

Resurgence of Indigenous Religion in China

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Many scholars have observed in recent years that religion and spirituality are resurgent around the world. Contrary to the predictions of sociologists and others that modern society will eventually become completely secularized, it appears that human beings are engaged in a wide range of religious and/or spiritual experiences, disciplines, beliefs, practices, etc. that were virtually unimaginable two decades ago.

In this chapter we seek to provide evidence that traditional (also known as primal, traditional, folk, indigenous, etc.) religions are also involved in this revitalization, not just Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions. We will focus on the People's Republic of China as an extended case study of the widespread return to religion and spirituality around the world. Some of our discussion will be based on findings from our own research in China in both urban and rural areas.

During the last thirty years many people in mainland China have rediscovered and revitalized their earlier religious and ritual practices. Kenneth Dean estimates that one to two million village temples have been rebuilt or restored across China, and ritual traditions long thought lost are now being re-invented and celebrated in many of these temples.¹ This very rough figure of well over a million village temples does not include the tens of thousands of large-scale Buddhist monasteries and temples, Daoist monasteries and temples, Islamic mosques, and Christian churches (Catholic or Protestant) that have been rebuilt or restored over the past three decades. Recent anthropological

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and ethnographic research demonstrates that China's common spiritual heritage and devotional beliefs and rituals are gaining vitality in the everyday lives of ordinary Chinese people.

Religious resurgence is a global phenomenon that expresses the enormous social, cultural, and political impacts of religious change. As Peter Berger noted, "What has in fact occurred is that, by and large, religious communities have survived and even flourished to the degree that they have not tried to adapt themselves to the alleged requirements of a secularized world. To put it simply, experiments with secularized religion have generally failed; religious movements with beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism (the kind utterly beyond the pale at self-respecting faculty parties) have widely succeeded."² Some scholars are trying to understand the phenomenon of religious resurgence in the globalizing world by observing and analyzing religious identification through religious change and conversion.³ According to Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, religious conversion is a common phenomenon in religious traditions worldwide. Even in tiny preliterate societies, religious factions are common and new religious movements often arise. According to Stark and Finke's definition, "Conversion refers to shifts across religious traditions," such as from Judaism or Roman paganism to Christianity, from Christianity to Hinduism, or from the religion of the Nuer to Islam" While "Re-affiliation refers to shifts within religious traditions," such as when Baptists become Catholics or Sunni Muslims become Shi'ites.⁴ Conversion, like other terms used in the study of religions in the world, is a problematic term when used in the study of Chinese indigenous religious practices and beliefs. In the preface of his splendid book, *Religion in Chinese Society*, C. K. Yang reports, "For many years, I have been perplexed by the problem of the place of religion in traditional Chinese society." He admits that "there was no strong, centrally organized religion in most periods of Chinese history."⁵ Yang

recognized that many categories adequate for understanding Western society and culture were not useful—and sometimes even misleading—when applied to Chinese social realities. Many problems arise if we attempt to explain Chinese religious questions by relying exclusively on Western concepts. If we insist on this approach, much of the intellectual heritage and worldview that has influenced Chinese culture over thousands of years will be lost to academic studies.⁶ Many concepts created in the Western cultural context would lose much of their original meaning once translated into Chinese and read in the Chinese cultural context.

In the following discussion, we draw on current anthropological and ethnographic research for evidence to examine the continuing vitality of China's common spiritual heritage. Our discussion here will be substantially shaped by studies of popular religion based on devotional beliefs and rituals that are alive in the lives and practices of ordinary Chinese people today. We begin with some major researches in the study of Chinese religion to identify the characteristics of "diffused religion" in traditional China. We then describe the contemporary revival of popular religion in China. We conclude with an analysis of how, through the revitalization of their spiritual heritage and the practice of popular religion, individuals and communities discover and reconstruct traditional forms of religion and spirituality that creates modes of self-fulfillment and meaning that transcend the traditional, constricted understandings of conversion.

<1>Pervasiveness of diffused religion

In the first years of the twentieth century, a Chinese translation of the English term “religion” (宗教) appeared in China. This new term, along with other terms related to the study of religious belief and practice, were “all adopted from Japanese neologisms crafted a few years before, and were used to express Western notions which had not existed in the Chinese discourse until then.”⁷ One of those terms is “conversion,” which is difficult to fit into Chinese discourse and does not have a proper Chinese translation⁸. For instance, the term “conversion” is usually translated into Chinese as “guiyi” (皈依),⁹ but this translation does not adequately convey in the Chinese cultural context the equivalent meaning of “conversion” in English. Contrasted with institutional religions such as Christianity or Islam, “diffused religion” in China is a pervasive factor in all major aspects of social life, contributing to the stability of social institutions. Meanwhile, “institutional religion, although important in its own way, lacked organizational strength to make it a powerful structural factor in the over-all Chinese social organization”¹⁰

C.K. Yang recognized that China’s traditional religiousness was deeply imbedded in family life and civic institutions, rather than expressed in a separate organizational structure. In traditional China, therefore, “it was in its diffused form that people made their most intimate contact with religion”¹¹.

In institutional religions like Christianity, participation customarily depends on membership, which characteristically involves personal choice. The diffused religiousness of the Chinese culture does not require an explicit decision to join an identifiable group; no call to personal conversion stands as prerequisite for participation. For example, reporting on his contemporary study of the Black Dragon Temple in Shaanxi Province, Adam Chau observed: “The average

Shaanbei popular religious ‘believer’ does not own any religious texts to read, does not form a congregation to meet at regular intervals, and does not pray to any particular deity with any frequency.”¹² China’s religious practices vary from locale to locale, but in each setting, ritual behavior is highly organized by the community. Local people recognize that there is a proper order to be followed and believe that observing this order is necessary for the ritual to be effective. Normally, temples and their gods have acquired symbolic character, with specific functions involved in the everyday life of the local community. The most common social base for religious activities in China is the "natural village"¹³; by being born in a particular village, people inherit its traditions and responsibilities, which are naturally and permanently a part of their lives. Neither a baptism nor any other formal membership ceremony is necessary for people to be involved in the community rituals.

The spiritual orientation and moral convictions that arose in traditional China did not coalesce into a fully formed religious institution like that in the Western context. The usual structures of institutional religion did not pertain in China: no organized church or formal doctrines or official clergy were required for transmission or ongoing vitality of religion. Instead, in this culture “the prime criteria for religious participation is not to believe, but to belong to a community, such as a village temple community, the clan, or a pilgrimage association”¹⁴“Not to believe, but to belong” means that, in their various local gatherings, the Chinese people enacted their beliefs; in these associations they forged, over many centuries, a spiritual orientation with religious practices including prayers, rituals, and expressions of virtue. We identify this enduring cultural orientation as China’s “common spiritual heritage.” The term ‘common’ in the phrase common spiritual heritage refers to the moral and spiritual convictions widely embraced by ordinary Chinese across

history and up to the present. The central elements of this heritage include *tian* (天) as the transcendent source of moral meaning; *qi* (气) as the energy that animates the universe; ancestor veneration; and *bao ying* (报应) as moral reciprocity. Despite the intensely local character of Chinese religiousness, these beliefs form, as Daniel Overmyer notes, “the basic values and symbolic culture of the great majority of the population” and are still honored throughout the Chinese Diaspora. The term *spiritual* moves the conversation away from thorny questions provoked by the term *religion*—with its many Western (institutional and monotheistic) nuances—in the direction of a moral orientation and worldview that is diffused throughout Chinese culture. This enduring orientation is deeply embedded in Chinese culture, though it has never been organized into an institutional structure such as Buddhism or Christianity. The term ‘heritage’ points to the long tradition of belief and practice (which C. K. Yang and others have designated as China’s “indigenous religion”) that endures today as a resource of moral capital for China’s future. Viewed through an anthropological lens, this heritage is often identified as “popular religion.” Historically, Chinese religiousness has drawn upon plural sources of spiritual nourishment. Resources separately identified with China’s three great traditions—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—have been combined freely in local religious practices, without troubling considerations of denominational distinctions or ritual orthodoxies. In Chinese society, “the Three Teachings did not function as separate institutions each with their own believers; rather, they all served the entire society. . . . Buddhists, Daoists, and Confucianists were all routinely invited by village and neighborhood communities to officiate at their festivals, offering sacrifices, and submitting prayers to the gods on their behalf.”¹⁵ The overlays and borrowings of the religiousness of “diffused religion” from the more formal traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism,

and Daoism comprise the major part of China's "common spiritual heritage." So, "in principle, the Chinese groups had no ground for a sharp distinction between initiated and uninitiated, ordinary and hidden truth, public and secret ritual."¹⁶ This pattern continues in many areas in China today, in both urban and rural contexts.

There is no strict distinction among different religious traditions, since the religious beliefs and the religious taboos do not commit to any particular doctrine or sect affiliation. Brokaw's research on "The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit (功过格)"¹⁷ provides a very good example in her use of *The Tract of Taishang on Action and Response* (太上感应篇) to illustrate her point. She comments, "The cosmology of retribution defined in the *Tract on Act and Response* is also accessible to a general audience; unlike the Daoist and Buddhist scriptures of the early medieval period, it does not bind the system to the gods of a particular sect. The other retributive spirits of the *Tract*, both earthly and heavenly, are drawn from a vast nonsectarian pantheon of gods dating back to the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD) at the latest. The pantheon of the *Tract* is certainly not the exclusive property of any one of the Three Teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism."¹⁸

In the Chinese popular religion that penetrated into everyday life, the values covering filial piety, family rituals, and loyalty to the state are applicable widely to all people, regardless of their status or religious belief. But since these values had been incorporated into Confucian ethics and, to a great extent, into Daoist and Buddhist scriptures, it might be best to consider them as China's "common spiritual heritage," expressed in a diffused form.

<1>Communal aspects of popular religion

Chinese local religion involves large-scale festivals participated in by members of the whole village or township community on the occasions of what are believed to be the birthdays of the gods, or to seek protection from droughts, epidemics, and other disasters. In all cases, such festivals invoke the power of the gods for practical goals to “summon blessings and drive away harm.”¹⁹

In the vast land of China, temples, shrines, altars, and other places of worship can be seen everywhere. The numbers of temples and the extent of their ritual activities have grown rapidly over the past thirty years. According to Dean, “in the rural sector . . . if one takes a rough figure of 1000 people per village living in 680,000 administrative villages and assume an average of two or three temples per village, one arrives at a figure of over 680 million villagers involved in some way with well over a million temples and their rituals.”²⁰

Therefore, popular religion is exhibiting a dramatic revival throughout China. Since the mid-1980s, the government has focused primarily on the modernization of large cities; the rural areas have frequently enjoyed considerable autonomy. With the demolition of the people’s commune system, the central government moved to a policy of benign neglect or *wuwei* (无为)²¹ in regard to rural community life. The local government’s new regulatory relationship with local society is characterized by practical mutual dependence, which gives much space for popular religion to develop. Unlike Daoism or Buddhism, which are among the officially recognized legal religions, popular religion is technically illegal and is seen as a superstitious activity.²² Despite its immense popularity, popular religion still carries with it an aura of illegality and illegitimacy in

China today. Viewing the rebuilding of temples and resurgence of religious activities as communal affairs, however, village people have taken the initiative and ignored government restrictions on popular religion. Meanwhile, given the drastic resurgence of religious activities, many local officials take a one-eye-open-and-one-eye-shut attitude or, in some cases, an even more positive and supportive attitude in the name of carrying on cultural heritage.

A good example comes from Mount Qingxu in Hebei Province, where 19 temples have been rebuilt since the 1980s. One of them is Ge Hong Temple. According to local legend, Ge Hong (葛洪 284–364 CE) and his wife, Bao Gu (鲍姑), brought healing to many who suffered in a local epidemic and also provided shelter for the poor. In recognition of their power and compassion, a temple was built in their honor and a local mountain ridge was named after them.²³ Local peasants have a long tradition of organizing their own religious activities. “Since at least the early twentieth century most Hebei community rituals have been organized and led by the people themselves. Their leaders are selected from male heads of families or lineages who have good reputations and own land. These leaders at the same time may be village heads playing ritual roles. Some are involved primarily in preparation and organization, others in the performance of rituals, but these roles can overlap.”²⁴ Many local temple buildings were destroyed during the Boxer Uprising in the early twentieth century; others suffered severe damage during the Japanese invasion of China in 1937. The Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1976 brought a third effort to destroy these centers of popular religious devotion. With the revival of folk religion since the reform, however, many of the temples have been rebuilt and festivals restored. Now no monks or priests are involved in the temple festivals in the Mount Qingxu area. Organizers of festival activities come from local villages, and each village builds a shed to provide food and boiled water

for the pilgrims. Local people, peasants and officials alike, feel pride in their festivals and take an active part in the activities.

These festivals attracted worshipers from ten surrounding counties as far away as neighboring Henan and Shanxi provinces. Worshipers go up and down the mountain day and night, an eight-kilometer trip on a narrow, stony path. Some women put on new clothing and stick squares of yellow paper in their hair, on which are written “going to the mountain to offer incense.” Many come to repay vows to the gods by contributing incense, oil, and candles, as well as money. People who come from a distance reserve rooms in advance in nineteen surrounding villages, sleeping on mats, cooking their own food on little stoves, and making small contributions to their hosts. (Overmyer 2008) Another local tradition is the participation of performance troupes (*huahui*), involving many different kinds of groups of performers such as stilt walkers, lion dancers, musicians, martial arts masters, *yangge* dancers, and story-tellers. These groups arrive a few days before the temple festival begins, staying in nearby villages and putting up flags to announce their presence. Typically, the pilgrims to the temples located on Qingxu mountain make petitions for peace and good fortune, for the birth of sons, for finding good husbands or wives, and for release from physical and mental illnesses. The festival activities at Ge Hong Temple are replicated in many other shrines throughout Hebei Province; these annual gatherings are complemented by regular visits to various temple sites throughout the year by individuals and families.

The overwhelming majority of Shaanbei²⁵ temples do not have clergy or a set of doctrines that allow for easy identification. And the range of religious activities at any one temple can be quite wide and confusing for anyone who is looking for “pure” Daoist or Buddhist characteristics. Even historically, Daoist and Buddhist temples have accommodated elements that are

“unorthodox.”

A very good example comes from Adam Chau’s research about the dragon king (*longwang*, 龙王), who is the agrarian deity par excellence, especially in drought-prone northern China. Torn down completely by the villagers themselves during the Cultural Revolution and rebuilt from scratch in 1982, the Heilongdawang temple has been expanding in grandeur ever since. Its fame really took off in the mid- and late-1980s, when stories of Heilongdawang’s²⁶ efficacy spread widely in Shaanbei and when the Heilongdawang Temple began to host opera performances that are by far the longest, most diverse, and most expensive in Shaanbei.

The temple coffers swelled as its fame grew phenomenally. Compared to the throne of village dragon kings, Heilongdawang is considered a much more powerful god because he has an imperially conferred official title, the Marquis of Efficacious Response (*Lingyinghou*, 灵应侯).²⁷ In the past as well as today, believers go to Heilongdawang to pray for divine assistance not only for relief from draught but for all kinds of other problems. Over the last decade or so, however, more and more people have come to ask Heilongdawang to help them with their businesses, to bless them so they will get rich. It is now the richest temple in Shaanbei, receiving more than a million *yuan* RMB²⁸ in donations from worshipers each year, though the temple is hidden away in a long, narrow valley called Longwanggou (literally the Dragon King Valley).

The Longwanggou temple festival in honor of the Heilongdawang’s “birthday” is one of the most famous and well attended temple festivals in Shaanbei. A few hundred thousand visitors and pilgrims come to Longwanggou during the six days of the temple festival. The entire valley is jam-packed with people, food stalls, watermelon sheds, game circles, pool tables, circus and performing troupe tents (even some with “freak” shows), incense and firecracker stands, makeshift

convenience stores, all kinds of small, mobile peddling devices, and even little gambling dens strewn here and there among the crowds.²⁹

There were and are different levels of beliefs and practices regarding the gods, who possess various types of functions.³⁰ For example, there is a goddess represented by a female medium who lives next to a temple that she herself built. She claims to be a living manifestation of an ancient goddess: “I am the Silkworm Mother; I am coming here to heal people who have disease.” People turn to Mrs. Wu for the healing of illnesses that cannot be cured by either Western or Chinese medicine. As more and more people receive help from Mrs. Wu, they believe that the Cult of the Silkworm Mother is *ling* (灵 efficacious). Thus, efficacious divine power makes the Cult of the Silkworm Mother more and more influential. People come to see Mrs. Wu not only from Zhiwuying village and villages that are nearby, but also from distant places such as Beijing, Shijiazhuang, and other cities. Those people in turn testify that they have benefited from worshiping the Silkworm Mother and spread the good news about Mrs. Wu, and this has made the Cult of the Silkworm Mother grow in popularity among many villages. On the ninth day of the ninth lunar month in 2001, about 150 people gathered in Mrs. Wu’s house to begin a pilgrimage to the Silkworm Mother Temple located in the Xi’shan (西山, West Mountains) 200 miles away.³¹ A new Silkworm Mother Temple has been built in Yang Village near the birthplace of the Silkworm Mother; another Silkworm Mother Temple has been rebuilt in Xi’shan, and more religious sites are now being constructed. Temple festivals attended by many worshipers also take place for the Cult of the Silkworm Mother, lasting several days and including offerings in temples and the performance of operas or puppet-plays. For local believers, this goddess is not a fictitious figure but a real human being who lived in the area many years ago. People believe that the

Silkworm Mother helps to solve various difficulties and problems. She has the ability to possess shamans, perform cures, send sons, and work miracles, which makes her more accessible and appealing than other gods. Above all, the Silkworm Mother is a local god; she is also identified as a neighbor by villagers.

As we have already pointed out, the diffused religiousness of the Chinese culture does not require an explicit decision to join an identifiable group, since the village people were born in this cultural environment and are naturally and permanently part of the inherited traditions and responsibilities. Popular religious activities with lay leaders have long been active in local communities, featuring their own forms of organizations, activities, rituals, and beliefs. The local divine power who were also once human beings are believed to sympathize with and respond to their worshipers. To the ordinary people, a deeper understanding of religious doctrines and myths is not really necessary.

<1>The family, ancestor veneration, and cultural capital

Many local religions in China are based on family worship of deities and ancestors on home altars, because clans constitute an important unit in society. In December 2007, the Chinese government added three traditional festivals—*Duanwu* (端午), *Qingming* (清明), and Mid-Autumn (中秋)—to the list of official holidays observed in the People's Republic of China. These festivals have both religious and cultural meanings. Serving to express ancestor veneration, *Qingming* festival is the time when people go to family graves of departed ones to pay respects to their ancestors. The persistence of the *Qingming* Festival demonstrates that the authorities have

finally come to terms with the religious traditions of the great majority of the people.

The worship of ancestors still plays an important role for the maintenance of unity and continuity of family, since people believe that the spirits of the ancestors as an integrating factor give people inspiration for achieving success in modern times. There is much evidence coming from ethnographic research that supports the resurgence and vitality of ancestor veneration in China. For instance, in Beijiabi Village, Handan, Hebei Province, local people with the family name Lin are descendants of Lin Xiangru (蔺相如) (329-259 BCE), who was a famous minister of Zhao State during the Warring States Period (475-221 BCE). This lineage has been living in the Handan area for at least 2200 years. The Lins live in six villages in this area and cooperate in important activities related to ancestor veneration. They regularly maintain the practices for mourning the dead and perform ancestor worship in the home and ancestral temple (*citang* 祠堂)³².

C. K. Yang traces a development within ancestor veneration that not only shows the interaction of various belief systems, but also addresses the ways that a diffused religious heritage contributes to social order. An example is found in Wenzhou (温州), a coastal area in Zhejiang Province, East China, which has been known as a “regional center of global capitalism” since the 1990s. During the reform era, Wenzhou's economic development was mainly characterized by private or family-owned businesses making small merchandise such as buttons, shoes, clothes, and household appliances. Meanwhile, Wenzhou is also a place where the tradition of family-clan system and ancestor veneration has been widely revived. In Cangnan county alone, for example, there are 123 ancestral temples of Chen lineage that have been rebuilt in recent years, serving 184,260 local people who are of the Chen lineage.³³ In Chenjiabao Village (陈家堡) of this county, the Chen family has been there since 1250 CE, a total of 26 generations, and have a current

population of 8810. They completed the reconstruction of an ancestral temple in 2004. The ancestral temple is located at the entrance of Chenjiabao Village as a symbol of the religious devotion of the Chens to the spirits of the ancestors. The facade of the building copies the design of the Tiananmen Tower in Beijing. With its impressive size and elaborate decorations, this temple stands out among the more than one hundred Chen ancestral temples in the county and represents the wealth, influence, and achievement of the Chen clan in the area. Furthermore, there are plaques displaying mottos and exhortations left by the forefathers to inspire ambition and moral achievement among their posterity.

Members of the Chen clan gather annually at this village to mourn the dead and venerate their ancestors. For some special occasions, people from other villages and towns, or even Chen descendants from faraway cities and overseas places, gather in the hall for ancestor veneration and festival celebrations. The whole environment of rituals emphasizes a group tradition and symbolizes a moral atmosphere permeated with the sacred character of the ancestral spirits. “The whole series of sacrificial rites helped to perpetuate the memory of the traditions and historical sentiments of the group, sustain its moral beliefs, and vivify group consciousness. Through these rites and the presence of the group in the full numerical strength, the clan periodically renewed its sentiments of pride, loyalty, and unity.”³⁴

As ancestor veneration developed in Chinese culture, people took note of certain persons who had made exceptional contributions to their clan and the larger community. Because of the moral excellence of these individuals, people began to believe that such persons do not perish after death but instead are transformed into protector deities. C. K. Yang describes this tradition: “Every culture, simple or complex, develops some mechanism to perpetuate the memory of illustrious men

who exhibit extra-ordinary moral qualities and perform public duties unusually well.”³⁵

Yang describes the “ethnico-political” process by which certain persons who have “rendered distinguished public service often receive posthumous divine titles from the government or had a sanctuary built in their memory after death.”³⁶ Such transformations are driven by the conviction that “for such a personality, death might destroy his body, but his spirit would remain undaunted. As people could not forget his unusual qualities, their memory of his spirit continued and inspired the mythological lore to substantiate and perpetuate his memory.”³⁷

In Qiang Village, Handan, Hebei Province, the historical figure Lin Xiangru (蔺相如) is celebrated as such a deity. More than two millennia after his death, his protection and patronage are celebrated in a recently renewed “temple” (*miao*) in this village. In acknowledgment of Lin Xiangru’s protective power, a memorial temple was once built many centuries ago at the site of his tomb. Even during the Cultural Revolution, when the temple building was utterly destroyed, village people maintained a small, hidden shrine in his honor.

In the 1990s, people in the area started plans for rebuilding a memorial to Lin Xiangru at the site of his tomb. Renovating this important shrine was seen as part of a larger refurbishing of the area. Mr. Lin’s birthday on July 20 in the lunar calendar is the occasion for a large temple festival. People come from many outlying villages to take part in the religious/civic event. A market naturally springs up to meet the needs of the festival and to take advantage of the heavy flow of traffic.

Although this temple and many of its activities are still seen by the government as “feudal superstition” and thus are, technically, illegal, local officials show no objection to what takes place at Mr. Lin’s temple. These officials are themselves part of the community that reveres the memory

of this historical figure and have come to believe in his power of protection. The expression of devotion exhibited here does not lead to political unrest. In fact, it appears to contribute to the harmony and wellbeing of the citizens. For these reasons, the government shows little inclination to suppress the activities at the site. As a matter of fact, the authorities have been increasingly tolerant of these “technically illegal” activities, especially since the start of the new century.

In the yard of Lin’s temple are many steles and stone carvings, given by entrepreneurs and local scholars; these are considered “capital improvements” that add to the reputation and spiritual “worth” of the site. As Lin Xiangru is a well-known figure³⁸ in China, the “temple” was built in the name of a cultural site. Both local people and government officials have become accustomed to seeing Mr. Lin’s temple as a cultural site; it is no longer associated with superstition. Everyone sees that the temple and its yard has not only enhanced their pride in their heritage but has substantially increased their cultural esteem in the larger locale. The memory of Lin celebrates a historical person who was both a person of high moral quality and a virtuous official. Thus has the *de facto* religious temple of Lin gained legitimacy; thus has his spiritual *ling* (efficacy) multiplied.

<1>Common spiritual heritage: from spiritual hunger to spiritual nourishment

With the death of Mao Zedong in 1976, and as the promise of Marxism eroded, people felt both the disorientation and the exhilaration that came with the collapse of the Cultural Revolution. However, the radical transformation of the Chinese socio-economic structure also seems to have rendered Maoism obsolete. As the once-sacred canopy was in tatters, society-wide disappointment

and a “spiritual vacuum” could be felt throughout China in the late 1970s and early 1980s.³⁹

“Spiritual needs” arise in various domains of human life. Marxist theory suggests that “spiritual needs” are a projection of unmet “basic needs.” Religion functions only as compensation, distracting attention from the struggle for a more just distribution of material resources. When the material needs of a human population are met, this illusory distraction will no longer be needed and religion will disappear. However, this may also hold true the other way round; that is, when people have their material needs met they may have even greater hunger for spiritual fulfillment. Based on the ethnographic studies of migrants in the city of Shenzhen, the following discussion drives this point home.

In 1979, as part of his program of Reform and Opening Up, Deng Xiaoping declared Shenzhen (深圳), a small fishing village in Guangdong Province, next to Hong Kong, plus a vast tract of surrounding territory as a Special Economic Zone. By the 1990s, Shenzhen was already a modern city with a population of millions, including many young urbanized Chinese who had grown up during the Cultural Revolution and were embracing elements of traditional beliefs and practices as part of their personal spiritual awakening. Preeminent here are the quest for meaning and purpose in life as well as for the freedom needed to pursue this search. The new residents of Shenzhen found that economic wellbeing was not enough. As their initial hopes for a better-paying job and a higher standard of living were met (or even exceeded), life questions of a different kind emerged. Many Shenzhen respondents commented that before arriving in this new city they asked few questions of their life’s purpose. Instead, whatever came in life was accepted as inevitable: “This is my life.” But in Shenzhen they became attuned to the more-than-mundane aspects of their daily experience. Amid the changing fortunes of their lives in Shenzhen, the economic migrants

moved toward a new level of awareness. The shift was manifested in a new sensitivity to spiritual dynamics that may be at play in human experience and a heightened sense of responsibility for the direction of their own lives.

The most significant finding of Fan Lizhu's research in Shenzhen is that the once latent religiousness of Chinese traditional culture is now resurgent. Western-style capitalism—with its double threat of “blind” market forces and moral relativism—threatened to undermine traditional values, sounding the death knell for spirituality. But today in the city of Shenzhen, economic opportunity coexists with a new and exciting spiritual awakening. Confronted with new questions of meaning and purpose of life, the respondents⁴⁰ did not turn to the officially approved religious institutions of Buddhism, Daoism, Christianity, or others. Instead, they found very personal approaches for their spiritual search from the age-old traditions of China's common spiritual heritage, which does not ask for membership or baptism or limit their spiritual freedom. By turning to their ancient cultural heritage, they find a way to solve the problem of making sense of life and finding inner peace.

The people Fan met in Shenzhen recognized themselves as on a very personal search for spiritual meaning. They were eager to speak about activities and practices gaining new significance in their lives. For example, one group formed a loose network and gathered with some regularity at a vegetarian restaurant owned by a Buddhist laywoman. Here they would meet with other persons on the spiritual journey. Part of the space in the restaurant is dedicated to a small bookstore featuring a wide array of spiritually oriented titles, and a bulletin board lists activities in which people may be interested, such as a lecture in the community, a ritual gathering planned in the near future, or an ecological project asking for volunteers. Sometimes the restaurant owner

invites a local monk or a visiting international author to make a brief public presentation. More often the discussion develops informally, as customers linger after their meal to share concerns and speak about their spiritual practices.

People share their experience with the practice of meditation and physical exercise and prayer. They talk about the impact of the spiritual insights and ritual activities in their own lives. This kind of preference of religious practice and belief should be understood from the broad definition of religion offered by C. K. Yang: “Religion may be viewed as a continuum ranging from nontheistic belief systems with an emotional intensity that borders upon ultimacy, to theistic belief systems with ultimate values fully symbolized in supernatural entities and supported by patterns of worship and organization.”⁴¹

A look at Shenzhen suggests that the values and practices of China’s common spiritual heritage continue to energize contemporary Chinese caught up in the cultural dynamics of urbanization. These people quite comfortably employ terms such as *karma* to augment their understanding of the chance events that, upon reflection, they do not see as chance at all. Such terms with strong religious connotations are very common in people’s conversation, even though native speakers are hardly aware that some important words and concepts have been borrowed from various religions. This kind of borrowing is especially prevalent in the Chinese spiritual heritage, which never worries about whether it is borrowing or even engaging in syncretism.

Fan’s research in Shenzhen sheds light on the human impulse to search out “meaning beyond the mundane.” And the findings indicate that economic advancement does not necessarily do away with spiritual needs; instead, it appears to create the conditions for people to face deeper spiritual hungers of which they were previously unaware. In this “free market” atmosphere, people are able

to choose their own means of satisfying their spiritual hungers. Many of them returned—often self-consciously—to practices that are part of China’s old tradition, practices to which Chinese people over the centuries have turned in their search for deeper meaning and a peaceful way to live in the world. The moral freedom in this city—unimaginable in earlier days and other places in China—generates a resurgence of interest in China’s cultural heritage of religiousness. In their discussion about their experience in searching for spiritual fulfillment, the respondents in Fan’s research often centered on traditional Chinese themes—*ming yun*, *yuan fen*, *bao ying*, and *wu*. In this section, we first briefly define these terms and then illustrate them with case examples from the study.

Personal Destiny (*ming yun*, 命运). Chinese have always believed that a person’s life (*ming*) is somehow related to the influence of a transcendent force named *tian* (天) or heaven. What had once been seen as the ruler’s “divine right” to rule (his “mandate of heaven,” or *tian ming*) was interpreted by the philosopher Mencius (372-289 BCE) as part of every person’s destiny, that is, *ming yun* (命运) (Mencius, Tsin sin I). This ancient belief in *ming yun* should be understood in two aspects: *ming* (命) as the given status of personal destiny and *yun* (运) as the changing circumstances and individual choices. The combination of these two aspects into *ming yun* as personal destiny keeps life open-ended. For the Chinese, as for people of many other cultures, a person’s destiny is seen as both fixed and flexible.

For some decades during Mao’s time, the “fixed” or fated side of life seemed to dominate. One had to accept one’s lot in life as a worker, as a farmer, as a wife, or whatever. Imagining an alternate destiny was all but impossible. Profound changes since the post-Mao reform have attuned China’s younger generation to more choices and new possibilities. In place of state-sponsored

guarantees of lifetime employment—the so-called “iron rice bowl” —young people today can and must choose their own careers. Their livelihood is no longer chained to the *danwei* (单位),⁴² the local work unit that had previously exercised near total control over employment as well as many other aspects of people’s lives.

In Shenzhen people live in a “free market” for jobs and salaries. “Here I’m free to choose my work,” said Ms. Wang. “I can even leave this job if I don’t like it, because I know I can find another job in a short time.” For many respondents there, this utterly novel experience of employment freedom was linked to a growing awareness of deeper levels of personal decision-making now available to them. And with their expanded consciousness has come a new range of spiritual questions. If this provokes anxiety, it also brings freedom, with a sense that one’s destiny is highly flexible. In contemporary Shenzhen, residents frequently speak of “grasping their fate.”

Mr. Zhou is a good example of this attempt to grasp one’s fate. In the mid-1990s he moved to Shenzhen to start his own small business; now he has met with material success well beyond his earlier hopes. Living in his hometown, he had never entertained the questions, such as meaning and purpose of life, since any decision about his life would be determined by his family. After several years of struggle in Shenzhen, Zhou was suddenly quite successful, now owning a house and even a private automobile. This financial success triggered deeper questions about life. Now, in the giddy freedom of Shenzhen, he found he was not able to simply enjoy his new wealth. His sudden good fortune led him to ask himself: Why is this success mine? While others he knew—equally hard-working—were still struggling, his life and career had quite suddenly begun to flourish. To make sense out of this turn of events, Mr. Zhou found himself unexpectedly

returning to traditional convictions in his culture about personal destiny or *ming yun*. As Mr. Zhou well knew, to say “my life (*ming*) is good” was not to brag but expressed surprise and even gratitude for the good fortune that had come to his life. While the ancient concept of *ming yun* did not fully explain Mr. Zhou’s recent successes, it did make him more mindful of the good fortune that had been given him—a fortune that he recognized he was now responsible for. This retrieval of an ancient theme made Mr. Zhou more attentive to the meaning of life, and he eventually started to practice what would be called popular religion.

Fateful Coincidences (*yuan fen* 缘分) . Another element in the Chinese common spiritual heritage that surfaced repeatedly among the respondents was that of chance or fateful coincidence, which in Chinese is *yuan fen* (缘分). This notion is commonplace in Chinese tradition, serving as a rough equivalent to the English phrase “luck” with an emphasis on certain potential relationship. Chinese are likely to describe any happy coincidence—the chance meeting, for example, of a good friend in a supermarket—as *yuan fen*. There is, of course, also bad *yuan fen*, what in English one might name “an unlucky break.”

Almost all of Shenzhen’s residents had moved to this burgeoning metropolis in the previous one or two decades. Leaving settled lives in their old home towns, they were intent to make a new life in the new environment. Their re-location brought them much more than physical displacement. Ms. Wang, for example, was struggling to understand her own life journey. Her present economic wellbeing in Shenzhen had come about through circumstances that were mysterious to her. Several crises and painful setbacks had led her to come to this city, where her fortune experienced an about-face. But, after many reversals of fortune, she found herself in Shenzhen with an excellent job that offered quick promotions.

But Ms. Wang wondered how those earlier crises and reversals contributed to her life today. In this realization her sense of *yuan fen* underwent a transformation; for her, *yuan fen* no longer simply referred to superficial chance events but now registered important links between her previous unfortunate experiences and her present wellbeing. She seemed to take *yuan fen* out of its more everyday and superficial meaning and assign it a richer sense of “fateful coincidence” that was intimately linked to the current direction of her life.

Despite the pain Ms. Wang’s misfortunes caused her at the time, many of the misfortunes she suffered along the way seemed to have led to this new and much better life. How to explain this? To help fathom this contemporary mystery, Ms. Wang rediscovered a theme from China’s past: *yuan fen* as fateful coincidence. This deeply embedded aspect of Chinese culture became fused many centuries ago with the Buddhist notion of *karma*; in a universe that is thoroughly moral, there are no mere coincidences. The events of our lives, for better or for worse, are related to past behavior—virtuous or otherwise.

K. S. Yang and David Ho have discussed the psychological advantages of this traditional belief. By assigning causality of negative events to *yuan fen* that is beyond personal control, people are able to “soothe relationships, reduce conflict, and promote social harmony.”⁴³ Similarly, when positive events are seen to result primarily from *yuan fen*, personal credit is not directly assigned—thus reducing pride on one side of the relationship and envy and resentment on the other.

Ms. Wang’s interpretation of *yuan fen* had undergone a transformation through her own life journey in Shenzhen. Earlier, she had understood *yuan fen* as a simple coincidence or a casual chance event. Now, she sees fateful coincidences as having shaped her fortune in a favorable way.

This insight has made her grateful. And her new appreciation of *yuan fen* has moral consequences, which have given rise to a heightened sensitivity to the ethical dimensions of her professional life. She desires to conduct her life according to high moral principles so that her favorable *yuan fen* will continue. For Ms. Wang, *yuan fen* has shifted from cultural cliché to a meaningful marker of a moral life. From this case, we see another important dynamic aspect in the Chinese spiritual heritage. Personal destiny and fateful coincidence are linked; what had appeared on the surface to be chance events (for better or for worse) are, in fact, part of some deeper, more spiritual rhythm that shapes a person's life.

Moral Reciprocity (*bao ying* 报应).⁴⁴ Traditional Chinese belief in *bao ying* or moral reciprocity tells us that people dwell in a moral universe. In *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, Cynthia Brokaw describes *bao ying* as a “belief in a supernatural or cosmic retribution, a belief that has been a fundamental, at times *the* fundamental, belief of Chinese religion since the beginning of recorded history.”⁴⁵

For many respondents in this fast-changing city of Shenzhen, questions of morality were of greatest concern. Ms. Shen recalled her early experience in the city, when she was ready to cheat clients in pursuit of greater profits. As she became increasingly wealthy, she also experienced an increasing sense of guilt. During this period of regret, Ms. Shen went with a friend to a public lecture offered by a visiting Buddhist monk. One of his statements struck home: “If you are meant to have something, it will be yours. Otherwise there would be *bao ying*.” Puzzling over this cryptic statement, she began to question her own acquisitiveness and greediness. Gradually, she came to see her business pursuits as part of a larger life design. She determined to end her deceitful practices and adopt a pattern of strict honesty in her dealings with others.⁴⁶

This belief in moral reciprocity, woven deep into the fabric of Chinese culture, is rooted in the conviction that the universe is moral. This view of fate as moral retribution dominates the earliest Zhou (1046-771 BCE) texts, including those later incorporated into the Confucian canon. The *Classic of History* says, “On the doer of good, heaven sends down all blessings, and on the doer of evil, he sends down all calamities.” (《书经·汤诰》) Ms. Shen now recognized that living according to higher moral standards would affect her own future; good would come from this moral discipline. She began to believe that, even financially, she would have “what she was meant to have.”

These moral themes—fateful coincidence, personal destiny, and moral reciprocity—are closely interrelated. Apparent chance events, small or big, influence the shape and fortune of each person’s destiny. Recognizing this connection has the moral result of making a person more responsible for his or her actions. The recognition of the Chinese common spiritual heritage tells us that the residents of Shenzhen today enjoy a freedom that is not only economic, but spiritual. Now, in the “free-market” atmosphere of Shenzhen, they are able to choose their own means of satisfying their spiritual hungers. Their interest is seldom in the orthodox understanding of these themes or in the institutional religions. Instead they speak of the impact of these spiritual insights and ritual activities in their own lives through ancient Chinese moral categories that are a crucial part of Chinese popular religions..

Awareness (wu 悟) .The three themes of personal destiny, chance, and moral reciprocity form an interlocking unity within the Chinese common spiritual heritage. Each is related to the others; seemingly chance events profoundly influence one’s destiny; yet one’s own responsible performance within a moral universe also gives shape to one’s life. Doing good for others

produces further good for oneself, according to the traditional theme of moral reciprocity (*bao ying*).

These three themes in the common spiritual heritage of Chinese only come alive when a fourth theme is introduced. Many respondents in Fan's study spoke of a "new awareness" (*kai wu* 开悟 or *jue wu* 觉悟) that triggered their new consciousness of the above three themes. A spiritual awareness is the engine or energy that moves these themes from mere ideas to motivating forces in an individual's life. A new and deeper awareness of *ming yun* ignites a more responsible attitude toward life; a richer awareness of *yuan fen* as more than mere coincidence stirs a person to respond to events instead of simply resigning themselves to a response such as, "That's life."

Mrs. Wei is a well-educated person who enjoys a high profile as the host of a popular call-in television show in Shenzhen. She takes satisfaction in giving good advice to those who call her with questions and problems. And she sees this public service as a fruit of her growing spiritual awareness. Impressed by the calm and peacefulness she has observed in the Buddhist monks who have preached in this city, Mrs. Wei says she has determined to live in a more mindful way. She has arranged a small shrine in her home where each morning she sits quietly in front of a statue of Guanyin. She has become more careful and intentional about her diet and consciously links her nutritional habits with her spiritual nourishment.

Awareness, as a dynamic factor in the Chinese spiritual heritage, appears in two guises: it is first a realization that arrives as a gift, seemingly unbidden; then it necessarily becomes a practice that a person intentionally follows. That is, some of the respondents in the study reported becoming aware in a quite sudden fashion and/or in a way that was triggered by external events (hearing a lecture or reading a book). Having received this new awareness about their destiny,

what had seemed like chance events, or the need to do good and benefit their own fate, some respondents told how they had developed this sense of awareness. This might be through practices of private devotion, or periodic discussions in vegetarian restaurants, or a more social, ritualized practice of freeing animals in the Buddhist ceremony of *fang sheng*.

<1>Chinese popular religion—thriving in the midst of everyday life

Daniel Overmyer observes, “Chinese local rituals and beliefs are similar to those of ordinary people in many other cultures, whatever their larger political and intellectual contexts; wherever one looks, one sees people praying and sacrificing to their gods or saints for help in dealing with the difficulties of life, appeals that can also involve festivals and processions.”⁴⁷

In the twenty-first century, the Chinese common spiritual heritage continues to exist in China’s rural and urban areas. This heritage is characterized as a non-institutionalized, non-rationalized (in the Weberian sense) form of religion; diffuseness remains the major characteristic of folk religion in China. Instead of signaling the demise of traditional religiousness, China’s economic development seems to have quickened the impulse of spiritual renewal. The worldview of the Chinese common spiritual heritage is distinctive. Its images and practices are shaped by the elaborate codes of Chinese culture, which help Chinese people to face the challenges and puzzles brought about by modernization.

In conclusion, we are convinced that the dramatic revival and development of Chinese popular religion in recent years is not dependent on institutional “shifts across religious traditions.” Every single religious tradition developed in the history of China contributes to the common rich spiritual

heritage that pervades various aspects of everyday life.

When a Chinese person turns to certain ideas of the popular religion, or takes part in certain ritualistic activities, it is more likely because he or she feels the necessity of some adjustment in his or her way of everyday life. However, there is not much, if any, thinking or talking about being converted or not converted. Even when a Chinese accepts and practices certain religious principles, he or she is likely not to gain membership in that particular religion through what is generally known as “conversion.” After all, the folk religion of China is diffused and highly inclusive.

Understanding the resurgence or revitalization of religions/spirituality around the world may be constricted if the term “conversion” (especially as it has been used in Western Christianity) is deployed. We believe, however, that the return to or the rediscovery or discovery of the depth dimension of human experience, both individual and communal, is important in the study of both global and local manifestations of religious/spiritual change in the contemporary world.

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¹ Kenneth Dean, "Local Ritual Traditions of Southeast China: A Challenge to Definitions of Religion and Theories of Ritual, ," in *China: Methodology, Theories and Findings*, ed. Fenggang Yang and Graeme Lang (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

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³ Patricia M. Davis and Lewis R. Rambo, "Converting: Toward a Cognitive Theory of Religious Change," in *Soul, Psyche, Brain: New Directions in the Study of Brain-Mind Science*, ed. Kelly Bulkeley,(New York: Palgrave, 2005 Macmillan) 4.

⁴ Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. (Berkeley: University of California Press 2000) 114.

⁵ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 3-4. .

⁶ Lizhu Fan, “The Dilemma of Pursuing Chinese Religious Studies in the Framework of Western Religious Theories,” *Fudan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 2 (2) (2009): 29-48.

⁷ Vincent Goossaert, “Religious Traditions, Communities and Institutions.” In *Chinese Religious Life*, eds. David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)172.

⁸ Yang, Fenggang, trans. Chinese version of *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*. (Beijing: People’s University Press, 2004) 142.

⁹The Chinese term *guiyi* (皈依) refers to the ceremony that initiates a person as a Buddhist. This procedure of changing a layman into a believer has very strong Buddhist connotations. More importantly, many people in China, if not the majority, practice Buddhism without going through such a ceremony.

¹⁰ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961, 296.

¹¹ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961, 296.

¹² Chau, Adam. *Mysterious Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 242.

¹³ The term “village” (Chinese: 村, pinyin: *cun*) in China today may refer to either a natural village or an administrative village. A natural village (Chinese: 自然村, pinyin: *zìrán cūn*) is a spontaneously and naturally formed rural community unit, while an administrative village (Chinese: 行政村, pinyin: *xíngzhèng cūn*) is a grassroots-level administrative unit that is the lowest

level of the government system. Quite often an administrative village may include more than one natural village. But sometimes, an administrative village may include only one natural village. In the latter case, they just overlap.

¹⁴ Vincent Goossaert, “Religious Traditions, Communities and Institutions.” In *Chinese Religious Life*, eds. David A. Palmer, Glenn Shive, and Philip L. Wickeri. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 187.

¹⁵ Lizhu Fan, James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, *Sociology of Religion : Religion and China*, Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2010) 290- 291.

¹⁶ Lizhu Fan, James Whitehead and Evelyn Whitehead, *Sociology of Religion : Religion and China*, Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2010) 194

¹⁷ The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit (功过格). The ledgers of merit and demerit are a category of morality book (shan-shu, literally, “good books”) , a genre of literature that as a whole became very popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The ledgers are founded on the belief in supernatural retribution, that is, the heaven and gods will reward men who do good and punish those who do evil.

¹⁸ Cynthia Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1991) 40.

¹⁹ Daniel L. Overmyer, “Protestant Christianity in China: Perspectives from the History of Chinese Religions and Early Christianity in the Roman World”, *China Review* Vol 9, No 2 (2009)

²⁰ Kenneth Dean, “Local Ritual Traditions of Southeast China: A Challenge to Definitions of Religion and Theories of Ritual” In *China: Methodology, Theories, and Findings*, eds. Fenggang Yang and Graeme Lang, (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 134.

²¹ The term *wuwei* (无为), literally meaning non-action, is an important concept of Daoist (Taoist) philosophy that involves knowing when to act and when not to act. When the Han Dynasty (206 BCE - 220 CE) was first established, the emperor Liu Bang immediately initiated the Daoist *Wuwei* governance, which involved making peace with the Xiongnu (confederation of nomadic tribes from Central Asia) through Heqin intermarriages, rewarding his allies and giving them pseudo-fiefdoms, and allowing the population to take a breath from centuries of warfare. Later on, *Wuwei* governance developed with local autonomy. Far from the capital, local leaders in the villages negotiated with regional officials in what sociologist Fei Xiaotong has described as a “largely self-regulating” environment.

²² Adam Chau, *Mysterious Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 13.

²³ Daniel L Overmyer. “Introduction,” In *Collection of Temple Festivals and Folk Customs in Baoding Area*. (Tianjin: Tianjin Chinese Classics Press, 2007) 80.

²⁴ Daniel L Overmyer. *Local Religion in North China in the Twentieth Century: The Structure and Organization of Community Rituals and Beliefs*. (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2009) 58.

²⁵ Shaanbei (陕北) refers to the northern part of Shaanxi (陕西) Province, which is located in northwestern China. It is an area that is cold in the winter and very hot in the summer, with dry winter and spring.

²⁶ Heilongdawang (黑龙江大王) literally means “the Great Black Dragon King.”

²⁷ Adam Chau, *Mysterious Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 88.

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- ²⁸ The official exchange rate between the U.S. dollar and Renminbi yuan is about 1:6.38 (1 US dollar = 6.38 yuan RMB), as of September 2011.
- ²⁹ Adam Chau, *Mysterious Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 86.
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- ³⁴ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 43.
- ³⁵ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 168
- ³⁶ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 168.
- ³⁷ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 168.

³⁸ Lin Xiangru (蔺相如) served as the State Premier in the kingdom of Zhao (403-228 BCE), an area in Hebei Province just south of the modern city of Beijing. He is famous for his wisdom and patriotism, and some of his life stories have come down as proverbs in Chinese culture. For example, “Return the intact jade to Zhao” (璧归赵), “Making up between the general and the premier” (将相和), etc.

³⁹ For more information on the Shenzhen study, see Lizhu Fan, *Religious Transformation in Contemporary China: Field Study in Shenzhen* (Taipei: Weber Culture 2005); Lizhu Fan, James Whitehead, and Evelyn Whitehead, "Fate and Fortune: Popular Religion and Moral Capital in Shenzhen," *Journal of Chinese Religion* 32 (Feb. 2005): 83-101; Lizhu Fan, James Whitehead, and Evelyn Whitehead, “The Spiritual Search in Shenzhen: Adopting and Adapting China’s Common Spiritual Heritage,” *Nova Religio* 9, no. 2 (Nov. 2005): 50-62.

⁴⁰ Fan Lizhu conducted lengthy interviews with fifty-six persons, both men and women, in Shenzhen from 1998-2000. For details, see Fan Lizhu, *Religious Transformation in Contemporary China: Field Study in Shenzhen*.

⁴¹ C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of their Historical Factors*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961) 26.

⁴² The *danwei* was a special type of organization in China under the planned economy. Centered on the urban workplace, the *danwei* (work unit) was the fundamental social and spatial unit of urban China under socialism. Not only was it the source of employment, wages, and other material benefits for the vast majority of urban residents, it was also the institution through which the urban population was housed, organized, regulated, policed, educated, trained, protected, and surveyed. Furthermore, as the basic unit of urban society, each *danwei* became a community, providing its

members with identity and social belonging.

⁴³ On the role of *Yuan*, see “Chinese Social Life: A Conceptual and Empirical Analysis,” *Asian Contributions to Psychology*, eds. Anand C. Paranjpe, David Y. F. Ho, and Robert W. Rieber, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 270. Sociologist Rance Lee (Li Peiliang) reports that a survey of 550 persons in Hong Kong in 1974 showed that more than 50 percent believed in the importance of establishing good *yuan fen* with their physician. (Here, *yuan fen* refers to the ‘chemistry’ or friendly feeling between persons; as such, it is both a “fortunate” relationship and one that people have some responsibility to influence.) Lee argues that such an attitude is both positive and rational; having a comfortable relationship with one’s doctor will likely lead to better care and a healthier life.

⁴⁴ Cynthia Brokaw and other scholars prefer to translate *bao ying* as “moral retribution” (though Brokaw does occasionally use the word “reciprocity”; see *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, p. 28). The term “retribution” carries negative nuances, suggesting that *bao ying* functions more characteristically as punishment than as positive reward. In our judgment, the term reciprocity better expresses the distribution of both reward and punishment.

⁴⁵ Brokaw defines this belief as “the faith that some force—either a supernatural force like heaven or the gods, or an automatic cosmic reaction—inevitably recompensed human behavior in a rational manner: it rewarded certain ‘good’ deeds, be they religious sacrifices, acts of good government, or upright personal conduct, and punished evil ones” (p. 28).

⁴⁶ This cannot be considered as a case of conversion, at least not in the meaning defined by Stark and Finke. Rather than being “converted” to the Buddhist religion, Ms. Shen only accepted certain

ideas from the Buddhist preaching she heard. This is very common in Chinese culture, where folk religion is diffused and highly inclusive.

⁴⁷ Daniel L. Overmyer, "Chinese Religious Traditions from 1900-2005: an Overview," in *Cambridge Companion to Modern Chinese Culture*, Kam Louie (ed), (Cambridg, Engl: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 178.