhiming was praised for his patriotism.

In conclusion, nowadays a Chinese can be comfortably a patriot and a Christian at the same time. Through the deconstruction and reconstruction work of the Chinese pastors and evangelists, Christianity reconciled with the Chinese nationalism. More than that, the seething nationalist sentiment among Chinese students can actually enhance the appeal of Christianity.

CHRISTIANITY VS. SCIENCE

The traditional religion/science conflict thesis maintains that the incompatibility of religion and science is based on their contradictory evaluations of the authority of human reason and faith. Glock and Stark quintessentially summarizes this inherent contradiction between religion and science:

Religion, because of its ultimate commitment to a non-empirical system, must take the position that man's reason is subordinate to faith as a means to truth. From this view, reason is at best unreliable, and at worst, sinful pride. Science, on

the other hand, defines truth as that which may be demonstrated either logically or empirically, and thus opts for the supremacy of reason (1965:264).

Religion and science are two conflicting paradigms, each claiming its own superiority and dismissing the other as erroneous and inferior. Steeped in Marxist materialism as well as Enlightenment thoughts, most young Chinese intellectuals believe there is an incompatibility between science and religion. Since science is regarded as the only way to understand the world, the anti-science religion is false and hence unacceptable. For the Chinese graduate student population in America, who are predominantly natural science majors, persuasion in the scientific discourse is most effective.

For this purpose, *Overseas Campus* has a column that devotes to the discussion on science and Christianity. Some samples of published articles on this magazine are: “Cong wuxing fanzhi jishu chenggong tanqi” (*On the Success of the Clone*) (1999, Vol. 34), “Chuangshiji yu xiandai kexue” (*Genesis and Modern Science*) (1999, Vol. 35), “Shunlichengzhang de faling: Ji chuangzaolun yu jinhualun de shiji dazhan” (*A Justifiable Decree: The battle between Creationism and Evolutionism over the last century*) (2000, Vol. 39), “Shengwuxue lishi shang zuida de pianju” (*The biggest scam in the history of biology*) (2000, Vol. 40). The two most widely circulated books among Chinese students that also serve this purpose are *Kexue yu Xinyang: Gei zhongguo zhishijie pengyou de yifengxin* (*Science and Faith: A Letter to Friends in Chinese Intelligentsia*) by Wei Yan and *Youzi Ying: Yongheng zai zhaohuan* (*The Song of a Prodigal: Beckoned by Eternity*) by Li Cheng. Both the CCC and the CSF presented free copies of the two books to newcomers. These articles and books criticize the pitfalls of scientism among Chinese intellectuals. However, most of the pages are devoted to citing scientific evidences to prove that Christianity is compatible with science. The persuasion concentrates mostly on three themes: First, the Bible is proved scientific. The precision of prophecies in the Bible—that they are verified by later historical development and latest

discoveries in science—is emphasized. Archaeological evidence is cited to verify the historical authenticity of Jesus. Second, Christianity is not only compatible with modern science, but also conducive to the development of science. Names of great scientists who were pious Christians or believers in God, such as Newton, Copernicus, Pascal, Faraday, Kepler and Einstein, are mentioned. The monotheistic view of Christianity is said to be the foundation of modern science. Third, Darwin's evolution theory has many flaws, whereas creationism is substantiated by scientific evidence.

The contradiction between science and Christianity, for Chinese students, is epitomized in the dispute between creationism and evolutionism. According to the students, the existence of God and the resurrection of Jesus can neither be proved nor disproved scientifically. But creationism is totally at odds with Darwin's evolutionary theory, which is taught and accepted as the indisputable scientific truth in mainland China. The logic goes: If evolutionism is scientific, then creationism is against science. If science is creditable, then Christianity is discreditable. Therefore, if evolutionism is the truth, then the Bible is a fallacy.

From my interviews as well as my participant observation, I find one of the questions most frequently asked by the students was about the doctrine that God created the universe in six days and created human beings from mud. Evolutionism, then, is inevitably the stronghold that Christian preachers have to attack ferociously in proselytizing Chinese students. Both *The Song of a Prodigal* and *Science and Faith* try to discredit Darwin's evolutionary theory by enumerating evidence from the fields of biology, geology, paleontology, physics, cosmology, astronomy and other areas of scientific inquiry. For instance, the second law of Thermodynamics, the Big Bang theory, the lack of transitional forms in fossil record, the Cambrian explosion, the perfection of the structures of the various life forms, and the flaws of Miller's experiment on the origin of life are used to question the validity of evolutionary theory. Quotations from numerous scientists are cited at length to corroborate the authors' viewpoints. Both point out that

Darwin arrived at his evolutionary theory after he became an adamant atheist, suggesting that evolutionism was no more than an expression of Darwin's ideology and his camouflaged attack on Christianity and thus lacked scientificity. Some of these examples were presented to Chinese students for the first time or occurred to the students for the first time that they could be used to as counterevidence of evolutionism. A student who has never given creationism a second thought would now be considered as being not sophisticated. Evolutionism might not be dismissed as fraudulent by the students, but its scientificity was open for questioning.

The science background of several preachers adds credibility to their testimonies from an "arrogant and blind atheist" to a "more sophisticated and scientific Christian." Among my interviewees, one said that after reading Li Cheng's book, he quickly turned from an atheist to an agnostic. Another one said that what he had learned about the Dead Sea Scrolls from the same book made him think, "Maybe the Bible is really the revelation of God. Otherwise, how could the Bible be kept so consistent for thousands of years?" Another interviewee said, "I once liked to debate with Christians, citing my scientific knowledge to imply how ignorant they were to believe in all the myths in the Bible. I was very smug then, I guess. When I learned that greatest scientists like Newton and Einstein believed in God, I was crestfallen. I thought, 'Who am I to challenge what Newton and Einstein had believed from the scientific ground?'" When I asked Ma, a Chemistry major who felt strong interest in conversion, about how he resolved the contradiction between evolutionism and creationism, he answered by asking me, "Hasn't evolutionism already been proven invalid by scientists?" The examples he cited were all from Li's book. Interviewees like Fang said they learned that evolutionism was something similar to a religious faith, instead of a scientific fact. They saw the indoctrination of evolutionism as part of the CCP conspiracy to serve its political purpose. The feeling of being blindfolded made the students lean towards the alternative theory. As creationism becomes scientific to the Chinese, so does Christianity. As Christianity is reconstructed as being scientific,

one of the biggest obstructions to Chinese students' acceptance of Christianity is cleared up.

Typically, the conversion to Christianity of the Chinese graduate student is not the surrender of reason to faith, or the shift from the scientific paradigm to the religious paradigm. Rather, science is used to call forth faith and buttress faith. What happened is what Robert Wuthnow would call "mixing religion and science" (1989:150). The conversion, from the perspective of the converts, is not about their abandonment of their conviction of science at all, but about their turning from flawed science to true science.

DISCUSSION

We are now ready to address the question: Why Chinese students did not accept Christianity in mainland China but converted in America? First of all, since most of them want to stay in America after graduation, political persecution and social disadvantage in China due to one's religious orientation became less a concern. Second, removed from the familiar cultural niche, the students had greater freedom to construct a self-identity in a foreign land. Third, Christianity, while at the cultural periphery of Chinese society, is the dominant culture of American society. Conversion to Christianity in America does not entail a marginal social status. Fourth is the institutional factor: the inaccessibility of Christianity in China and the intensive proselytizing efforts targeting Chinese students in America made all the difference. In the process of proselytization, the important role played by the Chinese evangelists in reconstructing the meaning of Christianity cannot be overemphasized.

Three obstacles, namely Chinese cultural identity, nationalism and scientism have historically stood in the way for Chinese intellectuals to accept Christianity. Social change and cultural shift in Chinese society have made the first two less relevant. No less importantly, the active deconstruction and reconstruction of Christianity on the side of the Chinese Christians in North America has cleared the way for the conversion to Christianity of the student community in America. The wave of intensive deconstruction

and reconstruction of Christianity emerged in the early 1990s, when many Chinese scholars converted to Christianity, entered seminaries to study theology and became influential preachers in North America. After his study of the conversion of mainland Chinese intellectuals in North America, Chuang Tzukung, himself a popular preacher among the mainland Chinese in America, goes on to recommend several topics for pre-evangelistic lecture, which include:

- The rise of modern science and the role of Christianity
- The great debate: creation versus evolution
- Christianity and the modernization of society
- American constitution and its Christian heritage
- Democracy, human rights and Christianity
- Home, sweet home: Christianity and family (Chuang 1995)

These topics were precisely the centers around which the reconstruction efforts were carried out. After the reconstruction, Christianity became not only compatible with science, modernity and democracy but the very foundation of the modern Western civilization. The congruence of Christianity with the scientific, technological, modern worldview became the basis for Chinese students to embrace Christianity.

Drawing upon the field research on two religious movements, the peace movement, and several neighborhood movements, and relying on Goffman's frame analytic perspective, Snow et al. discuss and analyze frame alignment as a necessary precondition for movement participation (1986:464-481). Frame alignment is referred to the congruent and complementary linkage between the interest, values, and beliefs of the individual and the activities, goals, and ideology of the movements (Snow et al. 1986:464). In this chapter, I have examined various frame alignment efforts on the part of the Chinese Christians, including identifying with some of the values that are appealing to Chinese students such as modernity, democracy, and patriotism; framing the Christian appeals in the language of scientific discourse.

CHAPTER 6

WHY BUDDHISM IS NOT THE FAVORED CHOICE

Although Confucianism still exerts its influence on the mores and ethics of the Chinese people, it is now commonly regarded as a system of moral values and social ethics instead of a religion. Therefore, Confucianism and Christianity do not compete at the same level (Yang 1999:154). Taoist philosophy might stir some interest among the intellectuals, but as an institutionalized religion, its influence on contemporary Chinese society is very limited because of its presumed association with superstition (Ching 1993).

Buddhism is probably the only rival to Christianity as a religion. Buddhism has many cultural resonances among the Chinese that are not present with Christianity. Historically, Buddhism is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. It has made a profound contribution to the formation of the Chinese psyche and national culture. Even today, its influence is apparent in popular cultures. Expressions such as “karmic connections between people” (*yuanfen*) and “retribution” (*baoying*) are part of Chinese everyday conversation. Tens or even hundreds of millions of Chinese citizens retain some kind of residual influence from Buddhism. They were perhaps brought up in households where members of the older generation were Buddhist devotees to some extent (Hunter and Chan, 1993). Among 27 interviewees, the post-doctoral student Tang identified himself as a Buddhist. Eight interviewees said that at least one member in their family, usually their grandmother or mother, had some Buddhist beliefs. In addition, four students said they had known someone who was Buddhist back in China.

Tang, a post-doctoral fellow in Mathematics, is one of the only three Buddhists in the entire mainland Chinese community in this state university. Influenced by his elder brother, he became interested in Buddhism as a high school student. In the following seven years in college and graduate school, he read some Buddhist sutras and was fascinated by the profundity of its philosophy. But before he left China for his Ph.D. study in America, he was not ready to identify himself as a Buddhist yet. His roommate in a university in New York, a student from Taiwan, was a devout Buddhist. Under his influence, Tang started to practice vegetarianism²³ in his fourth month in the United States, a sign of his strengthened Buddhist commitment. There was a Taiwanese Buddhist community in New York centering around several Buddhist temples founded by monks from Taiwan. With his roommate, he visited monks, associated himself with Buddhist friends, and regularly attended Buddhist study groups and lectures, as well as meditation retreats. For a time, he even lived his life according to the monastery order. Then he had an enlightenment experience. He described the galvanizing, life-defining moment when he took the Three Refuges Vows (*san guiyi*)²⁴, “I don’t know why. But I couldn’t help crying when the masters started chanting the mantra. Tears were gushing out.” Since then, the Buddhist identity had been deeply rooted in him. He said his worldview was transformed.

Should Tang have stayed in China, his commitment to Buddhism probably would not have come so quickly or so easily. He would have encountered objections from his family and friends who probably would have dreaded the conversion to Buddhism of their close ones as a plague. Using my own example can be helpful to illustrate this entrenched fear among a common Chinese household. During my college years in Beijing, I became interested in Buddhism. One summer break, I went back to my

²³ The Chinese Buddhism requires vegetarianism among monks and nuns and encourages this practice among lay followers.

²⁴ It is to take refuges in the Triple Gems of Buddhism—the Buddha, the Sutras, and the Sangha.

hometown, bringing some Buddhist books with me. My parents literally panicked when they discovered that I was reading those books. My mother's first reaction was, "You won't become a nun, will you?" After reassuring them again and again that being a Buddhist did not necessarily entail withdrawing from the world and joining the monastery, I still could not dispel all the misgivings of my parents. I was practicing vegetarianism in Beijing. However, it had to be discontinued when I stayed with parents. In Chinese culture, vegetarianism is almost certainly associated with Buddhism and symbolizes a deep religious commitment. My mother is not without some belief in the much-secularized Buddhism—She would pay visits to Buddhist temples and ask protection and blessings from Buddha or Bodhisattvas for our family. However, anything beyond the petitionary prayer, such as adopting Buddhist worldview or practices, is regarded by her as leading towards a monastic commitment, which is horrifyingly disruptive of normal family life. Historically, ever since Buddhism entered China in the first century, Confucian scholars never stopped attacking institutionalized Buddhist monasticism as they perceived it to be a serious threat to the familiar and civic duty (Chandler, 1998). Since contemporary Chinese society retains many of the Confucian habits of heart, and since Buddhism in mainland China remains for the large part the other-worldly monasticism, the social milieu in China is adversary to commitment to Buddhism. In United States, Chinese students have more freedom to choose and adhere to their religious beliefs. As one moves out of the familiar cultural niche, s/he grows freer from the constraints of community and acquires more power to reconstruct the self (Dowd, 1991).

According to the statistics collected and compiled by Stuart Chandler, by 1994 there were approximately 125 Chinese Buddhist organizations in the United States, 68 of which are in California, 25 in New York, and the rest scattered from Colorado to Massachusetts, from Louisiana to Wisconsin (1994:23). Most of the organizations concentrated in metropolises with a large Chinese community. Many were founded by

monks from Taiwan. In Tang's case, his Taiwanese roommate was the key figure who introduced him to the local Buddhist support system. Buddhism is the most popular religion in Taiwan, with 30 percent of the population claiming Buddhist belief. Buddhism is far better preserved in Taiwan than in mainland China. The modernization that Buddhism underwent in Taiwan also helped its revival and boom on this island. The modernization efforts could be traced back to the reform of clergy and monastic life pioneered by the Buddhist Abbot Tai Xu (1889-1947) in 1920s (Bush, 1970). Since then, Chinese Buddhists began to adopt Christian organizing and social welfare practices in China. Whereas these modernization efforts were terminated in mainland China under the Communist reign, they have been carried out full scale in Taiwan since 1960s (Yang, 2001). It is interesting to note that the three largest and most dynamic Buddhist organizations in Taiwan today all carry Tai Xu's reformist spirit. They are, respectively, the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tz'u-Chi Association (*Fojiao ciji gongde hui*) founded by the nun Zhengyan, Fo Kuang Mountain by the Ven. Xingyun (Hsing-yun), and Dharma Drum Mountain by Ven. Dr. Sheng-yen. The three have a worldwide network of subtemples, foundations, schools, social welfare agencies, and other auxiliary organizations (Jones, 1999). Many of the organizations are in America.

Tang was uncommon among the Chinese students in many aspects. Even before coming to the United States, he already had immersed himself in Buddhist sutras, and much of his life philosophy was influenced by Buddhism. This prepared him for further commitment once he was freed from social constraints and connected himself with the Buddhist networks in metropolitan New York.

More Chinese students, however, were like Duan and Fu. Duan, a first-year student in Public Administration, who expressed interest in Buddhism in the interview. Protestant Christianity and Buddhism are almost equally influential in his hometown, a coastal city in Southeast China. His mother, like many other local women, would visit Buddhist temples at some specific festivals. At times of uncertainties, she would pray to

the little Buddha statue worshipped at home. Duan noted that although China was nominally a Buddhist nation, Buddhism only means utilitarian rituals for the majority of the devotees. He had little opportunities to learn about the doctrines of Buddhism. In China, his job as an urban designer enabled him to travel around the country, and he would visit Buddhist temples in his trip. Duan felt his heart was filled with peace whenever strolling under those age-old cypresses in the temple. Another source of Duan's impression of Buddhism came from the Chinese calligraphy. Some of the famous ancient calligraphic works are transcripts of Buddhist sutras. Despite the elusive content, the calligraphic works itself conveyed an indescribable feeling to him that was both delightful and soothing. Duan also commented favorably on the inclusive nature of Buddhism. He joined the SBS in his first semester.

Fu, a Computer Science major, said that his mother worshipped Guanyin, the goddess of mercy in popular Mahayana Buddhism. When he was a college student, he accompanied his mother to the Putuo Island in East China Sea, a Buddhist pilgrimage destination especially known as the sacred site for Guanyin worship. His mother prayed and prostrated before the statues. Being a filial son, he did the same whenever he was asked to, although he regarded himself an atheist at that time. Like millions of other Chinese who worshiped Buddha and Bodhisattvas for practical reasons, his mother knew little about the Buddhist teachings and did not incorporate the Buddhist worldview into her life. Fu admitted that he felt attached to Buddhism because of his mother's belief. His positive impression and scanty knowledge of Buddhism also came from the popular martial arts fictions (*wuxia xiaoshuo*), in particular the novels of Jin Yong (Chin Yung) who probably commands the largest readership among the Chinese worldwide. Himself a Buddhist, Jin's novels not only portray the monks and nuns as being admirably carefree and stress-free, but his writings are generally permeated with Buddhist philosophies. In the United States, Fu made the acquaintance of John, an American Christian affiliated with the Bridge International. For one and a half year, they had met almost every

Wednesday afternoon for one or two hours during which John taught him the New Testament. As times went by, Fu's understanding of Christianity grew, so did his respect for Christians. Nevertheless, he did not convert to Christianity. He said he would rather believe in a Chinese religion, such as Buddhism. As he related,

Buddhism sounds abstract and hard to understand, but it seems sacred to me. I have a deep respect for it. I remember when I was a young boy a Japanese cartoon series was shown on TV. I remember it made all the gods in other religions the guardian gods of Athena. So Buddha became a mere guardian god of Athena. I was very indignant at that time. If there were Buddhist temples or organizations that were easily accessible in America, probably I would have leaned towards Buddhism. Who knows? But here, I am surrounded by Christians.

It is noteworthy that the affinity with Buddhism of Fu and Duan derived from their mothers' religious orientation, the commercial culture, and the artistic expressions of Buddhism. They had negligible knowledge about Buddhist doctrines, and they never practiced Buddhism.

Despite the advantage of cultural resonance, Buddhism is far less influential than Christianity among the Chinese student community in America. I argue that this is partly due to institutional factors. To illustrate my point, I sketch the Buddhist organization in the university where I carried out my research.

The SBS was founded by some Taiwanese students in the 1998 with help from an American branch of Dharma Drum Mountain, a Taiwan-based Buddhist organization. Over the years the SBS was joined by several mainland Chinese students. Similar to what had happened to the CCC, mainland Chinese students gradually outnumbered the Taiwanese members. Also during this period, some important Taiwanese members left due to graduation, and no new ones joined. Consequently, the bond with the branch of the DDM extenuated. At the beginning of the semesters, the SBS would post a message on the listserv of the CSA, inviting interested students to come to the meetings. This recruiting technique proved to be rather ineffective, as few new students showed up. All

the new members joined the group through acquaintances with old members. A few of them already had some kind of exposure to Buddhism back in China.

The SBS had eight regular members in 2001. The President, Xia, coordinated the activities of the group. Only three members in the SBS, Tang, myself and Lo, an Education student from Taiwan, identified ourselves as Buddhists. All three of us had already been deeply influenced by Buddhism before we came to the United States. From 2000 to 2001, the SBS met once every two weeks. For a typical meeting, less than 10 students gathered at one member's apartment to discuss some paragraphs in a sutra or one chapter in a book. Although three of the members were somewhat more conversant than the rest with Buddhist doctrines, they commanded little authority—everyone freely said what s/he wanted and disagreed with one another. Quite a few times, the group had to put aside a question for no one had the answer or was able to persuade others into accepting his/her interpretation. The discussion concentrated on the philosophical side of Buddhism, while the Buddhist practice was rarely broached, and the supernatural side, such as the doctrine of transmigration (*lunhui*) or the Western Pure Land Paradise (*xifang jile shijie*), deliberately circumvented. Buddhism was treated as a philosophy instead of a religion. The following episode amply reveals this feature of the group: At a regular Sunday evening meeting, the wife of a member came together with her husband. When she was asked to study the sutra with us, she asked gingerly, “Do I have to become a Buddhist to study it?” Several members assured her that it was not necessary. The President Xia laughed, “If that was the case, I myself would be afraid of joining the group!” More often than not, the discussion on Buddhism would slide out of the track to turn into heated debates or exchanges on seemingly irrelevant topics until someone discovered it and brought the conversation back to the study materials. The conversation covered sundry topics such as the educational system in China, the 2001 American Presidential election, morality, human nature, cooking, photography, etc.

The organization was very loose, resembling more the style of a salon. There was a vacuum of authority within the group. It was devoid of religious atmosphere whatsoever. These characteristics of the group made it insufficient to reinforce religious commitment or to evoke conversion experience.

Compared to the powerful presence of Christianity among the Chinese community in this university, Buddhism was hardly noticeable. Furthermore, the proselytizing efforts of Christianity were far more aggressive than Buddhism, which tend to let non-believers find it instead of actively seeking potential converts. Many students never heard of the existence of the SBS. While the number of 14 percent of Chinese converts strongly indicates the dominant position of Christianity among the student population, it might be helpful if we visualize the typical experience of a Chinese student as a consequence of the influence of Christianity among the Chinese community in this state university.

In the busy early August before the semester started, the CCC and the CSF coordinated with CSA in arranging airport pickups and temporary housing for the new students. Consequently, a Chinese student's first moment in the United States might have some Christian tinge. At the airport, she was picked up by a Chinese Christian and given temporary shelter in the home of the same or another Chinese Christian. The Christians also helped the student to get a social security number, find an apartment, do the shopping, etc. In the disconcerting first weeks, the generosity of the Christians made her life much easier and greatly impressed her. The Christians then invited her to go to the church. Out of gratitude and curiosity, she gladly accepted the invitation. Thus for the first time in her life, she walked into a church where she met many Chinese Christians. Some of them were students like herself.

At the beginning of the new semester, the CCC held a reception for the newly arrived Chinese. The Christian called and arrange for transportation. Approximately 200 people attended the reception. Almost all the 50 or more new students showed up. After a

Chinese-style dinner, a lecture on how to adapt to American society was given. A Chinese student gave his testimony on how he received Jesus Christ after coming to the United States. In the ensuing days, she began to know who among the fellow students were the Christians. The Chinese who studied in the same department revealed himself to be a Christian and gave her some Christian magazines from which she read many conversion stories of overseas Chinese students and scholars. Throughout the year, the CCC and the CSF organized potluck parties, picnics, excursions and festival celebrations for the Chinese community. The BBS of the CSA was a website she frequented daily. The usual content was information, such as yard sales, car sales, or house rentals. But from time to time, students would post their opinions on some controversial issues. Several times, religion was the focus of a heated debate. It was often initiated by some self-claimed atheists and followed by several Christians who defended their faith. She noticed that no religion other than Christianity was mentioned under the title “Let’s talk about religion.” Even at the dinner table when no Christian was present, Christianity was not an uncommon topic. She heard from time to time that some new students became frequent churchgoers and several received Christ by the end of the first semester. Indeed, a couple of them turned out to be her acquaintances. She was invited to attend their baptism ceremony. The most stunning news came one day when she received a phone call from a former college classmate and was told that several days ago he “gave his life to God” and decided to attend a seminary and spread Gospel to people back in China after graduation. She had been asked “Are you a Christian?” several times during her first year even at casual encounters.

In addition to the CCC that enjoyed a regular membership of 70 and the CSF that had a regular attendance of 15-25, there were other American churches that welcomed Chinese students and several American Christians who were doing proselytizing work among Chinese students by themselves. For instance, John, the American Christian affiliated with Bridge International, was very active in the campus. He formed some

small groups of 3 or 4 Chinese students to study Bible together in weekdays. An old couple, Bob and Mary, would come to students' apartment to teach them the Bible over weekends.

In a word, Christianity permeated the Chinese student community. It is almost impossible for a Chinese not to feel the vibrating throb of Christianity.

Christianity occupies the dominant niche in the American culture, whereas Buddhism is clearly not in the mainstream. Dai, the MBA student in a Midwestern university who accepted Jesus but had not received Baptism, made a comparison between Christianity and Buddhism in this regard:

God is everywhere in America. "In God we trust" is inscribed on coins. You meet Christians everywhere. They are decent and nice people. You often hear people say "So help me God" or "My God". Even non-Christians would say those words too. Everybody takes them for granted. In such a culture, your Christianity faith is reassured from time to time. Few people you meet, however, will say "Amitabha."²⁵

Besides the easy acquisition and deployment of social resources and culture support that are enjoyed by Christianity but not Buddhism in American society, to fully understand the reasons behind the lower popularity of Buddhism among Chinese students, we have to look at the perception of Buddhism among Chinese students.

Yan, a student in Agricultural Economics, converted to Christianity during his first year in the United States. When invited to talk about religious exposure back in China, he mentioned Buddhism but equated it with old village women "going to the temple, burning incense, kowtowing to the Buddha." A subdued contempt was still easily detectable in his comment. Intellectuals of the early and mid 20th Century regarded the common practices of Buddhism with disdain, even though they might enjoy a stimulating

²⁵ Amitabha is the Buddha of Blissful Light, who made forty-eight vows to build the Western Pure Land. The devotees of the Pure Land Sect believe that if one concentrates on chanting the name of Amitabha, Amitabha would deliver her/him to the Western Pure Land when s/he dies in this world. Devotees also implore to Amitabha for protection in times of adversity.

discussion of Buddhist philosophy (Bush, 1970). Many of the present-day young intellectuals share the same contempt towards the “superstitious practices” of Buddhism.

Ma, the youngest of my interviewees, said that in high school due to weariness and depression he played with the idea of going to Mt. Wutai to become a Buddhist monk. Ma hardly knew anything about Buddhism. But to him, it represented an escape from “this mortal coil.”

Hu, Veterinary major, had once answered the call of the preacher in a sermon to accept Christ. Later he decided that he could not accept some basic tenets of Christianity and distanced himself from the church. Nevertheless, he thought highly of Christianity and would encourage others to go to church to find out for themselves. Hu had a high school classmate who later became a Buddhist monk. This was apparently something shocking to him. With many years that had passed, there was still consternation in his voice when Hu mentioned that event. In order to make sense of his high school classmate’s unusual and bewildering decision, Hu once tried to read *The Sixth Patriarch Platform Sutra* (*Liuzu tanjing*), a famous Buddhist sutra, however, “it was too abstruse, too difficult to understand.” He said, tongue in cheek,

And it was in ancient language! That added difficulty onto difficulty. After several pages I had to give up for the sake of the well being of my brain. Also, I think Buddhism bears little on the kind of life I am living. It perhaps suits with ancient society well in which people had little things to do after feeding themselves. So they had time to ponder on those abstract ideas. I have to think that Christianity better matches our modern society. For one thing, whether you accept it or not, at least you can understand what it means. And the Christian teachings are readily applicable to our modern lives.

There are two themes embedded in his comment, one being that Buddhism is elusive, the other being that Buddhism is irrelevant to modern life. The first theme was broached by other interviewees too. Bi, for instance, once also tried to feel Buddhism out. Interestingly enough, the book he experimented was the same *The Sixth Patriarch Platform Sutra*. Like Hu, he was frustrated by the difficult language of Buddhist sutra and the abstract philosophical ideas. The second more important theme on the incompatibility

between Buddhism and modernity in Hu's comment was echoed by many more interviewees. The following interview transcript is a further elaboration on this theme by Qian,

I think [Buddhism] is removed from the lives of people, from our modern world. The sculptures of Bodhisattvas in the temples are grotesque. They have a terrifying effect on me. I think they are repulsive.... I thought the God in Buddhism, if there is any, is not a creator god, is not a god who loves people. He demands practitioners to withdraw from the world. I think it is selfishness if one only cares about self-perfection. Buddhism demands followers to practice meditation, vegetarianism, burning incense, chanting sutra. I think it is repressive to human nature. It is against historical progress. It is disconnected to our modern life. If he is the god who creates the universe, he will preserve and protect what he has created instead of asking people to separate themselves from it.

Qian converted to Christianity three months after coming to the United States. It is evident that he knew little about Buddhism for he thought that Buddhism had a God like Christianity. He also used Christianity as the frame of reference to judge Buddhism. More noticeably, however, Hu charged Buddhism from the standpoint from modernity and progress. The students' perception of Buddhism was in line with the commonly held view in mainland China of Buddhism as a monastic religion, a religion of monks and nuns, and a world-renouncing religion. Interviewees thought that the Buddhist practices like vegetarianism was self-constraining and incompatible with modern life, incense burning and mantra chanting passive and meaningless, and monastic commitment disruptive to a normal life. For many students, whether it is conducive to or at least not at odds with modernity and progress is the yardstick to evaluate the value of a religion. Buddhism is not appealing partly because the students perceive that it fails to meet these criteria.

In conclusion, that Buddhism remains less popular than Christianity among Chinese students is due to many factors. First, Buddhism is institutionally weak and less accessible than Christianity among the mainland Chinese student community in America. Second, Buddhism is far less aggressive than Christianity in proselytizing the students. It

is also important to note that the minds of these young Chinese intellectuals are preoccupied with modernity and progress. Buddhism, an ancient religion in Chinese society, symbolizes an archaic tradition. It is perceived as ignorant superstition by some students. Other students might be vaguely appreciative of its philosophical or aesthetic attainments, but they nevertheless think Buddhism lags behind the modern society. Therefore, the frame resonance (Snow et al. 1986) between the students' modernistic ideology and Buddhism is lacking. If Buddhism is ever to become an alternative religion to Christianity for mainland Chinese students, it has to go through the deconstruction and reconstruction, too.

Within the Chinese Buddhist circle, such efforts are not totally lacking. The above-mentioned three Buddhist organizations in Taiwan that have expanded to America all emphasize involvement in social service and social action, and the absorption of Buddhism into everyday contexts of families, interpersonal relationships, communities, and work. They also actively seek to blur the traditional distinction between the clerical and lay realms. The activism and this-world orientation is the realization and amplification of the pioneering ideas of reformation in the modern history of Chinese Buddhism such as Taixu's "Buddhism of human life" (*rensheng fojiao*) and Yinshun's "Buddhism in the Human realm" (*renjian fojiao*) (Jones, 1999). This trend is also in line with the growing phenomenon of "engaged Buddhism" worldwide (see Rothberg, 1998). Dr. C. T. Shen, known for his patronage of the Chuang Yen Monastery in New York, has spoken and written extensively on the compatibility of Buddhist philosophy with modern science and technology (Chandler, 1998). However, the influence of these reconstruction efforts of Buddhism has not yet diffused to the mainland Chinese student community. In other words, the frame alignment has not been successfully constructed.

Can Buddhism eventually become an alternative religion to Christianity among the mainland Chinese student community in America? Will the community become a

religiously more pluralistic situation²⁶ (Berger, 1966), approximating American society at large? In this chapter, I have emphasized that the importance of frame alignment efforts.

²⁶ Peter Berger characterizes the pluralistic situations as the situations when the monopolies can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client population. He points out that “the pluralistic situation is, above all, a market situation” (1966: 137).

CHAPTER 7
DEPRIVATION, DISRUPTION OF MORAL ORDER
AND FRAME ALIGNMENT

One of the conventional approaches to the study of religious movement has emphasized relative deprivation as the major causal factor. It is argued that people who have suffered subjective deprivation are motivated to invent or adopt new ideology. Glock and Stark have identified five kinds of relative deprivation. People who suffer economic deprivation perceive themselves as economically deprived; social deprivation happen when people perceive themselves at a disadvantaged social status; organismic deprivation befalls people suffering from impaired physical or mental health; the ideals and values of people who suffer ethical deprivation are at tension with the general societal values at large; psychic deprivation occurs “when persons find themselves without a meaningful system of values by which to interpret and organize their lives” (1965:248). Deprivation theory requires us to examine social and other conditions for the sources of deprivation in order to discover what motivates people to join the religious movement.

The collective conversion to Christianity of mainland Chinese students in America has been quite noticeable among the Chinese Diaspora since the early 1990s. My empirical study shows that the social-cultural context of mainland China is the point of departure to explain this religious movement. Furthermore, the religious ferment that Chinese society is experiencing, such as the revival of traditional religions, the rapid growth of Protestant Christianity and the emergence of quasi-religious movements, also indicates that the conversion movement of Chinese students in America is not an

isolated phenomenon but can be explained by examining the context of contemporary Chinese society.

The rapid modernization of China has created massive alienation in the society. The young generation bears the imprints of coercive modernization and experiences self-disorientation and self-fragmentation. Among the five types of deprivation aforementioned, psychic deprivation is the most observable in the case of mainland Chinese students. As Glock and Stark point out, “a likely response to psychic deprivation is the search for new values, a new faith, a quest for meaning and purpose” (1965:248).

However, since relative deprivation is a subjective assessment (Glock and Stark 1965:246), it is “generally inferred from theoretical premises rather than being studied directly” (Wuthnow 1987:154). Wuthnow proposes an alternative approach, suggesting to examine the moral order which is more social in nature and more easily observable. He contends that disruption of moral order is likely to be a factor in the alteration of ideology (1987:154-156). My study also finds that the moral crisis of contemporary Chinese society is among the most important factors that have led Chinese students to seek religious resolution. The traditional Chinese value systems that provided a basis for self-anchorage and moral binding for thousands of years were under severe assault after the May Fourth Movement in 1919 and were devastated in the Cultural Revolution. The efforts to erect Communist ethos in their place are already proven to be a failure. The popular phrase “spiritual vacuum” justifiably conveys the anomic state of Chinese society. The lack of a meaning system and moral codes has made the moral fabrics of the society all the more defenseless against the inundating materialism and consumerism since the economic reform in the 1980s. In the midst of pervasive and profound moral crisis, an individual is often left with moral confusion and moral abulia.

It is under such social and cultural contexts that Chinese students are seeking resolutions for self-anchorage and a moral horizon. They convert to Christianity in

America because Christianity can provide meaning and purpose, an all-encompassing worldview as well as a simplified moral universe.

Deprivation theory and Wuthnow's moral order approach are not necessarily antithetical. Psychic deprivation can be caused by disruptions of the moral order. Moreover, the two approaches are complementary. Investigating both the more subjective psychic deprivation and the more objective disturbances in moral order can corroborate each other.

The eschatological response to psychic deprivation and disrupted moral order does not necessarily lead the students to conversion to Christianity. Why did the students covert to this particular religion instead of others? Other factors notwithstanding, I have emphasized the importance of frame alignment in this thesis. The worldview of Chinese students is infused with science, rationality, modernity and progress. The Chinese Christian evangelists, especially those Chinese scholars who entered seminaries and became preachers in the 1990s, carried out an effective job of reconstructing the meaning of Christianity. Through various institutional channels, such as pre-evangelistic lectures, magazine articles and books, sermons and the Internet, they successfully spread the message to the Chinese student community in North America. Consequently, the students' perception of Christianity changed dramatically after some exposure to Christianity in the United States: Christianity turned from a superstition that stood against science and modernity to the cultural core of science, progress, modernity and democracy. After the reconstruction, Christianity became consonant with the students' worldview and appealed to the students because of its compatibility with modernity and science.

Upon examining why Buddhism, a religion that still enjoys cultural resonance among the Chinese, is far less influential among Chinese students in America, I find that one of the essential factors is that the students perceived it as an other-worldly, monastic,

archaic religion that was antithetical to modernity and thus refrained from exploring it as an alternative religion.

Another example that can illustrate my point is from a survey report on Falun Gong carried out by the Voices of Chinese, a volunteer organization of Chinese students studying in the United States. This organization conducted a web survey in order to find out how people thought about Falun Gong. An e-mail message was sent to mainly overseas Chinese people with higher education to solicit participation in the web survey. A total of 1064 valid responses were collected. As it turns out, 85 percent of the respondents report having a Master degree or higher and 96.2 percent of them live overseas. Of those who currently are students, 75.1 percent are pursuing a Ph.D. degree. 21 percent of the respondents are Falun Gong practitioners, 68 percent are not, and 11 percent did not indicate if they are practitioners or not. Therefore, the survey result mainly reflects the perception of the overseas Chinese graduate student on Falun Gong. This population is similar to the research population of my own investigation. The Falun Gong Survey shows that 64 percent of the respondents thought that Falun Gong was anti-scientific and rejected it on this ground more than anything else (Lu, 2001). Falun Gong, a quasi-religious movement in China that also propagates spirituality and moral values, does not have much appeal to the majority of the highly educated overseas Chinese students partly because it is not in alignment with the scientific, rational worldview of the students.

Frame alignment is an interactive process. On the one hand, the Chinese Christian organizations actively reconstructed the meaning of Christianity to attune itself to the scientific, modernistic, progressive ideology of Chinese students. On the other hand, it is an issue of cognitive selection for Chinese students. Ideational elements, ideological appeals are important for Chinese students in choosing their religious orientation and making their conversion decisions. This suggests that the converts are indeed active agents in the process of conversion.

Since self-fragmentation and self-disorientation are widespread among Chinese students, how do we explain some converted while others did not? As I have analyzed in Chapter 4, social network can explain some of it but is not an adequate explanation. Chinese students came to America with pre-existing social network rarely existing. Social ties were often formed in church activities. Although there are plenty examples of conversion moving through pre-existing, extra-movement social network, non-network recruitment are more common. In the following, I would like to draw attention to two issues that I consider important.

First of all, there are some major barriers that prevent young Chinese intellectuals from accepting Christianity, including Chinese cultural identity, nationalism and scientism. The social change and cultural shift as well as the effective reconstruction of the Christians of Christianity have greatly reconciled the antagonism between the three and Christianity. Of the three obstacles, Chinese cultural identity, though only held by a small minority of Chinese students, might be the most obstinate one that resists reconstruction and reconciliation since it is at the same competing level as Christianity.

There are multiple responses to psychic deprivation and disrupted moral order, including various religious responses and secular responses, such as the existentialist response, as well. The second issue that I would like to bring to light is that an increasing number of Chinese students are for the existential resolution or protean resolution or postmodern resolution in face of modern alienation and moral crisis. These students are typically younger students in their early 20s from cosmopolitan cities. Many Chinese metropolis are infused with postmodern culture and abound with the personality type of a protean man who only has superficial commitment and is not interested in a religious resolution, who is accustomed to or even embraces the fragmentary reality. As this group becomes a growing population in the overseas Chinese student community, will the “Christianity fever” start to wane, or will Christianity stabilize and maintain its dominance among Chinese students in America?

A very interesting phenomenon about Chinese students' conversion to Christianity is that Chinese students typically converted to evangelical Christianity instead of liberal Christianity. Yang (1998) discusses why the Chinese immigrants flock to evangelical Christianity instead of liberal denominations. He maintains that it is because evangelical Christianity provides the certainty and absoluteness needed by the Chinese immigrants in the pluralistic postmodern American society. In addition, evangelical Christianity also provides an authority structure to enable the Chinese immigrants to pass on certain cherished Confucian values, such as family and ascetic values, and thus to construct and sustain a unique Chinese identity. In this study, the CCC and the CSF happen to belong to evangelical Christianity. I find that Chinese students' conversion to evangelical Christianity is characteristically not an "informed" decision in that they have not exposed to various denominations of Christianity and did not convert to certain denomination after making comparisons. Most of the Chinese Christian students, even after converting for a few years, had difficulty in distinguishing different denominations. However, not until I gather data on Chinese students who converted to liberal Christianity will I feel confident to address this question. This is an issue to be explored in future research.

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APPENDIX A

THE INTERVIEW GUIDE

The following questions will be asked during the interview whether the interviewee is a Christian convert or not:

1) His/her religious belief.

其宗教信仰。

2) Previous exposure to any religion.

先前与宗教的接触。

3) Family background.

家庭背景。

4) Education background.

所受教育。

4) Experience back in China.

先前在中国的经历。

5) His/her opinion on the current situations and future expectations of China--especially on the aspect of religion.

对中国现状和未来的看法- ---- 尤其对宗教方面。

6) Life in America and how s/he feels about it (for instance, study, play, friendship, a typical day, weekends and holidays, difficulties and how to deal with difficulties, etc).

在美国的生活和感受(如: 学习、娱乐、交友、普通一天的生活、周末和假期、困难及如何应付困难等)。

7) His/her participation in activities organized by church.

参加教会组织的活动的情况。

8) Future plans (for instance, will s/he go back to China or will s/he stay in America after graduation).

今后的打算 (如: 是否毕业后会回中国)。

9) The religion(s) of family members or close friend(s) and how their beliefs have influenced her/him.

家人及亲近朋友的宗教信仰, 他们的信仰对自己的影响。

If the interviewee is a Christian convert, the following question will be asked in addition to the above:

1) When did s/he accept Jesus Christ as her/his personal savior? Under what circumstance?

何时觉知信主? 在何种情形下?

2) Did s/he get baptized? If yes, when and where?

是否已经受洗? 如是, 是在何时、何地?

3) Did s/he give public testimony of her/his faith? Under what circumstance?

是否为信仰做过见证？在何种情形下？

4) Who introduced him/her to Christian belief?

是谁把基督教介绍给他/她的？

5) How did s/he become interested in Christianity and decide to accept it as her/his belief?

他/她是如何对基督教产生兴趣并最终决定接受基督教作为自己的宗教信仰的？

6) Are there any particular person(s) or event(s) that made her/him cling to Christian belief?

是否有什么特殊的人物或事件在促使其相信基督教的过程中起到作用？

7) Why did s/he choose to attend this particular church?

为何选择参加这所教会？

8) Her/his religious practice (church attendance, pray, reading Bible, donation to the church, etc.)?

其个人的宗教活动 (去教堂礼拜、祈祷、读圣经、奉献，等等)。

9) The impact of religious conversion on her/his life.

信教对个人生活的影响。

10) Does s/he try to preach Christianity to others?

是否向他人传教？

11) How did her/his relatives, friends (including those in China), and fellow Chinese students react to her/his conversion?

亲朋好友(包括在中国国内的)及其他中国留学生对其信基督教的看法及反应？

12) Before s/he became a Christian, what was her/his opinion about Christianity?

在成为基督徒之前，他/她对基督教的看法？

13) In retrospect, what were the barriers for her/him to accept Christianity?

回想起来，他/她接受在基督教过程中有何障碍？

14) Her/his understanding of Christianity and other religions.

他/她如今对基督教的及其他宗教的看法。

If the interviewee is not a Christian convert, I will add questions like:

1) Her/his experience with Christianity.

他/她对基督教的接触。

2) What have made her/him decide not to convert to Christianity?

为何不信教？

3) What does s/he think are the factors that lead to the conversion of fellow Chinese students?

其对中国留学生信基督教原因的认识。

4) Her/his understanding of Christianity and Christians.

其对基督教和基督教徒的看法。

5) Her/his experience and understanding of other religions or belief systems.

其对其他宗教的接触和看法。

6) If the interviewee is a believer of other religion, where and how did her/his belief develop and how does s/he practice the religious belief now?

如被采访者有除基督教之外的宗教信仰，此信仰是在何时、何地以及如何产生的？其在美国如何进行个人的宗教生活？

I will also ask the pastor (s) or the lay leaders the following questions:

1) History and reality of the church.

教会的历史与现状。

2) Participation of church activities, church membership of Chinese students.

中国学生参加教会活动及加入教会的情况。

3) What do they think are the factors that lead to the conversion of Chinese students?

其对中国学生信基督教原因的认识。

4) What has the church done to attract Chinese students?

教会方面为吸引中国学生做了何种努力？

5) How do they think of the religiosity and conversion potential of Chinese students compared to other groups?

中国学生的宗教热情和信教可能性与其他国家的学生群体相比有何不同？