The London School of Economics and Political Science

Attuning to 'the oneness' in 'the church in Taiwan':

An historical ethnography

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis describes the life of an international Christian group in Taiwan, which is referred to by members simply as "the church" (*zhaohui*, 召會) and regionally as "the church in Taiwan" (*taiwan zhaohui*, 台灣召會).

It is more widely known as "the Little Flock", "the Local Churches" and "Assembly Hall". The group is founded upon the teachings of the Chinese Christian reformers, Watchman Nee (*Ni Tuosheng*, 1903-1972) and Witness Lee (*Li Changshou*, 1905-1997). Initially expanding the group in China, from the late 1940s onward Lee and other group members fled to Taiwan, to escape Mao's communist takeover. From there, the group spread world-wide. The church's 'ministry' (*zhishi*, 職事) consists of a relatively unique, detailed and extensive set of ideas concerning the importance of "oneness" (*heyiwujian*, 合一無間). The group also engages in a distinctive set of aesthetic, linguistic and bodily practices.

Aside from describing the group, the thesis attempts to do two further things. First, it attempts to understand the contemporary and historical continuities and discontinuities between this group and other forms of religiosity in China and Taiwan. Secondly, it attempts to construct an ethnographic theory of social unity. Adopting Phillipe Descola's (2013) "ontological regime" of "analogism" as a frame of ethnographic description and historical contextualisation, I argue that church concepts of "oneness" draw upon pre-conceptualised, and pre-Christian Sino-Taiwanese approaches to social unity. To this "analogistic" framework I add the concept of "attunement", which is inspired by longstanding Chinese debates concerning the relations between cosmological structure (*tianli*, 天理) and social propriety (*li*, 禮). Throughout the thesis I try to understand the social reality of oneness in the church in Taiwan as a "parallax" of sameness and difference, movement and stasis, to which church members are variously attuned.

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Introduction

The Qualities, Qualia and Entangled Histories of a Christian Community

In the early 1920s on an island in the river Min, just outside the bustling port city of Fuzhou on the Southeast China coast, the young Christian enthusiast Ni Shuzu, later to become "Watchman Nee" (*Ni Tuosheng*, 倪柝聲, 1903-1972), and the elderly rebel British missionary, Margaret E. Barber (1866-1929), formed a life-changing bond amidst the social, political and psychological chaos of the time. Under Barber's tutelage, Nee was deeply affected by the eschatological writings of the Irish aristocrat John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), by the tripartite Biblical anthropology of the Welsh holiness preacher Jesse Penn Lewis (1861-1927) and by the mystical musings of the French, Catholic nun, Madame Guyon (1648-1717). These teachings would form the foundations of his own Christian ministry, which would in turn make Nee the most influential Chinese Christian in history (Smith 2009). Today, among Chinese figures, writes Paul Chang, Nee's "popularity outside of China is exceeded only by Confucius, Laozi, and Mao Zedong" (2017:2; see also Bays 2012). Barber was more than a teacher though. She also became Nee's "spiritual mother", credited by his followers as the "foundation and perfecting of his spiritual life" (Reetzke 2005:115; Lee 1991:127). The motherly bond between Barber and Lee laid the foundations for the growth and worldwide expansion of a highly integrated, theologically focused transnational group, which understands itself today to be "the Lord's recovery on earth" (*zhuzaidiquidehuifu*, 主在地球的恢復) of "the church" (*zhaohui*, 召會), of "Christianity" (*jidujiao*, 基督教), and of "the Body of Christ" (*jidu de shenti*, 基督的身體)[1].

The greatest number of adherents to this group, per unit of area today, live in Taiwan. It is there, in the Old Taipei neighbourhood of Jingmei, that this thesis picks up the story that began in Republican China. By way of introduction and before turning to Jingmei, I want the reader to harbour for a moment the idea that the bond between Nee and Barber was a small but unique and new "thing" in history. Of course, there were many such bonds like it before this one, and there have been many since. But technically, this particular bond, like all other bonds, was a distinct, unrepeatable thing to

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[1] Throughout the thesis I use the church's own English translations for each church term.

arise in human, non-human, and even cosmic history. Although it was dependent upon them for its existence, it was not reducible to the conditions under which it arose, that is, to the bodies and psychologies of its two members, their cultural backgrounds, to their common religion, nor even to the socio-political circumstances they found themselves in. This was an emergent but irreducibly distinctive addition to those circumstances.

Now, I would like the reader to understand that today, the Nee-Barber bond has grown into a huge, transnational collective of Nee-following adherents which binds them to its distinctive calendrical and ritual rhythms, to its relatively unique ways of thinking, speaking, dressing, and acting, and to its irreducible qualities as a barely-conceivable "thing" in the world. How might we understand this community- which, we will see, like the bond between Nee and Barber traverses so many conventional lines of understanding sameness and difference, oneness and multiplicity- as being a singular community? In this thesis I make and ethnographically illustrate a bold claim: that a close attention to life in "the church in Taiwan", as church members refer to the group there, provides original answers to this question.

I begin, in this introduction, by returning briefly to the group's origins in China, before describing two less consequential moments in its recent history, in the UK and in Taiwan. I thread them together via a common theme: the eucharist. I use these three moments to introduce the reader to the core ethnographic, methodological and theoretical concerns of the thesis: how might we anthropologists describe and think about sameness and difference, oneness and multiplicity as equally real aspects of human life? Or to translate that question into the theme of this introduction: how might we think of the different *tastes* of the eucharist in each place and time as nonetheless arising from the common *flavour* of the group?

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The key catalyst for the formation of the unique patterns, styles and infrastructures which today hold Nee's many followers together, across oceans, national borders and languages, was a eucharist wafer, tasted in the shadows of the foreign and familial oppressions of the time. In late October of 1921, on the outskirts of Fuzhou, church spires rose up from a bustling, smoky cityscape (Kinnear 1973:40-41). At this time, the Western missionary presence there is still strong, though, following the Boxer rebellion (1900) and the May Fourth Movement (1919), this presence is increasingly

awkward (Dunch 2001; Chow 2013; Starr 2016). In one corner of the city, three young Chinese Christians meet in secret: inspired by Margaret Barber, Watchman Nee calls together a gathering with his Christian friends, Leeland Wang and his wife, Ada. They meet unbeknownst to the Methodist and Anglican priests, parents and educators who have thus far bound their experience of Christian power so closely and so alienatingly with England, North America and with the missionary enterprise (May 2001; Woodbridge 2012; 2016). "'Missionaries', Watchman Nee once complained, treat Chinese Christians like they were 'just a kind of little toy terrier to be taken up and set down without their opinion being consulted'", Nee's great-niece, Jennifer Lin, reports (2017:128). At Trinity College, Fuzhou, where Nee was educated, an Anglican priest would administer the eucharist perhaps once a month, after which a prayer for England was uttered. "The shadow of imperialism seemed to hover over every communion service", Gracie May writes,

> The elements tasted foreign. The table setting looked unfamiliar. And the prayer honoring the crown of England sounded like a betrayal of China. Christianity was a Western import that had little to say to patriotic Chinese youth at the turn of the twentieth century (May 2001:13-4).

On that October evening, Nee snuck away from his mother's house for fear of reprobation, to meet Leeland and Ada. Baking their own eucharist bread, the three bless, break and eat it themselves. Nee would later recount, "I will not forget that night until death, even in eternity…That day, heaven was so near to earth! All three of us were so joyous that we cried" (Nee 1992: 308 in May 2001:100). This would be recalled by followers as the first meeting of the "recovered church", the resurrected Body of Christ, after centuries of "degradation" under the auspices of "Christianity". Sidestepping the priestly administering of the eucharist in school and church, Nee's modern-day followers say that in those early days of the group, these pioneers would "break bread together" whenever they felt like it.

Taking hold of the most powerful symbol of the West, the sacrificial Body of its God, these Christians denied divine power to the Western church, took hold of it themselves and consumed it directly, again and again. Through these actions the original bond between Nee and Barber multiplied and spread beyond them, though it still centred around Nee for the time being. The group developed a distinct set of practices and aesthetics, acquired property and set up a publishing house, which together sedimented Nee's ideas into a relatively integrated life-world, and to some extent, they became part of a "total aesthetic experience" (Forrest 1988:2). As the number of his followers increased, the "flavour" of Nee's meetings and those his ministry would inspire into existence, would develop and retain a set of common qualities that were irreducible to the socio-political contexts in

which the group was first formed, nor to the infrastructures through which the group expanded. Moreover, this growing church-world was transposable: Nee's followers spread beyond Fujian to the rest of China, to Southeast Asia, and eventually to the West, taking their styles of meeting, acting and speaking with them. Indeed, it was my own taste of a eucharist descending historically from the one that brought heaven and earth so close for Leeland, Ada and Nee, that led to the writing of this thesis. Despite initial attempts to footnote my own history as a child of church members, ultimately, I have found that excluding my adolescent origins in "the recovery", leaves a hole in the story. So, in this next section we briefly turn to the UK.

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My parents joined what their Christian friends at the time called a "Chinese church" when I was 12. The life of our family shifted in many ways at that time but a key difference demarcating the period before and after this transition, in my memory, is the taste and shape of the eucharist bread. Joining "the church", as we called it, was precipitated fifteen years earlier by what might be understood as an instance of "reverse Christian globalisation" (Cohen 2009; Frøystad 2009; Strhan 2010; cf. Bira 2003). Before I was born, my father, a Catholic-born, Liverpudlian quantity surveyor and football enthusiast, read a book by Watchman Nee called *The Normal Christian Life*. The book inspired him to leave what Nee, and now he, called "Christianity" for good, and to discover the nineteenth and early-twentieth century "British Brethren", from whom Nee drew inspiration. In accordance with Nee's ministry, my parents met several times a week in our living room with a few other Christians who after reading Nee were also disillusioned with "Christianity". They wrote their own hymns, baked their own eucharist bread and communed over their mutual love for Nee's teachings and Biblical exegeses.

Based on 1 Corinthians 5:8[2], the bread my mother baked on Sunday mornings was unleavened. But all that I, my siblings and my age-mates knew was that it was fragrant and tasty. A dense, doughy, sweet lump, topped with a flaky crust, it probably did more work than we knew in keeping our little group together. Still, the bread was evidently small consolation for the adults, who had renounced a more socially expansive Christian life for the isolated pursuit of a set of "recovered truths" that few other Christians around them cared to recognise. Only after fifteen years of periodically being

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[2] "Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (KJV).

dissolved and resurrected, of losing members and gaining them, of combining with other groups and detaching from them, did our small collective change irreversibly, on discovering that Nee had in fact produced a spiritual heir. His name was Witness Lee (*Li Changshou*, 李常受, 1905-1997). Moreover, we learned that there were thousands of other "Christianity"-rejecting groups like ours, putting Nee's and Lee's "vision" into practice. We had found, what we would learn to know as, "the church".

After making contact with this globally interconnected group, the standardised disk-wafer that we now blessed and cracked into tiny tasteless shards with a white cloth on Sunday mornings paled in comparison to the heavy doughy lump we tore pieces from before. Of course, this wasn't a major concern at the time, I only associate the two breads with the two life-stages in retrospect. This was just one of innumerable changes that occurred: people from all over the world visiting our house, sleeping on our sofa and coming to live in our city, regular trips to church "conferences", "trainings" and "meetings" across the UK, Europe and the US, new songs and ways of speaking, acting and thinking, new friends from far off places, and the prospect as a "young person" of one day being "trained" "full-time" at one of the 17 church training centres for university graduates. Life had shifted from an insular but intimate, home-based rejection of institutional Christianity to a world-facing embrace of a global group with too many faces and names to remember. While the doughy unleavened lump had the flavour of "home", the disk wafer tasted of a much larger entity[3].

It is to an ethnographic theory of that entity as it is lived, encountered and "tasted" from *Taiwan*, that this thesis is devoted. Of the estimated 23.5 million people living in Taiwan, approximately 900,000 identify as Christian[4]. Of those, around 128,000 are regular participants in the life of 'the church in Taiwan' (*taiwan zhaohui*, 台灣召會)[5], one branch of the international Christian

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[3] Just to let the reader know, I am now, happily, an "atheist anthropologist" (Blanes 2006)! Although, I am a believer in my own unbelief, which is as strange a position as any for many in Taiwan, I found (chapter four). It seems that although I don't believe in the church's ministry, I cannot deny the lasting effect it has had on my thinking and decision-making. In a way, this thesis is as much a "secular" (cf. Cannell 2010) extension of the church as it is a self-other encounter, as fieldwork is often still presented in anthropology (Holbraad 2008; Graeber 2015). Soon after joining the church, a Taiwanese church family came to join our "locality". The father, brother Wang, was completing his PhD in linguistics. His children attended a local primary school. His wife, sister Xu, spent almost every day with my mother. Brother Wang was enthusiastic about me applying one day to study at a Taiwanese university. He told me tales of the "full time training in Taipei". "No Westerner could survive its disciplinary regime" I remember him taunting. He showed me pictures of the "trainees", straight-backed, immaculate, military-like. Taiwan, to those in the UK was the centre of the church world. We heard many stories about it from our new "brothers and sisters". Though part of a large network, the 'church in the UK' was still minute, only a few thousand people. In our city there were only thirty to forty members. In Taiwan, we heard, church members bumped into one another whilst out doing the shopping. The "church-life" there was dense, rich, and easy. I finally made it to Taiwan, if with a very different "mission" than I expected I would have as an adolescent.

[4] Calculated from the figures given on http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/taiwan-population (accessed: 12/08/2019).

[5] According to a 2015 church booklet entitled 'A Brief Account of the Churches in Taiwan, 2012-2014' (*Taiwan chong zhaohui jianjie*, 台灣眾召會簡介).

assemblage introduced above. In its one hundred year history, beginning in China and spreading out across 65 countries today, this group has been variously referred to by outsiders as "the Local Church" (*difang jiaohui*, 地方教會), "the Shouters" (*huhan pai*, 呼喊派), "the Lord's Recovery" (*zhu de huifu*, 主的恢復), "Christian Assembly Hall" (*jidutu juhuisuo*, 基督徒聚會所) and "the Little Flock" (*xiaoqun*, 小群). The group itself however resists being named as such. It is referred to from within globally, as 'the church', and regionally as 'the church in [the name of a nation, city, or neighbourhood]'. The highest concentration of participants in 'the church in Taiwan', and as far as the records show, in the church as a whole, live in the Old Taipei neighbourhood of Jingmei (景美, literally: 'beautiful scenery'). It is there, living with a church elder and his family, that I conducted fieldwork for this thesis. Let me introduce the fieldwork setting and the research methods I employed there, before stepping back to outline the wider history of the island with which the church is entangled.

The fieldwork setting

On the big red front door of the Yang-Xie household, where I lived between January 2015 and July 2016, is a little placard which reads "Jesus loves you" (*Yesu ai ni*). Sister (*zimei*)[6], or "auntie" (*aiyi*), Xie has six children ranging from their mid-teens to late twenties. Elder (*zhanglao*), or "uncle" (*shushu*), Yang has two married sons, one living in Toronto and the other in London. Sister Xie's children come and go between her home and their father's on the other side of Wanqing Street. On entering the Yang-Xie home there is a little concrete-floored courtyard for umbrellas, shoes, slippers and laundry. Straight ahead is the window and door to the kitchen. To the left is the living room which has a heavy black door, with golden trimmings, usually left open with only the translucent flyscreen door closed. There are church meetings, social gatherings and family meals in here several times a week. As in many other homes and restaurants in Taipei, on the walls are large stickers, of flowers, trees, butterflies and cheesy aphorisms in English about love. The ground floor is white-tiled. Above a door leading to the kitchen, a small television room and to the bedrooms upstairs is a sign which reads "Jesus is the head of this household" (*yesu shi zhe jia zhi zhu*, 耶穌是這家之主)[7].

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[6] Like other Taiwanese Christian groups, the church in Taiwan uses the more antiquated terms *zimei* and *dixiong* for church 'brothers' and 'sisters', but members are likely to refer to biological brothers and sisters using the usual terms *jiemei* and *xiongdi*. Spouses are referred to as "my brother" (*wodedixiong*) or "my sister" (*wodezimei*) using the former terms, but I have still seen this terminology induce alarm in newcomers.

[7] This parallels the traditional Taiwanese reference to the Kitchen God (*zaojun*) as the "master of the household" (*yi jia zhi zhu*, 一家之主, Stepanchuk & Wong 1991:8).

There is a black metal staircase next to the kitchen window in the courtyard which leads to mine and two other lodgers' bedrooms, connected via a common hallway and bathroom. One lodger is a Vietnamese cosmetics trading assistant, who accompanies me to meetings now and again providing a useful outsider's perspective and help with translation. The other is a nocturnal Taiwanese graphic designer who likes to stay in her room. Neither are church-goers. Next to our bathroom there is another staircase leading to the roof which has a corrugated covering and is surrounded by heavy-duty mosquito netting. On the roof, there is a table tennis table, where I often play with uncle Yang and his step-son, Weipong, a trainee nanoengineer and lover of computer games. There is also a sink, a wooden storage and bunk-bed contraption, a washing machine, two clothes lines, a table and a large shiny steel water tank in the corner. From the roof, one can see the very large nunnery across the street- with its huge white cross- as well as people doing their laundry on the roofs and balconies of the surrounding houses and apartment blocks[8]. The air is often stuffed with the sounds of traffic and birdsong, punctuated now and then, by funeral chants and gongs, the drone of loudspeaker advertisements and the thud and shout of scooter crashes in the street below. I was introduced to this household through a Taiwanese member of the church in the UK, who we meet again in chapter two. I pay a very low rent and am free to enter the guest living room downstairs whenever I please[9]. There, I am exposed to a constant flow of "brothers and sisters" (*dixiongzimei*) pushing open and pulling shut the big red metal front door.

Let me now "zoom out" a little further to describe the neighbourhood in which uncle Yang and aunty Xie live. Jingmei is the most famously Christian of the old town neighbourhoods of Taipei. Part of Wenshan district, it lies close to the north-western edge of the urban sprawl which wraps its way around the eastern side of the island, from tip to tip, hugging the edges of the relatively indomesticable mountain spine which dominates the centre and West of Taiwan, making it look all the more like a floating leaf (figure 1). *Xianji*- "immortal footprint"- mountain to the east, skyscrapers to the north, and Jingmei river, banked by dreary New Taipei buildings, to the south and west, Jingmei is often in shadow. Still, it vibrates with urban noise. The sounds of the neighbourhood's sentient and not-so-sentient inhabitants echo off walls and doors lining its narrow

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[8] Cohen (1976) writes that Taiwanese people like to have their houses as close together as possible, for fear of malevolent ghosts, and I sense that these apartments are closer to one another than is technically necessary. Though research into the details of the 1970s period of intense house building that gave rise to Jingmei in its current form would be needed to confirm this.

[9] Wang (1974) writes that traditional Taiwanese homes have both a guest receiving room, where the ancestral tablets are kept and a more private, family living room. The Yang-Xie's too have a TV-watching room, where the family often relaxes, just behind the main living room where Bibles, books by Nee and Lee and church songbooks are kept neatly on shelves.

streets and alleyways. Its wide roads carry the city rush over brightly-lit bridges, from central districts to New Taipei on the other side of Jingmei river.

From the roof of the Yang-Xie family home, in between games of table tennis, we hear scooters buzz by, taxis honk, and the market's sellers hustle and shout as others bustle past. Sitting up there with my recording equipment, I hear, through my headphones, squeals and cheers from the schoolyard, the scuffle and yelp of baseball teams from the caged field by the swirling, toxic river. There is the quiet sound of the wind whizzing through bike spokes, the murmur of open cafe chatter and the shuffle of feet up and down the metro steps. Walking around Jingmei, these sounds flow into and out of one another, burst through and past each other as commuters, flaneurs and urban dwellers like me move through, ignore and attune to their dissonant compositions.

Figure 1: Map of North Taiwan with added arrow pointing to Jingmei. Source: *www.traintesting.com/images/Taiwan_map1.jpg*, permission granted.

These Jingmei sounds carry images as well as visceral sensations. They are the aural extensions of the myriad, multi-form entities which compose the neighbourhood. Through the image it evokes, Beethoven's "Für Elise" played through tinny, moving speakers, brings me, uncle Yang, and our neighbours onto the evening street clutching our little blue bags ready to throw into the yellow garbage truck. From cluttered scooter repair shops, one hears the clatter and clang of tools, as

mechanics work to the flashes of TV screens blaring out government-controlled repeats on the latest island disasters and events (Lo et al. 1994; Chen 1998; Rawnsley & Rawnsley 2001; Yang 2004). Desire is the flowing mortar by which the weak world of "Jingmei", and the interlinked worlds within and beyond it, cohere (Deleuze & Guattari 2007; Stewart 2011). Visual images stoke and feed desires, but they also bore and annoy, breaking bonds as much as they inaugurate them. Little lighted billboards line the streets showcasing unnaturally white teeth, crispy fried chicken, silky hair, expensive glasses, watches and handbags designed by local and foreign advertisers to induce a lack we did not know we had. Soaring up from this urban immanence, which in every direction points beyond itself, are red neon crosses in the shadows of skyscrapers, overlooking dragon-adorned temples, marking myriad Christian denominations. Nestled within the endless rows of shop names and advertisements, I see big, bold, white neon letters: G-O-D.

This is the ever-present sensory and semiotic environment which shifts between the foreground and background of the lives of church members (Coleman 2012). It is from amongst Jingmei's more or less dissonant compositions, its allures and intrusions, that on Sunday mornings, from between the bars of a window high up in one of the mustard-yellow apartment buildings near my home (which at this time is emanating a similar sound), I hear the repetitive chant of a familiar crowd: *Ohhh Zhu Yesuuuu, amen, Ohhh Zhu Yesuuuuu, amen, Ohhh Zhu Yesuuuuu, amen...* ["Ohh Lord Jessuuuus, amen…"]. Above the window, at the top of the building there is another huge sign, too high for any passer-by to see, Taipei's Nazca lines. On faded white it reads, in red: 景美召會 (*jingmei zhaohui*, 'the church in Jingmei'). Buzzing into the building, climbing the concrete stairs, and pushing open the door next to the overflowing shoe rack and the bucket of umbrellas, we meet the eclectic group of Christians who are the ethnographic focus of this thesis.

Inside the chanting apartment Jingmei's cacophony does not end but shifts into a more intimate key, and a more coherent aesthetic. There are between twenty and forty people here, from new-borns to ninety-somethings. Children play in a backroom, or they perform songs to a strummed guitar, with accompanying actions, clapped on by smiling adults. On fold-out chairs, 'brothers' (*dixiong*, 弟兄) sit on one side of the room, 'sisters' (*zimei*, 姊妹) on the other. Some wear formal attire, and speak in a loud, peculiar rhythm, using words unfamiliar to many outside- 'the all-inclusive spirit', (*baoluo wanyou de ling*, 包羅萬有的靈), 'the priesthood' (*jisi de tixi*, 祭司的體系), 'God's dispensing' (*shen de fenci*, 神的分賜). Others are more relaxed, preparing food in the kitchen area, whispering to their neighbour, playing with a grumbling child. On bookshelves around the room there are multiple works by the same two authors, Watchman Nee and Witness Lee. There are songbooks and

hymnals, and 'Recovery Version' Bibles (*huifu ban*, 恢復版) some in black, some in plum-purple faux-leather. In the middle of the room on a little wooden table there is a eucharist wafer on a silver tray, next to a glass jug of red grape juice, covered with a crisp, white cloth. On this occasion, a young church sister has brought her fiancé to his first Sunday meeting and she keeps arranging and rearranging the cloth and the jug, trying to make it look neater, until an older sister scolds her gruffly, telling her to leave it alone. This is 'group five' of 'hall 32' of 'the church in Taipei', a local manifestation of the island-wide 'church in Taiwan'.

Research methods

How did I get to know these people? This thesis is focused throughout upon fieldwork methods, with chapter three outlining a distinct methodology. Nonetheless, I give a brief outline here of my research methods in the most practical sense. They consisted principally in attending many church meetings and spending a lot of time collectively and individually with members of the church in Jingmei and other Taipei congregations. Most weekends I went with Jingmei church members on outings around the city and sometimes further afield. There were church meetings on every day of the week somewhere in Taipei that I could attend: 'prayer meetings', 'brothers' meetings', 'sisters' meetings', 'Bible-study meetings', 'elders' meetings', 'Lord's day meetings', 'college-age meetings', 'high-schooler meetings', 'children's meetings', 'gospel meetings', 'love feasts', 'blending meetings', 'trainings', 'conferences', and preparation meetings. With permission I recorded many of these meetings and the conversations which took place within them, and then transcribed them.

I spent a lot of time with the Yang-Xie family- eating at home and around Jingmei, gossiping, shopping, banking, attending weddings and funerals, playing table tennis, basketball and badminton, doing language exchange lessons and conducting formal and informal interviews. Their living room was a conveyor belt of fresh and familiar church faces. I spent a good amount of time with several other families too- visiting their neighbours and relatives, eating at their homes and in restaurants, attending their local church meetings, watching television with them, going for runs, swims and bike-rides together. With my local church elder I started a (tongue-in-cheek) "church running team" which met several times a week- to swim and hike as well as run- for over a year of the fieldwork period. Besides being great fun, this was a great opportunity to get to know church members in an intimate way, beyond typical church contexts.

I also designed a written questionnaire, and through a church elder in charge of the church 'training centre' (*xunlian zhongxin,* 訓練中心) in Taipei, distributed copies amongst the trainees who replied to me by email, in person or through a mediator. In the former two cases we discussed the questionnaire too. Aside from these questionnaires, there were the ones I distributed with a small church research team during and after the international church conference held in 2015, in Taipei over Chinese New Year (described in chapter two), which we turned into statistical data and presented as a PowerPoint at an academic conference (Appendix A). I conducted formal interviews with several church leaders and with the editor-in-chief of the *Taiwan Gospel Bookroom* (see below). Aside from ethnographic research, I spent time researching the church's history using secondary and primary data in Chinese and English. Finally, I read a lot of Nee's and Lee's writings and recorded speaking in English and Chinese. A "serving one" who lived above church hall 32 in Jingmei had a large collection of church literature which he kindly gave me full access to. As we will see, I found these text-based understandings vital, not only within certain fieldwork scenarios, but also for the ethnological analyses in the chapters ahead[10]. There is also a church museum in Jingmei which I found very helpful for understanding the church's history in Taiwan and elsewhere.

Having very briefly outlined the contexts of the church's beginnings, my first encounters with it, and my fieldwork setting and methods, let us finally outline the wider Taiwanese context, before reviewing the anthropological literature which I argue is most relevant to the approach of the thesis as a whole, and outlining the chapters ahead.

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The church in Taiwan is one small addition to an island which has always incorporated migrants (Thornton & Lin 1994; Rubenstein 1999; cf. Friedman 2015). This thesis aims to keep the migratory history of Taiwan and the traces and patterns it has left on the landscapes and people there never far from view, in its questions of sameness and difference, oneness and multiplicity. Moreover, it is Taiwan's culture of internal (Greenhalgh 1984) and external (Chen 2008) migration which has precipitated the prosperity of a group which depends for its existence on translocal connections. The origins of the first settlers on Taiwan are still undecided (Edmonds 1971; Stainton 1999), but

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[10] See Robbins 2006; 2013; Bialecki 2016; Carroll 2017b for different perspectives on the relations between theology, ethnography and anthropology.

each of the island's indigenous groups speak an Austronesian language (Diamond 2000; Manthorpe 2016). After successive waves of Chinese Han migration to the island from the 17th century onward however, the descendants of Taiwan's first inhabitants have been progressively displaced, killed and assimilated, so that today, self-identifying indigenous people make up only 2.3% of the population, and generally live more economically impoverished lives than the majority (Brown 2004; Simon 2005; 2007). The Chinese migrants to Taiwan mostly came from two different areas (Fujian and Guangdong) and the relations between these two ethnic groups added to the lines of oppression, conflict, separation and negotiation between Han and aborigines, and among aboriginal populations (Knapp 1976).

The island has been under various degrees of protectorship and colonialism at the hands of the Chinese (1662), Dutch (1624), Spanish (1926), Japanese (1895), and Americans (1950). Each of these invasions and interventions has left distinct traces in the physical (Allen 2012), linguistic (Curtin 2009), psychological (Chun 1995) and cultural landscape of Taiwan (Brown 2004), both adding to and detracting from its distinctiveness as a lived and imagined place (Dell'Orto 2003). The most influential wave of migration, and change in governance, in recent history came in 1945 when the nationalist government of China, and many of its followers, fled there from Mao Zedong's Communist regime. The presence and privileges of these two million people, called "mainlanders" (*waishengren*) by those already living in Taiwan, and the government who led them to Taiwan, has been the defining civil and political issue of the island (Hsiau 2003). Under General Chiang Kai Shek and then his son, Chiang Ching Kuo, from 1949 until 1987, the island was kept under martial law. Following President Lee Teng Hui's official apology in 1995, the extent of the violence and oppression suffered by the native population under the nationalist government is still only beginning to be publicly exposed, commemorated and explored (Wu 2013; Ryan 2016; Marran 2017).

In the early decades of one-party rule, it was the government's cherished hope that Taiwan was simply a temporary stopover until "the mainland" (*dalv*) could be retaken. Although no such hopes are still cherished, the defining public issue still today is the degree to which Taiwan is and should be economically, culturally and politically independent from China. I do not directly address Taiwanese politics again in this thesis, but it is noteworthy that while I did meet church members of indigenous and pre-1945 Taiwanese origin, the group originally grew in the hands of migrants under the protection of the nationalist government which favoured Christianity over other religions (Katz 2003). Some older members said that the transition from martial law to democracy made no difference at all, while many were government workers and descendants of nationalist soldiers. I

recognise here, before we go on, the historical privilege that very likely was a critical condition of possibility for my fieldsite to exist.

Here, I close this section, by filling out the historical circle connecting Nee, Lee, me and the church in Taiwan, opened in the first paragraph, by explaining very briefly how Nee's adherents settled and expanded on Taiwan. Within two decades of his time with Barber, Nee had a nationwide following of over 70,000. The group owned property in Shanghai, Fuzhou and elsewhere and ran a successful publishing house, *Shanghai Gospel Bookroom*, for distributing Nee's message. However, the so-called Little Flock soon came under the new Communist government's disfavour. Nee was imprisoned. He sent his protege Witness Lee (in1949), and around thirty other followers (in 1945), to Taiwan (Yi 2016). There, with drums and painted banners and bibs, the group conducted many "gospel marches" (chapter one) and bought prime real estate in Taipei, setting up a new publishing house, *Taiwan Gospel Bookroom* (TGB), to distribute Nee's, and then Lee's, writings and recorded spoken messages.

Membership increased rapidly amongst the newly settled "mainlanders". The church evidently became a comfort for those who had been recently severed from their ancestral homeland and who were confronted with an unfamiliar place, which Watchman Nee's nephew described to me in an interview as "a real backwater back then". The sense of togetherness within the church is perceived at times as being very close to that of "traditional Chinese culture". When I asked a church elder, brother Li, one night what he thought the latter was, he stretched out his palms over the long, food-filled table on the pavement outside a restaurant at which we all sat and conversed over, and said "*this* is, eating together, drinking tea, enjoying each other's company". These words still make it easy to imagine why the church spread like wildfire when it first came to Taiwan (see also Zimmerman-Liu 2017). From the original 30 or so followers in 1945, by 1955 there were forty thousand church members and by the 2000s there were two hundred thousand, almost one percent of the population (Yi 2016:102,110).

In 1962 Lee moved to California. Many North Americans were inspired by the perceived originality of Lee's ministry at a time of great dissatisfaction with mainstream, denominational Christianity (Rutledge n.d; Bialecki 2014b; Palmer & Siegler 2017). In the face of strong resistance from the conventional Christian establishment (Sparks 1977; Duddy 1981; LSM 1995; Hanegraaff 2009; Zimmerman-Liu & Wright 2015), a nationwide infrastructure of church elders, meeting halls, training and conference centres, a publishing house, *Living Stream Ministry*, and many home-based church "localites" gradually emerged. Between Nee's time and this period, the ministerial and

pragmatic emphasis of the church shifted from millennialism to a strong corporatism in and for itself. While Nee focused principally on self-denial, suffering and becoming an "overcomer" (*deshengren*, 得勝人, see chapter three), Lee's focus was increasingly upon "the church" (*zhaohui*, 召會), or "the Body" (*shenti*, 身體), as the "organic" (*shengji*, 生機), source and object of all human-divine 'nourishment' (*yingyang*, 营养), 'enjoyment' (*xiangshou*, 享受) and 'transformation' (*bianhua*, 變化).

Lee periodically returned to Taiwan from 1984 onwards to implement the "new way" (*xinlv*) which involved a strong practical emphasis on institutionalised church training, exclusive adherence to "the ministry" (*zhishi*, 職事) and a commitment to the "uniqueness" (*dute*, 獨特) and above all, "oneness" (*heyi*, 合一) of "the church" (*zhaohui*). While some resisted it, many fervently embraced the new way. One church auntie told me, as we walked around Jingmei one evening with bubble-tea in hand, that life in the church was incomparably "richer" (*fengman*, 豐滿) since the new way had been implemented. Church localities and evangelical efforts were built up around the world, backed in part by the newfound wealth of East and Southeast Asian economies. One church elder in Russia told me that one of the original "Asian tiger" tycoons featured in a *Time* magazine special edition was a Taiwanese church member, who had single-handedly financed the building of the church's training centre in Jakarta, Indonesia (see also Yi 2016:102). From Taiwan, then, the church expanded, via the US, world-wide, returning to Taiwan, as well as to China and Southeast Asia, with renewed vigour and confidence. Today it has 17 national "full-time training centres" where members with at least a university degree and who are "recommended" by their local elders, are trained for two years in church theory and practice.

'The ministry', as church members refer to it, is now propagated by a multi-million dollar joint-venture publishing company based in Taipei and Anaheim, California, several radio programs- which are particularly successful in South America- and the world-wide proselytizing efforts of the many members of the so-called Local Church. The group's English-language publishing arm, *Living Stream Ministry* (LSM), distributes Nee's and Lee's pamphlets, books, audio messages and collected writings via church affiliated organizations and networks all over the world, TGB being the key conduit for Taiwan, China and East and Southeast Asia. Several times a year the church, organisationally assisted by LSM, holds 'international conferences' attended by thousands and where a handful of "co-workers", Lee's original disciples, some Taiwanese, some North American, give messages on particular themes within his ministry. "Video trainings" are also held in thousands

of locations worldwide where church members gather, to listen to, pray over and take notes from 'messages' broadcast from the church's English-speaking publishing and training headquarters in Anaheim, California. (There was a video training underway in hall 32, Jingmei, when I arrived there). The 'Local Churches' then are a well-financed, highly-focused, translinguistic, multi-mediatic, global, sensory and cognitive assemblage of bodies, words, buildings, products and connections. With this prefatory outline of the church's history in mind, in the following section, using the descriptions above, I introduce an introductory framework for understanding sameness and difference in the church in Taiwan.

A framework: Qualities and Qualia

Spending time with those in the church in Jingmei, I learned that one can taste a social entity, like 'the church', just as one can taste a eucharist wafer. Like the latter, the church has its own "flavour", which, again like the latter, is only accessible via "taste". While the taste of a wafer, or a community, is shaped by the specific historical, biological, emotional contexts of the encounter, I will argue in this thesis, that the flavours of these things are the translocal, transhistorical conditions under which each taste can occur. Anthropologists for a long while have ethnographically investigated variations in the semiotic and social significance of taste (Stoller 1989), and other sensations, such as sight (Gell 1998), embodiment (Csordas 1990; 2004), touch (Csordas 1997a), voice (Harkness 2014), smell (Gell 1977; Classen et al. 2002) and emotivity (Briggs 1970; Lutz & White 1986). Most often however, these sensual encounters are theorised as being "dialectically" related to flavourless things such as "social life" (Manning 2012), "modernity" (Harkness 2014) and "cultural value" (Gal 2013). In sustained conversation with these approaches, this thesis explores the possibility that social entities themselves have certain *qualities* (including "flavours") which are experienced as various *qualia* (including specific "tastes").

To return to the eucharist wafer: it has a flavour which is distinct from other flavours- the flavour of apples, rice wine, or dumplings for example. The flavour of the wafer is the common condition for its being tasted in various situations. The taste in each case is influenced by the palate and mood of each taster, their social positions, bodily and mental memories, the significance to them of the wafer being tasted[11]. Each taster tastes the flavour of the wafer, not directly but from their specific

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[11] This imagery was partly inspired by the Taiwanese novelist Huang Chunming's (2001 [1974]) famous short story *The Taste of Apples* (*pingguo de ciwei*, 蘋果的滋味, see also Allen 2012a:55-58). The "taste" of the title also means "flavour" and "feeling".

spatial and temporal positions. Nonetheless, this flavour has a transcendental stability[12], to put it in philosophical terms, which is the ground for its being tasted in each situation. At the same time, and most importantly for this thesis, the eucharist manifests another, overlapping "flavour", this time it is the flavour of a larger whole of which it is a distributed part: "the church". It shares *this* flavour with many other aspects and items which ongoingly compose the church, which instantiate this flavour, in so many tastes, when and where the church is attuned to (see below) as a nebulous but real "thing" in itself. Thus, I was being more than metaphorical when I wrote that the church eucharist I encountered years ago 'tasted of a larger entity'.

These understandings are ethnographically derived. This introduction however, is virtually absent of the ideational contents of the church. One reason for this is that these contents are relatively dense and unique, and so beginning with them can be an overwhelming place from which to introduce the church[13]. They take the whole of chapter one to introduce. Another reason is that a key argument of the thesis is that one cannot assume the significance of what people say without taking into account the significance for them of saying something at all (Bloch 1974; Keane 1997a; 1997b; 1997c; Walker 2018). With these provisions in mind, it is still noteworthy that the principal way of speaking about God, for church members, who is for them principally a "corporate", collective being, is as something to be eaten. "Just taste and see that the Lord is good", "He's small enough to eat", and "masticating Jesus" are well known church songs lines for instance (see chapter four). It is noteworthy too that eating is a much more common way of speaking about experiences in Mandarin Chinese than it is in English (Link 2013:171-173)[14]. While church members do not use the taste-

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[12] Note the difference between the transcendental, as the conditions of possibility for something, and the transcendent as that which beyond something (Johnston 2008).

[13] The church in Taiwan, unlike many forms of globally dominant Christianity today is not evangelically focused (Marshall-Fratani 1998; Robbins 2004a), its gatherings are most often not aimed at being particularly "accessible" to newcomers. So, overwhelming the reader to begin with may not have been a terrible ethnographic strategy. Such a feeling of disorientation or bedazzlement may not be dissimilar from the experience of the first-time attendees who I often spoke to after church meetings, during which they may well have been baptised (see chapter four). "Yes, I enjoyed it" would be the gist of their answer, "but I have no idea who this "Jesus" is".

[14] Here are some examples Link (2013:171-2) gives: *Wo bu chi ni na yi tao*, 'I don't eat that stuff of yours', means 'I don't buy it'. *Chi yi ge zier*, 'eat a piece', means 'to take a chess piece' in a game. *Chidiao dijun*, to 'eat the enemy army', means to defeat that army. To enjoy popularity is *chixiang*, to 'eat fragrance'. *Chi huikou*, 'to eat return discount', is to receive a kickback. *Chi taiping fan*, 'eat great-peace food', means passing one's days in comfort. *Chi doufu*, 'eat bean curd', is sometimes used where the beancurd stands for the soft white flesh that a male metaphorically nibbles when he flirts with a female. *Chi laoben* is to 'eat original capital—live on past gains'. *Chi kui*, 'eat loss', means to get the worst of something. *Chi zui*, 'eat crime', is to take the blame for something. *Chi ku*, 'eat bitterness', means to suffer hardship, and *chi jin*, 'eat tension', is to be tense or hard pressed. *Chi jing*, 'eat surprise', is to be startled or shocked; *chi bai zhang*, 'eat defeat in battle', is to lose in battle; and *chi guansi*, 'eat a lawsuit', is to be charged in a suit. *Chi hei zaor*, 'eat a black date', means being hit by a bullet, *chi cu*, 'eat vinegar' means feeling jealous. When a ship is loaded and, as English puts it, "draws" water to a certain depth, Chinese says *chi shui*, 'eats water', to the same depth. Link even conducts a small experiment:

> Wanting to test objectively whether…*chi* is used metaphorically in Chinese more than "eat" is in English, I did a word search of two novels, chosen essentially at random: Lao She's novel *The Philosophy of Lao Zhang* (*Lao Zhang de zhexue* 老張的哲學) in Chinese and Mark Twain's novel *The Mysterious Stranger* in American English. In Lao She's text, chi accounts for one in every five hundred characters, and in Twain's text "eat" (including "ate" and "eaten") appears once in every twenty-five hundred words. This difference

flavour distinction I used above (*wei*, 味, means 'taste', 'flavour' and 'smell'), they do very much emphasise, we will see, the simultaneous "oneness" of God and his edibility, and the "sameness" of the church everywhere, which infers the kind of taste-flavour distinction I introduce here.

It was Durkheim (2008[1912]) who argued that the community itself could be sensed as a strange kind of thing in the world (Cladis 2008), though some have reduced this sensing to "crowd psychology" (Evans-Pritchard 1965:74) or to individual emotionality (Shilling 1997). This sensing of an emergent property of togetherness- "collective effervescence"- was at the heart of his speculations as to the origin of what he called "religion". As his theory progresses however, this original sensing is incorporated into a dialectical dance with "representation". Sensing the community and representing it become separate moments in the dialectic. It is to a pre-dialectical concept of community that this thesis pushes towards, not in opposition to dialectical thinking, but as a slowed-down complement to it. Representations here, alongside practices and aesthetics, are potential means of sensing the community, as a strange kind of thing, in specific ways. (To the degree that representations do not serve as tools of sensing the community, but are detached from it, they are, by many of those in the church in Taiwan, devalued.) In the process of rethinking community, the thesis aims to help reconcile the re-emerging tensions between Durkheimian anthropology and its opponents (Laidlaw 2002; 2014; Zigon 2007; Candea 2015; cf. Lambek 2010:12). We need not give "society" such unconscious power as some hold that Durkheim gave to it (Tarde & Durkheim 2015; Robbins 2015b; Latour 2007:13; Feuchtwang 2001:15) for example, but we can understand supra-individual social forms, such as "the church", as existing in certain moments through, in and amongst other forms- bodies, families, furniture, food, weather- and as jostling with those other forms for human attention. I aim, most importantly, to convince the reader of the ethnographic and anthropological worth of these understandings more generally.

The end-goal of the thesis is an ethnographically sound theory of community in terms of sameness and difference, oneness and multiplicity, which does not reduce any of these terms to any of the others. Community as I theorise and describe it in the pages ahead is not a container or context of social life (see Nancy 1991; 2016; Lingis 1994; Agamben 1993; Esposito 2010) so much as it is a 'thing' in and amongst other things which can be sensed as those other things can, though often in less predictable, less directly tangible ways. The texture, taste, and tangibility of the church community in Taiwan, we will see, is rhythmically, atmospherically, vicariously encountered. Moreover, community, as this thesis understands it, is an achievement, one that requires moment

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is accountable in part to the fact that eating in a literal sense gets more attention in Lao She's novel five instances in Lao She's novel, none in Twain's (2013: 172-3; see also Liu 2002).

by moment "attunement" to a common form, which nonetheless does not "stay still" but "moves" with the ever-restless movement of shared life and the lives that live it (Agamben 1998; 2000; 2013). Like the flavour of the wafer which exists between tastings, however, I infer also, that the flavour of this community exists beyond these moments of mutual attunement.

Central to this argument is the method by which I get there. Following church members' own notions, presented in the chapters ahead, I argue that there is a kernel of aesthetic sameness in the church everywhere but that this sameness is attended to, attuned to and oriented to differently in different places and at different times. These differences are only discoverable through familiarity with the church in more than one place and time. So, in this chapter, I introduced a theme that runs throughout the thesis: the differences between my prior assumptions of what being in the church is about and what I discovered it to be about in Taiwan. Put another way, I try to reconcile what might previously have been termed the "subjective" and "objective" sides of the church (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Searle 1995; Csordas 2004; Warnier 2006; 2007; 2009), but which, stepping away from the dualist, individualist implications of the latter terms, I call "world" and "infrastructure" respectively. I try to reconcile these aspects of the church both within Taiwan and between Taiwan and the rest of the church-world. I explore throughout the thesis, the idea, counterintuitive though it may be, that within the midst of church rituals, our "subjective", "inner", "world" positions are to some extent the same, while our "objective", "outer", "infrastructural" positions are different (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1998; 2004).

Literature overview and outline of chapters

Where does my approach fit into contemporary anthropological debate? To re-emphasise: I want to understand church sameness and difference across space and time ethnographically and I want to take sameness and difference as equally real aspects of life in the church. We might extend these aims into a series of questions which focus the thesis throughout: to what extent is the church in Taiwan continuous with the international body of which it is a part and to what extent is it continuous with the (Taiwanese) world around it? How might it be both at the same time? How does the sense of church sameness persist in a world of spatial and temporal change and difference? Might we understand the church-world divide as relatively autonomous from members' own assertions of it, without succumbing to regressive notions of socio-cultural holism? And how can the church be the "same" thing for people with evidently different orientations to life? To summarise, these are questions about continuity and discontinuity. The two most relevant literatures to this thesis, the anthropology of Christianity and the anthropology of Sino-Taiwanese "religion" (cf. Shih

2009), have both put questions of (dis)continuity at the heart of their ethnographic and comparative endeavours. In this final section I give an overview of these relevant literatures and how the thesis relates to them in terms of questions of (dis)continuity. In the process, I outline how each chapter contributes to the overall focus of the thesis, ethnographically, methodologically and theoretically.

…

The diachronic and synchronic continuity of Sino-Taiwanese notions and practices concerning "gods, ghosts and ancestors" (Jordan 1972; Wolf 1974), has been debated by historians and anthropologists for several decades. In its formative years as a self-conscious sub-discipline the anthropology of "Chinese religion" addressed directly the question of "whether a Chinese religion exists" (Feuchtwang 1991)? To simplify: leading the "no" camp was Arthur Wolf (1974:9; Smith 1974:341), leading the "yes" camp was Maurice Freedman (1974:38; Yang 1967:276). While the former focused upon transformations in a "basic structural unity", the latter attuned to diverse, situated "beliefs" and "perspectives" across and within specific locales (Weller 1987:3-4). The question not only regarded the *contents* of Chinese religion and whether they were shared across region and time period but, if there *was* a degree of uniformity in this regard, by what means did it occur? Watson (1985; 1988; Szonyi 1997; Sutton 2007) famously argued that in Imperial times the Chinese government was more concerned with "orthopraxy" than orthodoxy, amounting to a widespread emphasis upon conformity or ritual performance over shared beliefs, which were deemed relatively irrelevant. Complementary to this idea, is Robert Weller's (1987; 1994; 2000) work which shows that while there is a degree of 'unity' in terms of the practice and representational content of popular religion in Taiwan, one only needs to speak to the practitioners themselves to discover a plethora of perspectives and interpretations which attribute many different kinds of significance to these practices.

Even in the volume in which Watson published his thesis, there was dissent (Rawski (1988) for instance, argued for the importance of doctrine in China). However, Zito's (1993) later critique seems most productive; she argued that neither practice nor belief are primary in Chinese mainstream religiosity. They both emerge from a third concern, "li" (禮). How are performance and belief related through *li* (1993:327)? she asked. *Li* is most often translated as "ritual" or "rites", but it can also refer to "proper conduct", or "propriety". Feuchtwang (2001:10) questions the usefulness of the belief-performance dichotomy at all in the study of Chinese popular religion. He (1993; 2001) shows how the coherence of religious representation in China and Taiwan is in many ways best

understood as mediatic. That is, there are a cluster of "Imperial metaphors" which have interrelated the many significances of religion among folk and elite practitioners across space and time. Stafford (2000a) finds an alternative source of coherence across the Taiwan Strait. He explores Chinese and Taiwanese politics, gender relations, food practices, etiquette, funerary rituals, and festivities through the analytical lens of "separation anxiety". The "unusually *elaborate*, unusually *explicit*, and unusually *literal*... narratives and rituals of separation and reunion" (2000a:177) in China and Taiwan, he writes, form an "extremely coherent Chinese version of the separation and reunion matrix" (2000a:178). Through this matrix, "the tensions between autonomy and dependency", which each person must deal with from the beginning of their lives, are "elevated from an individual concern" (2000a:176) all the way, through the many "practices and cultural objects" (2000a:174) Stafford describes, to the "abstractions of Chinese religion and philosophy - and indeed the abstractions of Chinese politics - by relating them directly to personal, or more correctly familial, experience" (2000a:178).

My approach in this thesis is inspired by Watson, Weller, Zito, Feuchtwang and Stafford. As in their depictions of Chinese popular religion, I show how the church as a transnational entity attains a degree of "logico-aesthetic" coherence (Thompson 1945) via a shared set of practices and representations. Like them too, I hold that these practices and representations in themselves are not enough to make the church cohere, and that belief, as conventionally understood, is not the primary mode of commitment (chapter four). There are three key means of this coherence that the thesis describes: rhythmic (chapter one), aesthetic (chapter two) and atmospheric (chapter three) attunement. (We will review chapter four's approach to the question of belief after turning to the anthropology of Christianity, below).

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Chapter one posits the concept of "infrastructure" as an ethnographic means of describing what it is that is shared, not only across Taiwanese church lives, but between Taiwan and other church localities. In line with the methodology of the thesis, properly expounded in chapter three (for literary reasons), I show how differences in the "regimes of attention" (Phillips 2019:8) between Taiwan and other church localities, pointed me in the direction of *rhythm*, as that which mediates and connects church infrastructure. Thus, I position my descriptions in this chapter as contributory to a growing anthropological focus upon infrastructure (Larkin 2013; Amin 2014; Napolitano 2016;

Handman 2017), by bringing in rhythm, as a meta-aesthetic awareness[15] and a sensory reality, as a potential means by which religious infrastructure is sustained and transformed (Jalas et al. 2016).

Rhythm has been a focus in anthropology and related disciplines in at least three senses. First, as a fact of social life and life more generally. I review in chapter one those anthropological and philosophical writings which have pointed to rhythm as a means of bodily, social and psycho-social cohesion (e.g. You 1994a; Goodridge 1999; Jousse 2000; Benjamin 2002; Panikkar 2010). A second focus has been rhythm as a methodology. Henri Lefevbre's concept of "rhythmanalysis" has been increasingly influential in social scientific work in the English language since the translation of his book by the same name in 2004 (Henriques et al. 2014; Levine 2015; De Boeck 2015; Blum 2016; Chen 2016). Developing Lefebvre's idea, that rhythmically attuning to multiple, interlocking scales of life, from the city to the lover's touch, would reveal otherwise missed connections and comparisons, and amount to, what I read as a constructive, "critique of the [concept of the] thing" (2004:ch 1), helps us to move beyond the dichotomies of "things" versus "relations" and understand how these terms describe the same realities from different perspectives. My focus in the chapter ranges from the rhythms of speech, gesture, and product circulation, to event management and building design. By attending to rhythm, I demonstrate pathways of authority, historical continuity, and interconnection which may otherwise be missed. Most importantly, I argue that attending to the rhythmic aspects of life in the church makes sense of church members' convictions that the church is a strange and wondrous kind of "Body". My attention was directed to rhythm by these church members, as described in the chapter, which brings us to the third sense in which rhythm has been a focus in anthropology.

Although rhythm is in a sense everywhere, not everybody is equally attuned to this fact. A heightened rhythmic focus may be a cultural trait. This is what Haili You (1994b), following Marcel Granet (2012 [1934]), argues for Chinese thought and tradition. Other anthropologists, in part following Marcel Mauss' (2013) study *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo*, have also noted situations and traditions in which rhythm becomes a defining aspect of people's lives (Harris 1998; Vergunst 2010; Edensor 2010; Bear 2014b). Bandak for instance, uses rhythm to attend to the contested, "sonoric, affective, materially grounded…modes of belonging" in minority-Christian Damascus. He writes of these Christians' sense of "deterritorialization", via the daily calls to prayer from the increasing numbers of minarets rising up around the city, and of their attempts to "territorialize" (2014:250) Damascus through their own rhythmic practices, which nonetheless falter in the face of

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[15] Meta-aesthetic because the attention to rhythm encompasses various media of direct aesthetic focus- architecture, language, choreography, product and interior design, dress-sense etc.

their simultaneous commitment to the all-encompassing "national refrain[s]" of the "fragile Syrian nation" (2014:249, see also Peña 2017). Inspired by the arguments of You, Bandak and others, I show how Taiwanese church members' attention to rhythm evidences a degree of ecclesiastical unity and historical continuity which even they do not always recognise.

The seconds means by which I understand the church in Taiwan to cohere is a more directly aesthetic attunement to sameness, blandness and flavourlessness. Having presented "oneness" as the core ideational and pragmatic focus of the church in Taiwan, in chapter one, in chapter two I address church members' further conviction that the church "is the same everywhere". Using members own descriptions of what it is like to "be in the spirit", this being their core religious experience, I take this sameness seriously and attempt to provide an ethnological framework in which we anthropologists might understand the church as indeed being "the same everywhere" in very specific ways. I argue that we should understand the sameness of the church in terms of its "flavour" as a distinct "world", specifically a *non*local (implying relative stasis) rather than *trans*local (implying movement) world. I attempt to depict this flavour ethnographically, again drawing upon church members' experiences but also upon sinological literatures which describe "blandness", "plainness" and "flavourless" (*pingdan wuwei,* 平淡無味) as long-time ideals in Chinese ethics and religiosity.

I expand this argument in relation to the argument of chapter one, to argue that the church-as-infrastructure and the-church-as-world ought to be understood as irreducibly distinct but undetachable aspects of the same phenomenon. The social fact of this simultaneity is itself an explanatory factor in the social life of the church. Developing this point, I distinguish the significance of "blandness", "plainness" and "flavourlessness" through which the church-as-world coheres for those in Taiwan from, nonetheless highly resonant, aesthetic regimes associated with certain forms of Protestantism and "modernity" (Marshall-Fratani 1998:292; Coleman & Collins 2000; Meyer 2010). This is the first time the thesis introduces the idea that while Christianity has very often revolved around the question of "presence" (Engelke 2007; Orsi 2016), those in the church in Taiwan are more attuned to "parallax" (Zizek 2009) as the way in which divinity and humanity are related.

The third means by which I argue the church in Taiwan coheres is by "atmospheric attunement" (Stewart 2011). Having described and theorised church sameness in the previous two chapters, in the third chapter, I turn more directly to difference. This leads to the question of methods. I put this chapter here, rather than at the beginning as I would have liked to have done, because in the end I

found that methods could not be dealt with prior to the ethnographic substance of the thesis. My methods of description and analysis arose in interaction with Taiwanese Christians. My prior entanglement with 'the church in the UK', unsurprisingly, had effects on my fieldwork, thinking and writing, as much as I tried initially to resist them. Rather than trying to deal with these biases before attempting a neutral description of the church in Taiwan, from a position of nowhere in particular, I put my biases as the centre of the ethnographic depictions in the chapters ahead[16].

This is by no-means intended as an "auto-ethnography", because the object of analysis is not me but the differences between my prior assumptions of what being "in the church" is about, which arose of course from the church itself, and what I discovered it to be about, for many, in Taiwan. The first part of this chapter presents fieldwork as a biographical process of reconceiving my own early upbringing in the church from the perspective of the approaches to Christianity and the church that I encountered in Taiwan. We meet three Taiwanese Christians who progressively shifted my understanding of the differences between what being in the church was about for church members inside and outside Taiwan. It is through qualitative differences in the habits of atmospheric attunement that I differentiate the different modes of being Christian which characterise each of these Christians' lives. Atmosphere thus becomes my third means of understanding how the church in Taiwan coheres.

…

Beginning this overview by positioning my own approaches in relation to those in the anthropology of Sino-Taiwanese religion, we have turned now to the crucial fact that, those in the church in Taiwan are *Christians*. Before moving to the anthropology of Christianity (AoC) per se, though, here I briefly review the sociological and ethnographic literature on Chinese and Taiwanese Christianity. These literatures concern Christianity in Han (Rubinstein 1991; 1994; 1999; Wang 2001; Chao 2006; DeBernardi 2009; Zimmerman-Liu 2017) and aboriginal (Tan 2003; S.Yang 2008) Taiwan, in China (Bays 1996; 2012; Uhalley & Wu 2001; Aikman 2006; Yang 1998b; Yang & Tamney 2006; Cao 2010; Dunch 2001; 2012; Fulton 2015; Stark & Wang 2015; Kang 2017) and in overseas Chinese-speaking communities (Yang 1998a; 1999; 2002; Muse 2005; Abel 2008; Chen 2002; 2008). This literature group also includes the small amount of academic research specifically concerned with followers of

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[16] For contrast, see Zimmerman-Liu 2017, a useful article by an ex-Taiwanese-American church member of thirty years and close confidant of Witness Lee, in which she writes: "To prevent bias, the author relies primarily on third-party sources, confirming those data with her personal experiences" (2017:62).

Nee and Lee (Fred 1975; Rubenstein 1991; Yi 2016; Zimmerman-Liu 2014; 2017). Madsen and Siegler for instance, end their chapter entitled *The Globalization of Chinese Religions and Traditions* with a brief but instructive reference to the "Local Church":

> "...after being imported to China and transformed by Chinese culture, a Sinified form of Christianity may be exported back to the West. A prime example is the "Local Church," a form of Christianity indigenized in the 1930s by the charismatic preacher Watchman Nee. The Communists suppressed the Local Church in the 1950s and Watchman Nee died in prison. But his disciple, Witness Lee, took this fluid, non-hierarchical form of Christianity back to Southern California, from whence it spread throughout North America- where most of the members of its 200 branches are not Chinese- as well as through Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, remnants of the Local Church have reconstituted themselves in China and drawn spiritual and material support from coreligionists in North America" (2011:239).

In his three-fold categorisation of "the Protestant community on Modern Taiwan" in terms of "indigenous", "foreign" and "bridge" churches Rubenstein categorises the Local Church as one of the latter. He writes that,

> "While it is an independent church, the Assembly Hall or Little Flock represents a church that occupies the middle ground, a bridge between Christian communities in Taiwan and the West. It resembles a small Western church, the Exclusive Brethren, in its theology and ecclesiology but is a body that developed its own distinct doctrines and its own unique and, some might say, overly aggressive patterns of evangelism" (1991:97).

This literature informs the thesis throughout, especially the historical sections. My ethnographic contribution to this literature, aside from focusing upon an understudied group, is the degree of ethnographic texture offered here of a Chinese-speaking group of Christians who are nonetheless intimately tied into a transethnic, translinguistic, transcultural project. Much of the sociological literature on Chinese and Taiwanese Christianity links it very closely to "globalization", either explicitly (Yang 1999; 2002; 2006; Cao 2010; 2012; 2013; 2017) or implicitly (Kang 2017) but it does not show exactly how specifically global connections impact the lives of Chinese-speaking Christians on an everyday basis. Moreover, it does not explore the cosmological, aesthetic and practical specificity of "Chinese" or "Taiwanese" Christianity as such, much less the specifics, in these areas, of the groups in question. While much work has been done interpreting (Chang 2017), historicising (Meng 2018) and theologising (Cliff 1983) Watchman Nee's ideas, no study has yet investigated ethnographically what they look like in practice, tending to assume that those in the Local Church are understandable simply as "believers" in Nee's "theology". We turn, now, to the anthropology of Christianity.

…

Perhaps the founding question of the anthropology of Christianity has been "what, in any situation *is* Christianity, and how can one possibly discern its lineaments from that of the social context in which it lives[?]" (Cannell 2006a:13, my emphasis). Further to this, anthropologists of Christianity have asked cross-comparatively whether there are any identifiable commonalities across these situations which might characterise the "complex object" (Cannell 2006a:7), "Christianity", as a whole. Following Ricoeur's hermeneutic analysis of the book of Genesis (1997), Engelke for instance identifies the "the core paradox of Christian thought" as "the simultaneous presence and absence of God" (2007:9). "I would argue" he continues, "that while the details may differ from tradition to tradition, Christianity is premised on a notion of absolute difference" (2007:12). Absolute difference that is, between creator and created, God and humanity. The degree to which God's absence or presence is emphasised and valued differs by Christian tradition (Boylston 2018; Carroll 2017; Orsi 2016; Napolitano 2016; cf. Cannell 2017), and many anthropologists of Christianity resist this imputation of "absolute difference" at the heart of the Christian tradition. Certainly, there are myriad exceptions, as we will see with the church in Taiwan. A more widespread consensus in the sub-discipline is that "Christianity" very often, though of course not always, compared to the religious traditions which often historically precede and/or contemporaneously surround it in any given context, puts emphasis on a series of discontinuities (Robbins 2007; Guyer 2007; Chua 2012; Marshall 2010).

These pronounced discontinuities include those between God and humanity (Engelke 2007; Handelman 2008), the time before and after conversion (Cannell 2006a; Daswani 2013), between death and life, spirit and matter (Engelke 2007), mind and body (Beilo 2007), the world and the heavenly kingdom (Bialecki 2011; Marshall 2010), the secular and the sacred (Boylston 2018), action and intention (Keane 2007), meaning and matter (Engelke & Tomlinson 2006), the present and the future (Guyer 2007), even between one individual and the next (Robbins 2002; 2004b) and between the individual and the community (Marshall 2010). Needless to say, not all Christian communities emphasise discontinuity with regard to the same relationships and phenomena (Napolitano 2016; Orsi 2016; Carroll 2017). The question then is how, if at all, discontinuity is constructed, imagined and experienced within specific ethnographic contexts. I contribute to this comparative question using the notion of "vicarious discontinuity" in chapter four.

I present a situation in which voicing my own disbelief disturbed the atmosphere of a church meeting to everybody's annoyance. I suggest that belief as an interior state in this case was completely irrelevant to church members. The question of one's own belief is a highly private affair and demonstrates disregard for others if brought up in public. Belief as self-recognition is nonetheless important to some members. Some got mildly frustrated with me because, to them, my words and actions demonstrated that I did indeed believe, I just needed to recognise this belief and I would be "one of them". My key insight is that belief as a commitment to the church is *vicariously* important to church members, as they witness others making that commitment through baptism. However, this process for those being baptised is often hardly important at all. One might understand this through the analogy of Taiwan's night markets being sites of nationalism. In order for "Taiwan" as a singular, unique entity to become momentarily apparent for Taiwanese church members who took me to taste various morsels, it was not enough that they eat these things are recognise them as distinctly Taiwanese. Rather, I must do so, on their behalf. It is like this with baptism: in witnessing baptisms, church members were allowed to witness the all-important church-world distinction which they did not experience or narrate as a significant discontinuity in their own life trajectories.

Arguments regarding baptism and belief feed into a larger argument about the role of witnessing and recognition in church experience (Apter 2005). I describe the role that relatively exterior witnesses, "church friends" (*zhaohui pengyou*), have on the life and atmosphere of church meetings. I argue that the role of God in the church, where he is conceived of and prayed to as an entity distinct from the church body, is as the ultimate witness (cf. Vilaça 2011; 2013; 2015a; 2015b). Church members through vicarious witnessing are both objects and subjects, divine and human, individual bodies and the corporate body (Csordas 2004; 2009; Harkness 2014). Thus, I offer an ethnographically nuanced account of the discontinuities between past and present, church members and outsiders, humanity and God as they become significant within the context of the distinctive church aim of manifesting the divine corporately.

The broader question, for the anthropology of Christianity, however, is not only how discontinuity becomes uniquely pronounced in Christian communities, but, given the differences between each ethnographic case, whether "Christianity" can still be understood as a single comparative object. Again, there have been negative (Scott 2005) and positive (Bialecki 2012) responses to this question. Inspired by this debate, as by the one over whether a Chinese religion exists, I offer my own answer regarding the complex object of the church, in terms of qualities and qualia, already introduced above. Further to this, there is the question, also central to the anthropology of Christianity of how

exactly to understand conversion not just on an individual but on a collective basis: regarding the church, "what difference does Christianity make?" (Cannell 2006a:1) in this case. How do we conceptualise the (dis)continuities between Sino-Taiwanese and Christian approaches to life and reality in the church in Taiwan?

On the one hand, it seems reasonable to look comparatively to the church in Taiwan's closest religious ancestor for many members and closest religious neighbour for all members: "Chinese popular religion". The danger otherwise is that we impute autochthonous significance to key church elements, the significance of which may have longer histories and more widespread Taiwanese resonances. From chapter one onwards for instance I develop a contrast between the church in Taiwan and other groups studied by anthropologists of Christianity. I trace a concern within the church that historically precedes the church in China and Taiwan with pattern, arrangement, order, most specifically "parallax", and contrast this concern with the concern with "presence" found in many Christian traditions. However, what seem like continuities *on paper*- similar conceptions, body-techniques and terminologies-, *felt* very different not only for those I spoke to about this in the church in Taiwan, but for me, when I visited and participated in sites of "traditional" Sino-Taiwanese religious practices. Therefore, I argue for a principally aesthetic discontinuity between the church and other forms of Sino-Taiwanese religiosity. *Aesthetic* discontinuity here by no means denotes a surface change and difference: an overriding sense of this thesis is that the aesthetic dimension of social life is its most tangibly and affectively powerful aspect. The question then becomes, how exactly is Sino-Taiwanese history present in the life of the church in Taiwan?

Chapter five attempts to provide a longer historical context to the distinct orientations to the church world which have been presented in these chapters. My question is, why were Nee's syntheses, of Christian ideas which never became the basis of mainstream, sustainable Western groupings, so immediately and easily taken up as Christian practice in post-Republican China and nationalist Taiwan? This chapter provides a (very condensed) pre-history of the church tracing the problem of oneness back through Chinese civilizational and Western Christian history. These are the two genealogies which led to the church's beginnings under Nee and Lee. Although they neglect many details within each genealogy, I hope my tracing of the problem along these two lines draws out important differences which help provide an answer to the question of the church's success amongst Chinese-speaking communities.

Chinese popular religionists and church members share many of the same concerns, not least that of unity achieved through "the spirit" or "divine power" (*ling*, 靈; Sangren 1987a), though they

articulate this in radically different ways. Both Chinese Popular Religion and the church draw upon common background assumptions in their articulations of human-to-human, and human-to-non-human relations. These assumptions are evident for example in the common words they use. A brief example is the word *shen*, 神. The fact that "in China human beings become gods with some regularity and thus the thought of only one such being is looked upon as strangely limiting" (Rubinstein 1999:361) is encapsulated in the polysemy of this term. Shen is the term those in the church in Taiwan use for God, while they themselves are *shenren*, "godmen". The fourth century BC Daoist philosopher *Zhuangzi* also uses the term *shenren* which is usually translated as "spirit-man" (e.g. Puett 2002:124). The term *shen*, referring as it does to both entities and processes, to the human spirit and divine spirits has come under contestation by sinologists. "Shen 神" write Hall & Ames in a classic study,

> is a complex notion, meaning as it does both "human spirituality," and "divinity". *Shen* does not *sometimes* mean "human spirituality," and *sometimes* "divinity". It means both of these...What are the implications of this particular range of meanings where humanity and divinity are continuous? (1998:236) ...We may wonder what the fact that the single term *shen* can mean both "divinity" and "human spirituality" in the classical Chinese language reveals about Chinese religiousness (1995:226).

Contrastively Puett argues, in another classic study,

> that the term *shen* does *not* mean both "human spirituality" and "divinity". The term *shen* was used exclusively in the Bronze Age to refer to divinities. It was not until the Warring States period that the term came to be applied to substances within humans… (2002: 22).

What is important here is that the term for God in the church has a much more flexible history and range of meanings than is the case in Western Christianity. It seems highly reasonable to suppose that these deep, linguistically embedded assumptions, shaped how church members understood God in Nee's time and understand God today. My approach then is not that those in the church in Taiwan practice a Sino-Taiwanese "version" of Christianity, but that, like all forms of Christianity, the uniqueness and distinctiveness of their approach arises from the habits of thought and practice that they have historically inherited.

Confusingly there is another "li" (理) which, like the "li" (禮) discussed above, is a central topic both in and beyond Chinese Confucianism. This "li" can be translated as "truth" or "oneness"[17], which

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[17] Or, interestingly, "the texture or grain of wood".

we will see are key notions in the church in Taiwan, but which Ziporyn argues is better understood as "coherence" (Ziporyn 2012; 2013). In chapter five, I argue that the church in Taiwan participates in a long Confucian and anti-Confucian set of Chinese thought traditions which critique the separation of *li*, (rites, ritual, propriety) from *li*, (truth, oneness, coherence)[18]. Too much of one, leads either to empty ritualism, or to thought being disembedded from practice. This kind of critique became acute and mainstream in the "neo-Confucian" ideas of Zhang Zai (1020-1077) (Chen 2005), Zhu Xi (1130-1200) (Mu 2008), Wang Yangming (1472-1529) (Tien 2012) which I argue, following Meng (2018), were influential upon Watchman Nee and Witness Lee and their subsequent critiques of "Christianity" as being composed of "dead rituals" and having much "knowledge" but little "life". So, while chapters one through four demonstrate the unique rhythmic, aesthetic, atmospheric, representational and pragmatic form of the church, chapter five demonstrates that the roots of this form, the orientations to life and divinity from which it grew, extend far beyond it.

…

We have briefly discussed the forms of complex unity envisioned by anthropologists, of Sino-Taiwanese religion, and of Christianity. But there has also been debate as to how Chinese religionists themselves have imagined unity, in its most abstract, ontological sense. How, sinologists and anthropologists have asked, do Chinese worshippers imagine divine and human realities to fit, or not fit, together? Michael Puett (2002; 2006) for instance, contrasts two ways of relating to the divine in early China: via self-divinization and via sacrifice. In contrast to many scholars of ancient China, and under the influence of his supervisor Marshall Sahlins, he puts these approaches into political context. Sacrifice, he argues came first (see also Wang 2012). It was favoured by those in power because it posited divinity as being encased in discrete entities, gods, ghosts and ancestors, which were contacted by special, state-sanctified means. The royal priesthood then, had the most direct access to divine power. Dissenters who argued that divinity was more like a distributed substance in the cosmos, found also within human beings, were putting forward a relatively democratic argument with regard to the divine. Anyone can become divine, 'become a god', proponents of this perspective held, so long as they become properly aligned with the world around them.

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[18] Or more specifically *tianli*, 天理, that is, "the heavenly order".

A recently emerged debate among anthropological students of Chinese religion is structurally very similar to this ancient one. It follows from the work of Phillipe Descola. In his fourfold map of the "ontological regimes" of the world, Descola (2013) attributes what he calls "analogism" to ancient China, alongside other places. According to him, these ontological regimes share a concern to differentiate between "inner" and "outer" realms of human experience. They differ to the extent that these inner and outer realms are understood in terms of continuity or discontinuity. According to "naturalism" for example, which is the ontological regime of the traditional West, while the outer realm, "nature", is continuous, the inner realm, is discontinuous, whether this discontinuity is understood at the level of the individual, in terms of "subjectivity", or the collective, in terms of "cultures" and "species". For animists in contrast, each being shares the same continuous (human) subjectivity and culture (inner world) whilst existing in radically discontinuous natures, or worlds. "Analogism" is characterised by discontinuity in both outer and inner realms and forms a logical pair with totemism (or "homologism" (Matthews 2018)) which structures both outer and inner realms in terms of continuity.

I do not aim in this thesis to demarcate the ontological regime of those in the church in Taiwan. Firstly, I agree with others who have effectively argued that ancient, imperial and modern Chinese communities, unsurprisingly, fluctuate between ontological regimes according to historical period (Puett 2002; Hendersen 2011), philosophical school (Singerland 2003; 2018), scale of perspective (Matthews 2017) and religious persuasion (Matthews 2018). However, Descola himself admits that the whole project of demarcating ontological regimes is written from a naturalistic perspective. The regimes, for Descola, are discontinuous "inner" representations of a "continuous" outer world. In contrast, the theory of unity put forward in the concluding chapter of the thesis is written from an analogistic perspective. I assume, as did the ancient Chinese according to Descola, that there is discontinuity everywhere, between and within people, between people and things, between things, between the scales of things. The question I then ask is, 'how do the things that compose the church in Taiwan "hang together"'?

I propose that instead of maintaining a "naturalistic" frame of description and analysis, as do Descola and his critiques, we must apply an "analogistic" perspective to our understanding of the church in Taiwan. That is, I do not say that church members are, or are not, "analogists" per se, but that understanding them from an analogistic analytical perspective ethnographically elucidates what they are doing better than from a naturalistic one. Drawing upon Marshall Sahlins' (2013) diagnosis of the current state of anthropology as implicitly analogical, I utilise recent philosophical

developments in 'New Realism' (Garcia 2018) and 'Speculative Realism' (Bryant et al. 2011; Shaviro 2014) to upgrade analogism to an explicit, fully-functioning frame of analytical description. I then outline how one might utilize analytical analogism as a frame of ethnographic description, historical contextualisation and ethnological comparison.

Using the preceding ethnography, the conclusion presents what I call an outline for a "quantum anthropology". It has nothing to do with quantum physics. Rather it takes group oneness and sameness (quanta) seriously as aspects of people's worlds. Anthropologists have been understandably reluctant to do this. I attempt to outline an ethnographic way of taking oneness, sameness, "being" and even "essence" seriously which averts the dangers of reification. Roughly, this approach takes units rather than relations as the building blocks of ethnographic worlds. I engage debates within the anthropology of China on analogism (Feuchtwang 2017; Matthews 2017) not by arguing that church members are, or are not, analogistic, but, that using analogism, rather than naturalism (Latour 2009; Descola 2013), as an analytical frame of description is a useful way of understanding what they are doing. The question from an analogistic perspective is not 'how are entities constructed?', as has very often been the question in anthropology and related disciplines (Scott 2013), but 'how are entities, including social entities, related?' My answer to this question is "attunement".

Chapter 1

The Church as Infrastructure: A Rhythmic Parallax

"A network of congregations quietly rings the globe, comprised of Christians meeting in homes and unassuming buildings, which usually bear little resemblance to traditional "churches." A few outward characteristics are obvious. The local gatherings are of varying sizes, from two or three to two or three thousand. Frequently the members share meals together, often before or after services which can be boisterous and participatory. Generally, no pastor, priest, or designated religious officiant presides. As the Spirit leads, different members stand to call hymns, declare verses from the Bible, give personal testimonies, or shout praises to God. But, for all their openness about their beliefs and their tireless attempts at outreach, it can be hard for outsiders to understand who these Christians are. Why do they not join existing Christian denominations? What is the basis for their identity and the institutions they create?

When asked, congregants readily and happily acknowledge their fellowship and unity with other likeminded groups from around the world, but they may seem canny and evasive when asked for the name of their local church or the name of the church network as a whole. An inquirer may be told that the church has no name, that it is simply named with the local city, or that it is the same church to which all Christians belong. A visitor may even be treated to an extemporaneous bible study, explaining the generic naming customs of the church in the New Testament. All of these individuals and congregations speak of familiar Christian doctrines with a similar accent. From Nigeria to the Philippines, from Canada to Chile, visitors will hear talk of releasing the spirit, denying the self, building up the Body of Christ, and loving Christ as the bridegroom. Furthermore, all of these Christians will also share complex or indirect explanations for who they are and what they represent. If pressed in the right direction, however, most members will readily acknowledge their indebtedness to and respect for the ministry of 'Brother Nee'" (Chang 2017:1-2).

The above is a quote from one of the latest of a considerably long line of Masters and PhD theses devoted to the biography and "theology" of Watchman Nee (B. Lee 1972; Bassett 1977; Roberts 1979; Sell 1979; Siu 1979; Wong 1980; Scheifelbein 1980; Wetmore 1983; Cliff 1983; Ng 1985; Pamudji 1985; K. Lee 1989; Lu 1992; Liao 1997; May 2001; Wu 2006; Meng 2018)[19]. In his brief description of the global group of which the church in Taiwan is a part, Chang recognises a "similar accent", "familiar doctrines" and common forms of "talk", "[f]rom Nigeria to the Philippines, from Canada to Chile". He writes, too, that this group, which "quietly rings the globe", is "hard for outsiders to understand". He asks, finally, "what is the basis for their identity and the institutions they create?" While I am not directly concerned in this thesis with either "identity" or "institutions" per se, I do think that Chang's question points in the same direction as my own: what is it that is shared, or "the same", across church contexts?

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[19] There are of course many more books than these written about, or including descriptions of, Watchman Nee, mostly non-academic. Furthermore, there are many theses, articles and books on Nee written in Chinese (see the collection by Lin & Zhou (2011) for instance).

Each of the next three chapters will answer this question in a different way. In this chapter, I argue that the sameness of the church across time and context can be recognised as a form of infrastructure. This infrastructure is situationally composed of a great variety of human and non-human bodies and styles of acting, but I came to recognise rhythm as that through which these disparate aspects were bound to one another. This recognition became especially apparent to me in *Taiwan*, because of the heightened attention to rhythm there. Let me situate this argument in relation to wider anthropological understandings of religious representation, before turning to a historic moment in the church in Taiwan's history, which makes this heightened attention to rhythm especially apparent. After that, I present my argument in greater detail before turning to church ideas and how we might understand their significance through a heightened ethnographic attention to rhythm.

Anthropologists have understood religious signs (ideas, paraphernalia, aesthetics) in roughly three different (overlapping) ways. First, they have been understood to represent (or "mirror" (Wolf 1974:131)), however obliquely, a more tangible, underlying reality. Anthropology has been most influenced by the Durkheimian version of this argument, in which the more tangible, underlying reality is the social collective itself. (Durkheim was in turn partly reacting to the arguments of Tylor (1871), Lang (1898), Marrett (1909) and Frazer (1911-1915), who held that religious signs emerged in response to the awe and confusion experienced in confrontation with dreams and natural phenomena[20] (Wallace 1966: 6-7, 25-6)). Arthur Wolf, in this vein, argued (1974) that the tripartite structure of Chinese popular religion, split between gods, ghosts and ancestors reflected "worshippers' conception of their social world" (1974:131). Namely, a world divided between "family and kinship organisation, locality, strangers and government" (Feuchtwang 2001:58). Less influential within anthropology have been the psychoanalytic versions of this "Durkheimian" argument, such as Carl Jung's[21].

Here, religious signs obliquely represent individual psychology (Morris 1987:ch4; Campbell 2008 [1949]) rather than social structures. Someway between the "Durkheimian" and "Jungian" approaches, Maurice Bloch has argued (2007) that many "religious" notions, such as those of ghosts and ancestors, arise from implicit indigenous perceptions of pan-human psycho-social realities. Theory of Mind, for instance, is the human capacity to interpret other humans as having their own representation of the world, which may be at variance with one's own. Alongside sex and

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[20] See Meyer 2016 on Marrett (1909) for a post-Durkheimian theory of religiosity along these lines.

[21] Jung writes the following, for example, in his "Red Book": "...my soul finally lies behind everything, and if I cross the world, I am ultimately doing so to find my soul. Even the dearest are themselves not the goal and end of the love that goes on seeking, they are symbols of their own souls" (2009:132).

reproduction then, theory of mind (i.e. second guessing one another's intentions) is a third way in which human beings "go in and out of one another's bodies". Ideologies and experiences of ghosts and ancestors, who with heightened significance go in and out of human bodies, Bloch writes, are embodied reflections of these more everyday realities of human interpenetration.

This is all part of the first way in which anthropologists (and others) have understood the significance of religious signs. A second way is less enthusiastic about correlating religious notions with empirical realities in this way. This form of analysis understands religious signs (I am using the term "religious" very broadly here), to occupy an almost autonomous sphere of human imagination. Very influentially, for instance, Viveiros de Castro (e.g. 1998) interprets Amazonian perspectivism as a form of indigenous philosophy which should be engaged with as such. Analysing these notions as emergent from particular social realities, rather than engaging them as conceptual equals of analysis itself is, he holds, a form of conceptual colonialism. Closer to the themes of this thesis, Stephan Feuchtwang contrasts his own approach to Chinese Popular Religion with that of Wolf. Indeed, he argues,

> "that it is precisely the difference and *lack* of correspondence of the rites and imagery of gods and demons [my
> "religious signs"] to the manners and features of the living which give them metaphorical value. Myths and
> rites stand in a transcendental and an historical relation (as an eternal past) to present and lived reality"
> (2001:58-9, my emphasis).

Marshall Sahlins (1995; 2017) is perhaps the most vocal proponent of the relative autonomy of cosmology, or religious signs, from social orders. Indeed, he holds, in his famous notion of "mythopraxis", that cosmological and religious notions effect socio-historical reality more than vice versa (see also Scott 2007 on the derivative notion of "ontopraxis").

The third way anthropologists have interpreted religious signs is perhaps exemplified by Webb Keane (1997). Rather than represent per se, he holds, religious signs, in practice, serve to mediate, for those who employ them, between empirical and spiritual realities. This approach is very much influenced by performative versions of "speech act theory" which understand that words, like actions, *do* things much more than they represent them (Austin 1975). In Keane's approach, and those who have been inspired by it (Engelke 2007; Harkness 2014), the work of analysis is to demonstrate how worshippers' notions of what words and things can do affects their relations with the spiritual beings, which those words and things are intended to contact and mediate. Thus, within the anthropology of Christianity it has been shown how Protestant resistance to the idea that religious words and

things might have value in themselves, apart from their role in mediating the divine, makes the experience of transcendence fraught with the perceived dangers of "fetishism" (Keane 1997; 2007; Engelke 2005).

My own argument in this chapter partakes in all three approaches to religious signs. I argue that the church's central notion is that of "oneness" and that there are two kinds of oneness: "organisation", which is represented by church leaders as the "wrong" kind, and "organic" oneness, which is represented as characterising the true nature of the church. I argue that we should understand the church as an "infrastructure", and that like all infrastructures it is composed of two basic elements. One is spontaneous, flowing, implicit (represented by "organic oneness") the other is pre-planned, requires cogitation and some form of command structure (represented by "organisation"). Thus, in line with the first approach, outlined above, there is an experiential reality which corresponds with the church's representations.

However, in the denial of the organisational aspects of the church, church speakers stretch an experiential truth into a transcendent one. What rings true experientially is stretched into a utopian, escapist vision of pure, spontaneous oneness, free from the trappings of human negotiation, planning and command. Here I am in line with the second approach outlined above: the significance of church representations lies "precisely in the difference and lack of correspondence" between them and "the manners and features" of life in the church. My argument however is that while some seek this kind of transcendental relation between church representation and everyday life, others (who are the focus of this chapter), even some church leaders, find significance precisely in the fact that it makes the wonder of church infrastructure (what I call the "parallax" of organisation and organism, see below) semiotically available, that is poetically tangible in the form of the church's distinctive language and practice, described in this chapter. It is by paying attention to rhythm that both I and church members, extending a long Chinese tradition of heightened attention to the rhythmic aspects of life (see below), are able to experience the organisational and organic as two incommensurable but complementary, aspects of the same, wondrous thing ("the church"). Here, in line with the third approach, the significance of church words and practices lies in their capacity to mediate between the church as an empirical and a poetic, or 'spiritual', reality.

Before unfolding this argument any further, I turn briefly here to a church practice which evidences that heightened sense of rhythm which I will argue characterises the infrastructural integrity of the church in Taiwan. As mentioned in the introduction, the church is distinctive for its use of "gospel marches" (*fuyin youxing*) as a tool of proselytization, a practice first recorded by Witness Lee

in 1933. Marching like an army platoon, huge banners proclaiming God's love and acceptance were held, military-style drums were played and white bibs, with red characters on, were worn. When Witness Lee moved to California in 1962, just in time for the for the re-ignition of Christianity via the countercultural spirit of "the Jesus people" and others, this practice went with him, by turns terrifying and entrancing onlookers (Sparks 1977:231). When the group first came to Taiwan, they came marching with drums, holding banners and lanterns as they sang and shouted slogans through the streets of Taipei[22]. In 1985 Witness Lee recounted these early "gospel marches" as high points in the history of the church in Taiwan, in a series of addresses he gave to the church in Taipei between 1984 and 1989, with the purpose of implementing "the new way" (*xinlv*), inspired by his time in North America. In the passage below he paints a picture of mass rhythmic organisation, producing an "atmosphere" (*qifen*) under which the aim was to "gospelize" (*fuyinhua*) and "truthize" (*zhenlihua*) Taiwan:

In order to stir up an atmosphere of the gospel in Taipei in our initial stage, we determined the population of Taipei and then printed and distributed gospel tracts so that every resident in Taipei could receive one. In our practice we did not act on impulse, passing out tracts in a random way. Furthermore, we were not superstitious, thinking that with prayer alone the wind would blow and carry our tracts to every household. We asked the saints to come together and look at the map of the city of Taipei. Then we divided the city into small districts, studied the situation of every street, and decided which brothers and sisters should be responsible for the district. After receiving the tracts, the brothers and sisters placed them in mailboxes, going from house to house, covering the streets assigned to them so that every resident of the city would receive a gospel tract. This stirred up a gospel atmosphere.

Next we printed posters. We used four colors: red, yellow, blue, and green to prepare posters with words such as "Believe in Jesus and be saved," "Jesus Christ came to the world to save sinners," and "God loves the world." Then we placed these posters at train stations, bus stations, crossroads, important intersections, and on the front doors of the saints' homes. In this way, people who were walking on the streets of Taipei could identify the homes of the saints. As the number of believers increased, the city of Taipei was filled with these posters.

We also sent out gospel teams. Gospel teams were first used in Shanghai, and we often had more than eight hundred on a team that would march through Shanghai. When the team reached the Bund, a major downtown district in Shanghai, we would shout with a loud voice, "Oh, Shanghai! Repent quickly! If your sins do not go, peace cannot come." This stirred up a gospel atmosphere. When we started our work in Taipei, we strengthened the gospel teams, which were sent out in several ways. One team would go out on a regular basis

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[22] There is precedent for this practice in the Chinese traditional practice of parading dressed as and holding gods (Stepanchuk & Wong 1991; Sangren 2000). It seems to me, that despite being called "gospel marches" the primary goal of the marches today, are not to gain new converts. Rather, they, like traditional parades, are displays of corporate divinity to be witnessed and recognised by onlookers (see chapter four).

in the evenings. With lanterns in their hands, the teams would go through the streets and small alleys shouting slogans, such as "Repent!" and "Believe in the Lord!"

Another team would leave from hall one on the Lord's Day afternoon, divide into four groups, and walk toward New Park. We would walk according to the beating of drums and sing, "You need Jesus! You need Jesus! / Men and women all need Him! / For redemption you need Him, / For salvation you need Him! / And for everlasting life, / Yes, you need Jesus!" (Hymns, #1024). The four groups would take different routes and enter the park through its four gates. As we paraded through the streets, we gathered people into the park. People would stream in from all sides. New Park has over a thousand seats, and they were immediately filled. When everyone arrived, we would begin to sing hymns and preach a gospel message.

This was how we stirred up an atmosphere in those days. After gospel tracts were distributed and every street was saturated with gospel posters, people were easily attracted by the beating of the gospel drums on the streets. Every Lord's Day we would go to New Park to preach the gospel, and in the afternoon we would come back with four to five hundred names. We did this continuously for one to two years…[23]

Marching was a familiar form of togetherness for the newly arrived mainland Chinese who made up the majority of those who flocked to the church at this time. Most of the two million Chinese immigrants who flooded the island between 1945 and 1950 were members of the nationalist army, headed by the "Generalissimo" Chiang Kai-shek, and their families[24]. In February 2018, the church was still marching, wearing the same style bib, red characters on a white background, and holding huge banners (figure 2). Several hundred young people led the procession, struggling to keep the drum rhythms they'd been practicing for weeks. There were ten thousand marchers this time, including sizable minorities from sixty-two different countries. As can be viewed on the church in Taipei's Facebook page, the 2018 bibs declare in typical four-character Chinese phraseology[25]: "Jesus is Lord" (*yesu shi zhu,* 耶穌愛你), "God loves the world" (*shen ai shiren,* 神愛世人), "God is love" (*shen jiu shi ai,* 神就是愛), "(you) need Jesus" (*xuyao yesu,* 需要耶穌). Banner messages are declared in couplet form[26]: 'believe Jesus, receive eternal life' (*xiangxin yesu de yongsheng,* 相信耶穌 得永生), 'take off (your) heavy burdens, come receive peace' (*tuoxia zhongdan lai de anxi,* 脫下重擔

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[23] *Crucial Words of Leading in the Lord's Recovery, Book 4: The Increase and Spread of the Church,* Chapter 11, Section 1, accessed 17/09/2019, via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=17FFCC5ADF43.

[24] There is a martial aesthetic throughout populations of practitioners of Chinese Popular religion (Stafford 2000; Feuchtwang 2001). Whether there was and is a particular penchant for the militant divine among the mainlanders of this period and their descendants would not be surprising, but some studies seem to suggest so (e.g. Wachman 1994; Boretz 1995; Festa 2007).

[25] In Mandarin this four-character structure is called chengyu, literally "become language", almost as if words are not really language until they've been brought to life with specific rhythms.

[26] Some of these couplets demonstrate "semantic antitheticality", that is, they are formed of "paired opposites in meaning"- "heavy burdens" (*zhongdan*) and peace (*anxi*), "darkness" (*heian*) and "God's kingdom" (*shenguo*), "idols" (*ouxiang*) and "the living God" (*huoshen*)- which is a grammatical form "favored by classical [Chinese] poetry" (Link 2013:9).

來得安息), 'break from the darkness, move into God's kingdom' (*tuoli heian qianru shenguo,* 脫離黑暗遷入神國), 'abandon idols, serve the divine life' (*liqi ouxiang shifeng huoshen,* 離棄偶像事奉活神). This year almost everyone wears white caps displaying the church's logo (figure 3) which helps delineate the stream of church participants against the gush of the city that surrounds them.

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In the remainder of this chapter I first outline the principal ideas which characterise the church's ministry in Taiwan. I draw out a particular focus of these ideas: the distinction between the church as an "organization" (*zuzhi,* 組織) and an "organism" (*shengjiti,* 生集體). I relate these foci to analogous distinctions, which I encountered in interviews with leading church members, between the "mind" (*xinsi,* 心思) and the "spirit" (*ling,* 靈), the "sociological" and the "spiritual", and the "objective" (*keguan,* 客觀) and the "subjective" (*zhuguan,* 主觀). In the public discourse of church leaders, these principles are pitted against one another, with the latter terms viewed as wholly positive and the former as wholly negative. In practice and conversation however, I began to see less hard-line understandings seeping through. In the everyday life of the church, and often in Lee's own ministry[27], these two principles are encountered as irreducibly complementary aspects of the church. Like the traditional notions of *yin* and *yang,* they are two wondrously incommensurable sides to the same phenomenon.

This photo has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation.

Figure 2: Gospel march in Taipei, January 25th, 2004. Source: www.localchurch.cc/churches.asp.

The principles of *yin* and *yang* have been understood by many as two opposing but complementary forces which compose the cosmos at every scale (Sangren 1987a; 1987b). A more basic but not incompatible understanding positions *yin* and *yang* as simply as two incommensurable aspects of a single phenomenon. As is well known, the Chinese characters for *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽) depict the shady and the sunny side of a hill respectively (Wang 2012). In contemporary parlance we can understand the principles of *yin* and *yang* as designating a "parallax view". Explaining this notion, Slavoj Žižek writes of,

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[27] As in the long quote above, where Lee says explicitly that organization is the key to success.

"[t]he illusion…of putting two incompatible phenomena on the same level…[that is]…the illusion of being able to use the same language for phenomena which are mutually untranslatable and can be grasped only in a kind of parallax view, constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible. Thus there is no rapport between the two levels, no shared space- although they are closely connected, even identical in a way, they are, as it were, on opposed sides of a Moebius strip…they are *two* sides of the same phenomenon which [like the shady and sunny sides of a hill], precisely as two sides, can never meet" (2009:4).

This photo has been removed as the copyright is owned by another organisation.

Figure 3: 2018 Taipei gospel march, one can see the church symbol on the caps and bibs.
Photo courtesy of Chew Aak Chyuan.

In church practice, I argue in this chapter, using both ethnography and Witness Lee's own teachings, the "organic" and "organizational" aspects of the church are not encountered as two diametrically opposed notions but as a kind of parallax, as two irreconcilable aspects of the same rhythmic infrastructure. I argue furthermore, that this "parallax view" might be analytically helpful to anthropologists of religious and other infrastructures. Inspired by recent notions of "lively" (Amin 2014), "living" (Napolitano 2016), "bodily" (Handman 2017), "affective" (Street 2012; Knox 2017) and "intimate" (Wilson 2016) infrastructures, I describe the church as a "rhythmic infrastructure" which incorporates both spontaneity and planning, bodily participation and cognitive rumination, while not collapsing them into a single perspective. Rhythm is the means by which the two sides of the church, the "organizational" and "organic", in church terms, are held together[28].

I call the "churchlife" (*zhaohuishenghuo*, 召會生活) an infrastructure in this chapter because, we will see that, from a behavioural perspective, church practices, aesthetics and ideas are relatively integrated, all gravitating around the works, words and precedents of Nee and Lee. The day to day interactions which characterise participation in the church are particular, individual, never exactly the same, but they amount to a relatively stable system. It is a both a "hard" and "soft" infrastructure (Handman 2017) because it is made up of bodies, words and human communications as much as it is made up of flows of money and information, of specially designed buildings, places and products. But it is also composed, I am arguing, of two incommensurably complementary aspects. This image of infrastructure is not unprecedented. Focusing upon the large effects upon fluid use that small changes in a computerised library system can have upon its users, Star (1999)

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[28] Western scholars have often referred to the "Chinese" conception of society as being "organic" (Needham 1956; Overmyer 1986; Allan 1997). We may interpret the organic-organizational distinction in the church as arising historically from a sense of resistance to the (organisational) forms of association that Western missionaries and "imperialists" were perceived to be bringing with them in early twentieth century China (Zimmerman-Liu 2014). I return to a historical genealogy of church concepts in the chapter five.

notes the following "paradox of infrastructure". "[T]wo processes of work are occurring simultaneously:", she writes,

> Only one is visible to the traditional analysis of user-at-terminal or user-with-system. That is the one that concerns keystrokes and functionality. The other is the process of assemblage, the delicate, complex weaving together of desktop resources, organizational routines, running memory of complicated task queues (only a couple of which really concern the terminal or the system), and all manner of articulation work performed invisibly by the user (1999:386-7).

Infrastructure, in this understanding, is an ecology of the mind, the body and the world (Bateson 2000; Star & Ruhleder 1996), with both a visible exoskeleton and a subtle "immaterial body" (Blackman 2012) of learned, implicit knowledge[29]. Similarly, Larkin notes the "peculiar ontology" of infrastructures: "they are things and also the relations between things" (2013:329). They are not only "pipes, cables, sewers and wires". They can be "a kind of mentality and a way of living in the world" (2013: 331). "Infrastructures are not", Larkin writes, "in any positivist sense, simply "out there" (2013:330). Moreover, infrastructures are deictic objects (Hanks 1992; 2005; Viveiros de Castro 1998), that is, objects only become infrastructures from certain perspectives. Larkin again: "although electricity is the infrastructure of the computer, the computer is [also] the infrastructure of the electricity" (2013: 329; see also Edwards 1998). Infrastructures, while denoting specific technical systems, are also "good to think with" (Levi-Strauss 1966). If "technology is society made durable" in Latour's (1990) famous phrase, infrastructures are "societies" made analytically tangible for a post-"society" anthropology (Strathern 1990). "What distinguishes infrastructures from technologies", Larkin writes, "is that they are objects that create the grounds on which other objects operate" (2013: 329). In the next chapter I will argue that the object which the church-as-infrastructure "create[s] the grounds" for is the church as a "non-local world".

This chapter, however, contains a self-contained argument of its own. I show how attending to rhythm helps us answer the question of what it is that is shared across church localities and moments, despite the different understandings and orientations of church members that we explore in later chapters. Heightened attention to distinctive, transmediative rhythm is the principal means by which the church maintains its infrastructural integrity[30]. Daily rhythms, calendrical rhythms,

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[29] See Stafford 1995 and Lewis 2008 for analogous ethnographic understandings of the processes of learning.

[30] Anthropologists of capitalist processes have begun to look at the abstract rhythms of clock-time, which are so deeply entwined with capitalistic production (Marx 2018; Thompson 1967), as an oppressive, (dis)integrating force in themselves, often incompatible with local ways of measuring time and life (Bear 2014a; 2014b). From the 1970s on, industrial capitalist rhythms shook many Taiwanese out of spontaneously cooperative lives into alienated lives of mind-numbing habituation (Gates 1987). Taiwanese New Wave cinema, with its characteristically long frame shots and storyline slowness, some have argued, is a direct response to this rhythmic transmogrification of everyday life (Bachner 2007; Lim 2016). Church schedules are utterly harmonious with work schedules

rhythms of speech, bodily rhythms, rhythms of product consumption, rhythms of interaction, poetic and aesthetic rhythms: these are how the church persists as a relatively integrated social entity traversing psychological, linguistic, cultural, national, generational, gendered and educational differences.

During my time in Taipei, I found myself drawn towards conducting my own "rhythmanalysis" (Lefebvre 2004). Enthralled by the sensory difference between dense, humid, drab and exuberant Taipei, and the more turgid urbanity of my upbringing, I began to record the sounds I heard. Often exhausting my capacity to keep up with the content of what church members were saying (in Mandarin and sometimes in Hokkien), I found myself, in these moments, paying special attention to the rhythms of speech. Listening back to the city sounds I recorded from uncle Yang's rooftop, and to my recordings of church meetings[31], I found that rhythm revealed itself as what Yi Chen calls a "*meta-sense* which synthesises bodily and extra-bodily impressions" (2016:2). That is, rhythm ties together other senses, touch, sight, smell etc, into distinctive patterns, into a synesthetic "level of reality" (Chen 2016:15), that may not be recognised by simply and directly attending to these more immediate sensations. It is in this way that rhythm, to quote Malinowski, became my "method of discovering invisible facts by constructive inference" (1935, vol. 1:317 cited in Goldman 2018:n.p)[32].

Might we understand, then, church distinctiveness and church unity, that is church *unicity*, as having a rhythmic basis? "All life is rhythmic", writes the philosopher Susan Langer (1953: 126). "Rhythm", predicted the anthropologist E. T. Hall, "will...soon be proved to be the ultimate building block not only in personality but also communication and health" (1983:224n). He held too, that "the rhythm of a people may yet prove to be the most binding of all forces that hold human beings together" (1983:156). However, if it is true that "[t]he most characteristic principle of vital activity is rhythm" (Langer 1953: 126), it is also true that some are more attuned to this rhythmic aspect of life than others (Bandak 2014; Peña 2017). Haili you (1994a; 1994b), following Marcel Granet

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however. Meetings that are not for the retired or for students are held during the evenings and weekends. "Morning revival" is conducted on commutes or before leaving the house for work. Brother Yiqi, the "responsible one" for my local Jingmei congregation, laughs hard with hand motions at the repetitiveness of his work, but is clearly liberated to some extent by the differently repetitive church life. Work rhythms are not his own to the degree that church rhythms are (Gell 1980).

[31] I incorporated many of these sounds into musical compositions which I compiled into an online audio journal of my time in Taiwan. Putting church and city sounds into various songs and pieces drew out aspects of these sounds, their uniqueness(es), which were not accessible simply in the flow of the everyday. Although of course church members themselves do not do this, their repeated everyday exposure to relatively similar and distinct church rhythms against the backdrop of shifting urban, national and biographical "sensoryscapes" (Lee et al. 2012) may have a similar effect in drawing constant newness out of rhythmic sameness through its ever-changing contrasts with the audio world around.

[32] In line with anthropologists of sound, this method might also be called "the acoustemology of places, where the sonorous layers [of those places] enable us to attune to the way in which [they] are assembled, lived and experienced without making visual or discursive approaches dominant" (Bandak 2014:254; see also Feld 1996: 96-97; Feld & Brenneis 2004).

(2012[1934]:ch3), suggests rhythm as an analytical starting point for understanding Chinese thinking in general and the body in Chinese thought in particular. After reviewing the various terms used by scholars attempting to characterise "the Chinese world picture", she asks, "[b]ut why can we not use the term rhythm as the key to all these keywords: order, dance, cyclic recurrence, pattern, harmony, spontaneity, and of course "mysterious resonance"?" (1994:473). Wandering through Beijing, Perry Link (2013) notes that its signs and sounds are much more "rhythm-conscious" than in non-Chinese places. "I noticed a sign that was intended for pedestrians crossing Haidian Road", he begins,

> In other countries such a sign might have said "Caution" or "Look both ways." But this one read: *Yi kan, er man, san tongguo* 一看，二慢，三通过, 'First look, then go slowly, then cross'. The phrase is not only rhythmic but exhibits the 1–2, 1–2, 1–2–3 pattern of syllables that is at least as old as mirror inscriptions of the Han period and that has pervaded not only elite poetry but folksongs, proverbs, and storytelling in many later eras (Link 2013:8)).

After reviewing several such examples, he goes on to muse: "Whether or not they were used intentionally, the rhythms seemed to *add something* to the phrases they inhabited. What was it? Should we call it "meaning"? Can rhythms by themselves "mean"?" (2013: 10-11). If "meaning" is not the word (see Tomlinson & Engelke 2006), then I argue here that church rhythms mediate and connect in distinctive ways. "Big character posters" (*dazibao*) have been a means of advertisement and propaganda in China for centuries (Sheng 1990; Li 2009; Barmé 2012). Looking at pictures of 1980s Beijing, these posters can be seen everywhere. Mostly they are red with white characters on. The posters, banners and signs of the church, in Taiwan and elsewhere, are white with red characters on. Here then we note a potential rhythmic continuity between the mainland and Taiwan, Taiwan and elsewhere, Chinese and Christian history, between "the world" and "the church", across colours and contexts. It points towards the social productivity, and hidden connectivities, of rhythm which is the ethnological focus of this chapter.

Before getting carried away by rhythm however, it is necessary that we turn finally to the contents of the church's ministry. These contents are partly what is being mediated by church rhythm: we will see that they are learned through processes of dynamic rhythmicization. Then we can turn more properly to that which is directly recognisable as infrastructure: church buildings, aesthetics and practices, before finally concluding that all of this- concepts, practices, aesthetics, poetics, product circulation, event management, building design- can be productively understood as being elements of a transnational rhythmic infrastructure. We end by preparing for the next chapter.

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Amongst participants in the church in Taiwan, I heard the term "oneness" and its synonyms many times. "We are one!!" (*women shi yiiii!*) was the church version of "cheeeese!!" which, as we moved about in the city, to hotspring baths, city farms, for urban mountain walks, to museums, cake factories, teahouses and exercise classes, was uttered every time a group photo was taken[33]. Of all the various aspects and themes of the Bible and Christian history oneness is the singular focus around which the life and ministry of 'the church' as an international entity revolves. At a gathering of 30,000 church members which I describe in the next chapter, held over Chinese New Year in 2015, oneness was a central focus. The "general subject" of the gathering, which was referred to as both a "conference" (*tehui*, 特會) and a "feast" (*yan*, 宴), was "[t]he main contents of the Lord's recovery" (*zhudehuifuzhizhuyaoneirong*, 主的恢復之主要內容), "the Lord's recovery" being a term the church uses to describe itself. "Message one" was entitled "The Church Ground of Oneness versus Division" (*zhaohuiyidelichangyufenliexiangdui*, 召會一的立場與分裂相對). Of the twenty roman numeral points throughout the conference outline, half of them had the word "oneness" (*heyiwujian*, 合一無間) or "One" (*yi*, 一) in them[34].

There are several levels to oneness, as a concept, though many church members would not make these explicit distinctions. First, there is the oneness of the church itself. Denominationalism is perceived as the dismemberment of the Body of Christ. Having more than one name for the church, for the Body, Witness Lee often said is like having more than one moon, or like a "monster" with more than one body[35]. The only divisions in the church, according to church members, should be geographical, each city should contain a single church and each church should maintain constant contact with all others. (This is where the group received one of its nicknames, "the local church" (*difangjiaohui*, 地方教會), from). From its beginnings in early twentieth century China until now, the group has stated repeatedly that it is a great sign of the "degradation" of "Christianity" that the Body of Christ had been dismembered for so long along so many denominational and factional lines. (That is, until its "recovery" (*huifu*) under the guidance of Nee and Lee, which is where another name

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[33] Another phrase used was "always rejoice!" (*changchang xile,* 常常喜樂), another four-character idiom (*chengyu,* 成語).

[34] In the next chapter I argue that "oneness" is the "root metaphor" (Turner 1974) and the "master signifier" (Žižek 1989) which holds the "representational economy" (Keane 2007; 2018) and the "affective economy" (Ahmed 2004) of the church together as a "world".

[35] E.g. *Four Crucial Elements of the Bible—Christ, the Spirit, Life, and the Church,* Chapter 10, Section 3, accessed on 26/09/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=30B4FD26DE.

for the church comes from, "the (Lord's) Recovery" (*zhudehuifu*, 主的恢復)). The church in Taiwan understands itself as part of a global recovery of God's original "heart's desire" (*shenxin jihua*, 神心計畫) to form for himself a singular, coherent Body, with one heart and one mind.

This is the second aspect of oneness: the oneness of God and the church. According to Nee, Lee, their "co-workers" (*tonggong*, 同工) and the many thousands of articulate ordinary church participants, if God was once a disembodied lonely Spirit detached from the earth He made, today He has "undergone a process" (*jingguo guocheng*, 經過過程) beginning with the Incarnation and ending with those following the "high peak truth" (*gaofeng zhenli*, 高峰真理) of the "vision" (*yixiang*, 異象) revealed to Nee and Lee. Today, God is an "organism" (*shengjiti*, 生機體) formed out of the lives of His believers. The *ultimate* aim of the Christian life, then, is to become a "vessel" (*qimin*, 器皿) in "the organic Body of Christ" (*jidu shengji de shenti*, 基督生機的身體), to live as a "functioning member" (*gongneng zhiti*, 功能肢體) of "the corporate God-man" (*tuantide shenren*, 團體的神人), to be a "living stone" (*huoshi*, 活石) in the "building of the church" (*jianzao zhaohui*, 建造召會). That is, to be "blended" (*xiangtiao*, 相調) into "oneness" (*heyiwujian*, 合一無間) through total commitment to the "churchlife" (*zhaohuishenghuo*, 召會生活)[36]. The aim of the Christian life, in other words, is to carry out "God's plan" (*shen yi*, 神意), His "economy" (*shen de jinglun*, 神的經綸), which is to form for Himself a harmonious human whole through which He might find His "expression" (*zhangxian*, 彰顯). "Not the individual Christians, but a corporate entity"[37], as one song sung at the New Year gathering put it.

Thirdly, there is the oneness of individual humans and divinity. It is their understanding that, together, church members *are* God, terrestrially embodied. They are, in their terms, "godmen" (*shenren*, 神人), and the church is the "corporate godman" (*tuanti shenren*, 團體神人). "The Body of Christ" *(jidutu de shenti*, 基督的身體) for most members of the church in Taiwan is a term which describes a "living" (*huode*, 活的), "organic" (*shengji*, 生機), "subjective reality" (*zhuguan de zhenli*, 主觀的真理), a tangible social body. God is encountered explicitly through daily interaction with the church brothers and sisters, much more than he is as an inner voice, or through intense emotional

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[36] This is not to say that people do not pray to God with their individual problems; "give it to the Lord" (*songgeizhu*, 送給主) as the church phrase goes. In fact, a "romantic relationship" (*lanmandikedelianhe*, 羅曼蒂克的聯合) is encouraged in many congregations through "spending time with the Lord" (*huashijianhezhu*, 花時間和主), but this is a means to "corporate" ends.

[37] 不是單獨孤立基督徒，乃是團體新人.

experience, or ritual paraphernalia, as he very often is in other forms of Christianity (Cannell 1999; 2005a; Luhrmann 2012; Bialecki 2008; 2011; 2017; Orsi 2007; 2016) and in other forms of religiosity in Taiwan (Jordan & Overmyer 1986; Stafford 1992; 2000; 2007; Sangren 2000; Feuchtwang 2001). Social fragmentation for members of the church in Taiwan equates to divine fragmentation.

Crucially, the growth of the Body, the building of the church and one's role within this growing, building church-Body should be utterly "spontaneous" (*zifa*, 自發). "Eating" (*chi*, 喫), "absorbing" (*xiqu*, 吸取), "breathing" (*huru*, 吸入) and "drinking" (*he*, 喝) God[38], are key tropes by which this principle of the effortless, spontaneous oneness of the Body "overflowing" (*yongliu*, 湧流) with "life" (*shengming*, 生命) is spoken about[39]. The aim is that through being completely "blended" (*xiangtiao*, 相調) with "the brothers and sisters" (*dixiongzimeimen*, 弟兄姊妹們) one would become "transfused" (*jiaoguan*, 澆灌) and "saturated" (*jintou*, 浸透) with "Christ" (*jidu*, 基督), that is with the "mingled spirit" (*tiaohedeling*, 調合的靈) of humanity and divinity[40]. This transfusion does not occur from the outside in, however. When church meetings reach their energetic crescendos there is little sense or talk of the spirit being 'in the room', or 'descending' upon those gathered, or 'entering' into people, or things.

It has been held by members since Nee's time that "Christianity" (*jidujiao*, 基督教), both "Protestant" and "Catholic", is "degraded"[41]. Because of its' neglect of "the matter of oneness", "Christianity", it is said, is ignorant of the "innermost organ" (*zuineide zhiti*, 最內的器官), that of the "human spirit" (*renling*, 人靈), which Nee and Lee make a strong point of sharply distinguishing from "the soul"

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[38] While "breathing out sin" (*huchu zuiwu*, 呼出罪污).

[39] "I am a Jesus Bottle! / I am an open vessel! / I am a gushing fountain /Flowing with Christ Jesus my Lord!" sings one recently written church song. "Being in the mind" or "acting according to self" is said to "block the flow" (*yongliuzuse*, 湧流阻塞).

[40] Point 1, sub-point D of Message Five in the New Year conference outline puts it this way: "The life-giving Spirit is the Lord Spirit, the pneumatic Christ, for the metabolic transformation of the believers and for the growth and building up of the Body of Christ" (賜生命的靈就是主靈, 那是靈的基, 爲著信徒新陳代謝的變化, 以及基督身體的長大與建造).

[41] Lee noted a resemblance between his own understandings and those of Eastern Orthodoxy but never pursued this possible connection in depth.

(*hun*, 魂)[42]. The latter in turn has three parts: the "mind, emotion and will"[43], with the mind (*xinsi*, 心思) being particularly associated with the "brothers", the emotions (*qinggan*, 情感) associated more with the "sisters", and "the will" (*yizhi*, 意志) being more gender neutral. The spirit is less frequently divided but when it is, it is between "intuition" (*zhijue*, 直覺), "conscience" (*liangxin*, 良心), and "fellowship" (*xiaotong*, 交通). It is in "the spirit" that God resides, and it is through "exercising (one's) spirit" (*caolian ling*, 操練靈) that oneness is "expressed" (*zhangxian*, 彰顯), and one's soul and body become "saturated" (*jintou*, 浸透) and "transfused" (*jiaoguan*, 澆灌) (figure 4).

Watching congregants at an energetic meeting, one gets the impression, from bodily actions and orientation towards others- rather than toward a stage or the sky or toward the "self" through a closing of the eyes etc-, that they are pushing their 'spirits' outward rather than receiving the Spirit from the outside inwards. Air-punching is a ubiquitous body technique, and this contrasts markedly, in my view, with the charismatic-evangelical pose of outstretched hands and closed eyes (Csordas 1997a; Bialecki 2017)[44]. A life of this spiritual (and bodily) exercise results in "mutual perfecting"[45], where the life of the church- with its "burdens" (*fudan*, 負擔), its "responsibilities" (*fuze*, 負責), and its "service" (*fushi*, 服事)- would live itself effortlessly through you. For some, these understandings induce a strong ethic of "self-denial" (*fourenji*, 否認己) tightly coupled with an acute "sense of

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[42] The Christian anthropology Nee inherited from Penn-Lewis evidently enabled Little Flock congregants to maintain certain long held convictions concerning human nature and the role of the divine while repurposing them for a more explicitly globally-oriented project. Her notion of the all-important difference between the "spirit" and "soul" for example resonated strongly with traditional Chinese anthropology in which there are at least two "souls" (as Westerners have translated it)- one associated breath, clouds, yang, life, the other world, the other with ghosts, the earth, yin and death. As Alan Frederick Gates, drawing largely upon De Groot's famous six-volume study (1892-1910), *The Religious System of China*, writes:

> The *shen* or immaterial soul expresses itself in its activity in the living human body, as the *ch'i* (氣 breath). It is also called the *hun* 魂. Separated from the body after death it is called the *ming* (命 refulgent spirit) …The material aspect of the soul derives from the earthly or yin substance. In living man, it is manifested as *p'o* 魄 and upon death returns to earth. There it is regarded as *kuei*…The above were the views of the ancient writers and to a large degree probably basic to peasant thinking as well. These same concepts of the soul underlie present-day folk religion of the Taiwanese. In a vague way, they also regard the soul at the time of death as dividing into its constituent parts, the *hun* soul returning as *shen* to the other world and the *p'o* soul as *kuei* returning to the *yin* or terrestrial part of the universe. Hence this rather confusing picture of the soul may be summarized by saying that functionally, the Taiwanese have two souls. One is the superior soul called *hun*. The other is the inferior soul and is called *p'o*. Differences of view begin to emerge when one asks what becomes of the souls at death, at which point the deciding factor becomes the Buddhist or Taoist influences in one's beliefs (1979:114; see also Harrell 1979).

[43] This actually corresponds to Aristotle's tripartite understanding of the "soul" (Lambek 1998:112). Nee's "biblical psychology" is certainly psychotherapeutically helpful in many Christian eyes (Bassett 1976).

[44] Often children's songs, with their associated dance moves, are sung in adult meetings: they are a particularly effective means of "getting into the spirit". Despite their reputation for exuberant loudness (Rubenstein 1991:97-100), however, church members in fact explicitly value "soberness" and are proud of the fact that they refrain from using any amplified music (as in "Christianity") which could induce over-emotivity, and thus, in Watchman Nee's phrase, confuse the spirit with the "latent power of the soul" (Nee 1972).

[45] As Witness Lee and others put it at a 1993 "Blending Conference" (1993 *Blending Conference Messages concerning the Lord's Recovery and Our Present Need*, Chapter 7, Section 10, accessed on 23/09/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=25EC26C749)

discernment" (*fenban*, 分辨) for where the church begins and ends, undergirded at times by a fatalistic "rejection of the world" (*jujueshijie*, 拒絕世界). But this is not true, we will see, for all.

Figure 4: A set of diagrams on the wall of "Hall 19", Taipei, demonstrating the "mystery of human life": that humans have "divine form", or the "image of God", and that they are the "vessels of God". Photo by author.

The "leading brothers" (*dailing dixiong*, 帶領弟兄) are constantly reminding "the regular saints" (*zhengchang shengtu*, 正常聖徒) that the church is not a "movement" (*yundong*, 運動) and definitely not an "organization" (*zuzhi*, 組織). Roman numeral one, of message two, of the conference outline we held on our laps at the international church event I describe in the next chapter, for example, reminds attendees that, *The church as the Body of Christ is absolutely organic, absolutely of life, with nothing organizational[46]*. Sub-point B goes on to stress that, *[t]o even mention the word organization concerning the church and the church life is wrong…[47]*Acting organisationally is related to the church anthropology I described above. In organisations, it is assumed, we think about or are told what to do and then we act on that thought or order. But in the church, this is to act from the "soul" and not to act from the "spirit". The spirit is the "flowing substance" of "the Body" and as "vessels" of that socio-spiritual body it is understood that we act spontaneously with the "flow" of its spirit. That is, we act organically (cf. Morgan 1986:ch3)[48].

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[46] 做基督身體的召會完全是生機的，絕對是生命的，沒有一樣是組織的.
[47] 甚至用"組織"這詞來說到召回和召會生活也是錯的…
[48] See Appendix B for how these understandings are evident in the neologism used for 'church' in the group.

If the notions above sound complex, it is partly because they are! When I showed church literature to one non-Christian Taiwanese friend, in the hope that he would help me with translations, he baulked and exclaimed, "I can't understand it, it's like theology or something!" Simplified versions of the ministry are printed for many church members in Taiwan. The weekly readings (see below) are stripped down from book chapter size to a single A3-sized green sheet of paper. They also sound complex because here these notions are condensed and extracted from the usual contexts of their encounter. They are not disembedded theology for most church members. They form part of a lived "logico-aesthetic integration" (Thompson 1945) which participants refer to interchangeably as "the churchlife" (*zhaohuishenghuo*), which connotes the pragmatic everyday social reality, and "the Bodylife" (*shentishenghuo*), which connotes the spiritual reality of the church as a "divine and mystical realm" (*shensheng aomi de fanwei,* 神聖奧秘的範圍; Zimmerman-Liu 2014). In the summaries above it is evident that, to a certain extent, from a direct, literal reading of the church's ministry, there is only one way to understand the church: as "an organism". On speaking to the "leading brothers" in Taipei, however, already one begins to see a softer, more ambivalent approach in practice.

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In this section we meet two church elders who discuss the notions of organism and organisation, and the associated notions of the spirit and the mind, the spiritual and the sociological, the subjective and objective. My aim is to show that, in practice, there is an attachment to both the organisational and the organic, the mechanical and the spontaneous, the individual elements and the interconnected whole. There is a shared polyrhythmic aesthetic across these domains, and this is what keeps everything relatively together. I pay particular attention to language in this section, which may seem out of place in an argument about infrastructure, but I want the reader to extend the notion of infrastructure even to cognitive operations, speech acts and body techniques. This argument will make more sense in combination with the argument of the next chapter, but it also helps us answer the question which we asked at the start of this chapter: What is shared across church contexts? Put otherwise, what is it that holds the church together? My answer is, a distinct set of rhythms and a heightened but hidden sense of their significance.

Sitting, waiting to enter his office on the thirteenth floor of the Xinji building (信基大樓, see below), having told the porter and the receptionist that I had indeed made an appointment, I fumbled with

brother Zhou's business card. It is double-sided, Mandarin and English, and there is the church symbol, encircled by the words "the church in Taipei", in the left-hand corner. The card reads,

Elder, Church in Taipei
National Central University
Honorary Professor
ASME Fellow
Zhou, Fu-Chu, Ph. D.
Cell: xxxx
Email: xxxx

We have met like this multiple times. This time, in the midst of our ensuing conversation, I suggest a comparison between the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and the church. Brother Zhou replies in good humour, admitting some superficial resemblances. "But" he concludes, "they [Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses] do not have blending. They have headquarters, they have hierarchy." "The Body" he says in contrast, "is a mystical spiritual organism, not [an] organisation". When I ask him to elaborate he continues,

> God did not reveal himself in a very objective way, he does not write out what He wants in the sky, he reveals himself through particular lives. The beauty of the Bible lies in difference. Some part of me is the same with [the Apostle] James, some part of me is the same with [the apostle] Paul.

> This is the principle in the New Testament, is incarnation, not just logos, the word, logos became flesh. So we have an incarnated God, so word became flesh, became what we can touch, that we can understand, even enjoy to a certain extent, so God revealed himself in a very subjective way, objective way is laughable.

The inference is that organisation is related to the "objective way", and that the church as an organism is related to the "subjective way". In Mandarin the terms *zhuguan* ("subjective") and *keguan* ("objective") can be more literally translated "host perspective" and "guest perspective" respectively. The term "zhu" in *zhuguan* is the same term used most frequently for Jesus in his non-corporate aspect. As well as "host", it means "lord" and "master". This fits with the church notion that God is the guest of the church He inhabits (see Chau 2008; Feuchtwang 2007 for comparable understandings of Chinese popular religion). It fits, too, with the idea that the primary point of being Christian in the church is to become divine rather than communicate with divinity. It also fits with certain church notions that the difference between God and humanity is perspectival. Just as Chinese *yinyang* cosmology understands that the moon and the sun are simply two sides of the same universe, Lee once said, so humanity and divinity, God and the church, are two sides of the same reality. In

1952 during a message given by Witness Lee at a training event in Taiwan a church member asked, "What does "many first will be last, and many last first" mean (Matt. 19:30; 20:16)?". He began his answer thus:

> We should realize that there are always two sides to the truths in the Bible. The things in the physical world have this same principle. For example, our head has a front side with seven "holes" and a back side with no "holes." In the universe, according to Chinese philosophy, there are yin and yang, males and females, the sun and the moon. This simply reflects a law in the universe that everything has two sides. In spiritual matters, from God's side, everything is related to His mercy; from man's side, everything is related to man's responsibility [49].

Might we understand the church as an organism and the church as an organisation, like the subjective and the objective, rather than being totally different things as being two different perspectives on the same thing? One, in brother Zhou's case, more valued than the other? Let me turn to another "leading brother" in Taipei, for clarification.

"There are two kinds of truth", says brother Zhu, Editor-in-Chief of the *Taiwan Gospel Bookroom.* "One is in the spirit and one in the mind". He is tall, slim and bespectacled. He is also instrumental to the life of the 'church in Taiwan'. The distinction between the two truths, of the mind and of the spirit, is at the heart of the Nee and Lee ministry and is reiterated within church meetings world-over. In a particularly memorable instance, one of the international church leaders, a "blended brother", was holding a "question and response" session with a few hundred church devotees in a hired-out budget hotel in 2015. He was handed an anonymous question, pulled out of a tupperware box brimming with them, which asked if he ever regretted becoming a Christian. In his response he said that he probably struggled more with his Christianity than anyone else in the room. "If I stay in my mind for more than ten minutes," he declared momentously, "I am an atheist!". There was a moment of terse silence, interspersed with rumbles of laughter. "But then", he continued, "I just shout "Hallelujah!!! Oh Lord Jesus!!!"". The yellow-carpeted conference hall erupted with a relieved cacophony of "amen!"s and "Oh Lord Jesus!"s. Here, the truth in the mind, atheism, was rejected for the truth in the spirit echoing around that rather drab hotel room.

Brother Zhu spends much of his time overseeing the translation of the ever-expanding church 'ministry' (despite the deaths of its authors), into and out of Mandarin. I have seen him many times

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[49] *Guidelines for the Lord's Table Meeting and the Pursuit in Life,* Chapter 10, Section 4, accessed via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=0548091ED0 [28/08/2019].

on church stages, live-translating the Mandarin- or English-speaking speaker, for non-Mandarin- or non-English-speaking attendees. He is adept in Greek, Hebrew, French and Spanish too. From the 1970s to the early 2000s he helped carry out Witness Lee's vision to edit, compile and translate the church's very own Bible- *The Recovery Version* (*huifuban*, 恢復版)-, finished in 2003, and containing over 15,000 footnotes taken from Lee's ministry. After waiting outside brother Zhu's glass-fronted office, which overlooks a floor of hard-working church employees, in May 2016, I am welcomed in and shown to a chair facing his paperwork-filled desk. I had sent him some questions before our interview, as requested, and as we both get comfy, he prefaces our conversation, adjusting his glasses with a half-smile, with the following:

> "Err well these questions are in one sense difficult to answer, because um you are you know you are researching into arr what we consider things in the spiritual realm but with a linguistic or a sociological point of view, hehe, you are trying to you know put things from two realms, hehe!, together, so… well but anyway that is your research…"

After these initial remarks, the interview which ensued was nonetheless instructive, for me at least. I persistently tried to establish whether he agreed with me that the distinctive vocabulary of the church was a result of the translingual translations and interactions that characterised the early decades of the church in Taiwan (which was then the church in China). He refused to put it down to social relations such as these. He told me that originally, he and a team of translators had translated the *Recovery Version Bible* from English to Chinese. "Brother Lee" was not happy with it and told them to do the translation again, this time from the Greek and Hebrew[50]. He argued that the distinctiveness of the church's language was due to the fact that "brother Lee" and "brother Nee" had gotten closer than any Christian before them to the "deep truth" of the Bible. This deep truth it was clear to me was intimately related to the issue of oneness, not only as a concept but as an aesthetic. Brother Zhu demonstrated this through what at first seemed a very pedantic point.

I had put it to him that a church sister who I regularly attended a weekly Bible-reading class with said to me that the Chinese language is more polysemic than English. Often, she said when reading or listening to the church ministry the words used evoked unintended associations which distracted her from the intended meaning. Despite being native Taiwanese, she found it useful at times to turn to the English versions of church literature to clarify the meaning. I built upon this and suggested to brother Zhu that the language used in church congregations in the English-speaking locations was perhaps more distinctively, recognisably "church language" than in Mandarin-speaking

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[50] See Fred 1975; 1977 on Lee's authoritarianism in Taiwan.

congregations. In the latter, the language was more like everyday Chinese so it might take longer to recognise the congregation of one of 'the church'. He completely rejected my suggestion.

The distinctiveness of language of the church does not arise from any interlinguistic, or intra-lingual phenomenon, he said. All Bible versions are translations and all languages have their limitations, he reiterated. He reiterated furthermore that the distinction between the church and the cultures that surround it and the church and "Christianity" was due to the deeper truths of the church's ministry: the language of the church is the true language of the Bible. This time he added, "sometimes Chinese is closer to the original Greek than the English is". This seemed an interesting point, "can you think of any examples?" I asked. After "umming" and "ahhing" for a while, he tentatively suggested Romans 8:26, a verse he had recently been using in a translation. "It may not be a very good example" he worried. It turned out, I think, to be a very good example as it suggests for us that the two "realms" (*fanwei*, 範圍) of the church- the objective, sociological, linguistic, organizational and the subjective, spiritual, mystical and organic- are not as irreconcilable for members in practice as they are often said to be. In the *Recovery Version Bible* Romans 8:26 reads,

> Moreover, in like manner the Spirit also joins in to help us in our weakness, for we do not know for what we should pray as is fitting, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

"Now, this "joins in to help" in the Greek, is actually just one word [συναντιλαμβάνεται]", brother Zhu explains. He breaks down the Greek elements then says that the Chinese for "joins in to help" is *"bangtong danfu"*(幫同擔負), and concludes hesitantly with, "I think the Chinese is quite beautiful". "The English" he repeats in staccato fashion "is 'joins in...to help...us'" scrunching up his nose. "This *bangtong danfu* is invented by brother Lee" he says. His point from a semantic perspective, I think, is that in both the Greek and the Chinese "the Spirit" does not "join in to help us", rather it "takes" our weakness and "bears" them (*danfu*). This conveys the sense of "the Spirit" as something that "takes over" rather than "helps", it infers a greater intimacy between spirit and suffering than the English suggests. In the church ministry the basic idea is that one gives or sacrifices oneself to God and He in turn uses you as a vessel in his Body, and you become a God-man (*shenren*). The idea of the spirit "helping us" lacks this basic notion of the combined oneness of humanity and divinity.

"Well anyway", brother Zhu laughs, and we move on. At the time I did not really see any significance in what brother Zhu was saying, but now it seems that it is permissible to infer that the Chinese *bangtong danfu*, was "quite beautiful" for brother Zhu, and evidently for "brother Lee", not only

because of its semantic accuracy but because it fits the linguistic of four character phrase structure which is ubiquitous in the church's representational economy (Keane 2002:66; 2007:18)[51]. *Bantong danfu*, because of its familiar, flowing rhythm, suggests a single sweeping motion rather than a disjointed" joining in" and "helping out". Oneness here, is a rhythmic aesthetic as much as it is an explicit concept.

What does this have to do with infrastructure? Members in Taiwan often refer to the "beauty" of church language, and many too refer to the "beauty" of the sight of so many church members gathered together in one place, at church events. In practice then, church members find beauty in the linguistic and sociological elements of the church- in the "organizational" aspects of church words, bodies and buildings-, as much as they find it in the experience of the church as an "organic", "spontaneous", "living" entity. It is the fact of the coexistence of these two aspects, I argue, with which many church members are enthralled. It is rhythm, moreover, through which one aspect is made to emerge with temperate wonder from the other, and through which they are united, making them two sides of the same life. This becomes even clearer when spending time with members in their daily church lives: setting out chairs, cooking, printing off things to read, ordering the next batch of daily church materials (see below), driving members around, preparing for the next conference and training session, looking after children, organising church trips, counting up money. These activities are as ubiquitous as the "flowing", "organic," "spontaneous" interactions described below which characterise church meetings and ritual.

In this next section I am going to describe the structures of the "churchlife" in Taiwan. Rhythm ought to be evident as a mediating factor within these descriptions, but I wait until the close of the chapter to conclude explicitly with why I think understanding the church as a rhythmic infrastructure is theoretically helpful, and how this argument relates to the foci of the whole thesis.

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[51] "Representational economy" in Keane's definition, "refers to the totality of technologies, media, institutions, and practices prevalent in any given historical and social context, insofar as they have effects on one another" (2018:68). To this list we can add myriad other kinds of sign which can compose a representational economy: norms, conventions, words, things, persons and domestic arrangements for instance (Keane 2007:19). The key value of this term is precisely that it refers not just to the "things", broadly conceived, that a group does and says and by which it recognises itself as a group, but to the "dynamic relations" between those said and done things, "such that changes in one domain can have consequences for others" (Keane 2007:18). I think representational economy fits much better the kinds of collective changes and differences I am concerned with here, than those of "culture", "social formation", "episteme" which may be used to describe similar or congruent things (Keane 2007:19). There is, I hold, a shared global representational economy of the church, dynamic and heterogeneous to be sure but which it makes little sense to divide up along demarcations of cultural repertoire, nation-state, continent or the like.

In most cases, throughout Taiwan, daily contact is maintained with church members. The church calendar has several scales. If the cosmic rhythms of Imperial China were orchestrated by the emperor and his attendants (Feuchtwang 2001:1-3; 31), here they are orchestrated by the international group of "blended brothers" who speak at all major church gatherings and oversee the publication of all church literature, which has only two official authors. There are, first of all, the "seven annual feasts" which divide up the year, held in various locations around the world. Every two years, one of the feasts is held in Taiwan, over Chinese New Year. These typically involve tens of thousands of attendees and preparations begin months in advance.

There are also regional gatherings each month, called "blendings" (*xiangtiao juhui*, 相調聚會). In Taipei there is a Sunday meeting every month at the nearest church hall. (There are one hundred and twenty-eight halls in Taiwan in total, sixty of them in Taipei.) On top of this there are regular "trainings" (*xunlian*, 訓練) and "conferences" (*tehui*, 特會), some for everyone, some for particular age groups or levels of church responsibility- "co-workers", "elders", "responsible ones", "serving ones", "young people", "college age", "trainees", "middle-aged saints", "working saints", "high-schoolers", "children", "sisters" and "brothers", are all, except the latter two, loose but relevant categories. There is a "school of truth" each year for adolescents, there are summer camps, weekend trips, and, at least where I was living in Taipei, excursions throughout the week. There is also a two-year training for university graduates in Taipei[52].

However, most of what church members call "the churchlife" (*zhaohui shenghuo*, 召會生活) is spent in living rooms, in small gatherings of ten to thirty people occurring several times a week. Songs are sung to an acoustic guitar or an electric keyboard, food is cooked or reheated in the kitchen; and everyone, from small children to elderly grandparents, is expected to contribute in some way. In fact, this church-group was one of the first so-called "house churches" to arise in China. The church forms only 0.5% of the Taiwanese population. Still, Kuo (2008: 50) states that "Local Church" members make up the majority of China's Christians, and according to other estimates (Cheung 1970:5; McCallum 2011:n.p), 'the Local Church' is the largest house church in the world.

As mentioned, many of "the saints" (*shengtu*, 聖徒) are so-called mainlanders, being the children and grandchildren of those who migrated to Taiwan with the nationalist government following its

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[52] See Appendix C for a discussion of the historical evidence showing the difference infrastructure makes to interpretation of Nee's and Lee's words.

defeat by Mao's communists. There are also many Hoklo and Hakka Taiwanese and at times we stayed with aboriginal members living in the Eastern mountainous region of Taiwan[53]. There were also resident church participants from Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea and Vietnam, as well as one or two from Mexico and Eastern Europe. The church relies upon an island-wide network through which members stay in touch, stay synchronised in their "morning revival" (*chenxing shengyan*, 晨興聖言) practices (see below) and organise the many events that go on throughout the year.

In Taipei, there is the *Taiwan Gospel Bookroom* (*taiwan fuyin shufang*, 台灣福音書房), a publishing house, museum, and administration centre housed in the church-owned "Xinji Building" ("Believe/Trust Christ Building") which is leased out also to Citibank and other offices and which sits on the same road as Taipei 101. Over the period of the New Year conference the church held an exhibition on the Dead Sea Scrolls there, complete with guides, special effects and a large pop-up shop featuring a huge range of church paraphernalia from sticker-versions of church-designed emojis, to hoodies branded with the unofficial church logo, to the "eZoe player" (Chinese: *duogongneng shuwei fuyin ji*, 多功能數位福音機) preloaded with audio versions of the *Recovery Version Bible* (in English, Mandarin and Taiwanese (*taiyu*)), 1984 of Witness Lee's spoken messages (together called the "life-studies" (*shengming dujing*, 生命讀經)) and a compilation of 1142 recordings of church songs. (The church in fact has a distinctive musical style, similar at times to Western and Chinese opera, at others to sea shanties and traditional old hymns. It definitely does not sound like contemporary Christian "praise and worship" songs. Most of the songs are written by Nee and Lee, but there is a third now-deceased, much celebrated church song-writer, Howard Hagashi, the son of a Hawaiian sugar plantation foreman, of Japanese-Buddhist descent, who'd studied to be a high-school maths teacher before converting to Christianity and devoting his life to the church at age thirty-one).[54]

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[53] The church secures government backing for a "life education course" (*shengming jiaoyu*, 生命教育) each year which teaches aboriginal youths lessons to equip them for life in the city. As is clear from the title of the program however, the "life" referred to is more than the pragmatic one of jobs and education, if it were the word used would likely be *shenghuo,* 生活- "life, activity, to live, livelihood"- rather than *shengming,* 生命 - meaning something close to "life-force" or "the essence of living things" and which is the word used in the church- for "life-giving spirit" (*ci shengming ling*, 賜生命靈- the full name of the spirit of God), "life-studies", (*shengmin gdujing*, 生命讀經- the name given to Witness Lee's biblical exegeses) and the "eternal life" (*yongyuan shengming*, 永遠生命) for example. One brother Wang in fact told me that the program was a thinly disguised gospel outreach.

[54] At one time there was a song-writing competition at the church's annual "European Young People's Conference" in Poland (see chapter three). But it was discontinued when contestants started using music genres which church leaders felt distracted from the spirit of the gathering. There have been power struggles over musical genre within the church. A semi-professional church troupe, based in New York, began at one point releasing albums which were not approved of by church leadership.

Church halls across the city, are usually fitted out with a kitchen, an office, a baptismal font and a small shop, accompanying the main "hall" (*huisuo*). There is also a training and conference centre staffed and inhabited by several hundred church "trainees", teachers, administrators, editors and "serving ones". In Taiwan's second largest city, Kaosiung, there is another publishing house, many church halls, a conference and training centre and a number of "full-timers" taking care of things. In all major towns and cities there are smaller-sized but comparable buildings also staffed by trained and provisioned-for "serving ones". Dotted around the island in between urban areas and on Taiwan's outlying islands are several million dollars' worth of church-owned real estate, including wedding and conference venues, accommodations, sports fields and a cemetery ("Chanxing Paradise" it is called (*Changxing leyuan*, 長興樂園), and is tended to by "the saints of Pindong county" on Sunday afternoons, see Appendix D).

Unlike the other Christian congregations, the church hall where my host family meet does not have any cross or neon sign marking it out, sitting as it does in an unfindable back alley. To get there I only have to walk around 300 metres from the Yang-Xie home. It is next door to a Japanese-style restaurant down a narrow alleyway leading from Jingmei bridge road, which is bustling with cafés, restaurants, clothes shops, banks, offices, scooter repair shops and mini temples. Above the church hall's double doors is a white sign with "hall 32" (*sanshier huisuo*) written in faded red letters. This is typical of the church and is probably why they have also been nicknamed "(Christian) Assembly Hall" by outsiders (*jidutu huisuo*). In the entrance courtyard to the hall there is a very small bookshop and a corridor to the right that leads to a kitchen, washroom and the children's room. On the walls of the main room, against which are stacked many chairs, guidelines for life are written in blue and red: "enjoy the Lord" (*xiangshou zhu*, 享受主) "be perfected" (*shou chengquan*, 受成全), "serve your function" (*jin yonggong*, 盡用功), there are written the twelve steps of "God's predestined way" (*shenmingding zhi lu de shixing*, 神命定之路的實行), the three "secrets of increased blessing" (*zengzhi fu de mijue*, 增之福的秘訣), and the three ways in which "the church-life is the present-day garden of Eden" (*zhaohui shenghuo shi jinri de yixunyuan*, 召會生活是今日的伊旬園), all written in poetic rhythm. There is a blue chalk board with numerical scribblings on it depicting the recent changes in the boundaries between one church locality or cluster and the next. The expansion of the church is depicted diagrammatically, in church reports, as gradually splitting off from the original church into more and more, spherically-represented, daughter churches radiating out from the original centre (figure 5).
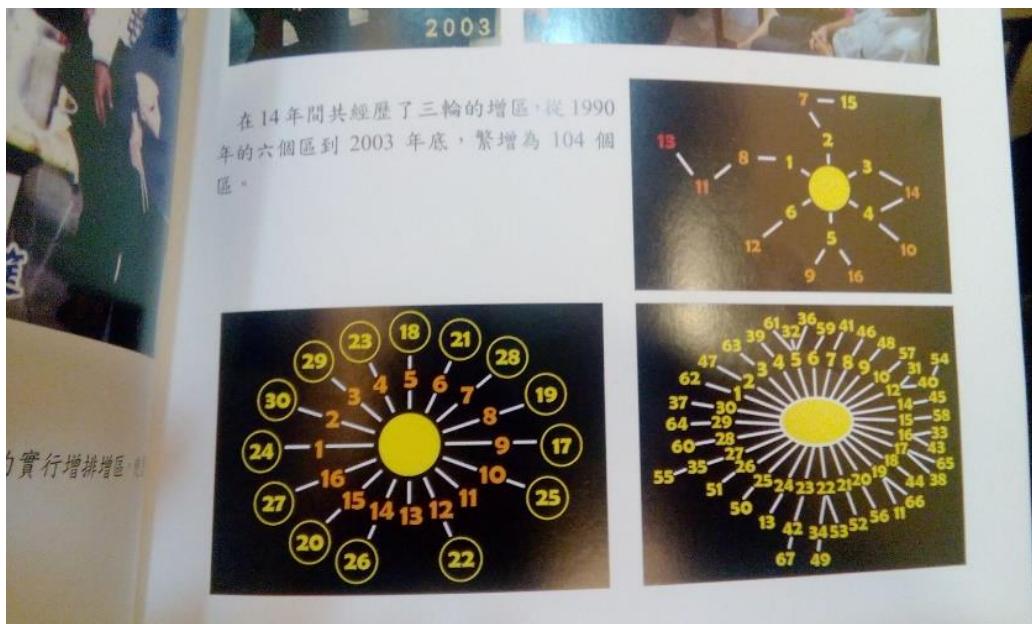
Figure 5: Diagrams of church expansion between 1990 and 2003 in a 212-page "best of" photo album (*zhaopianjijin*, 照片集錦),produced by Hall no. 13, entitled *A Blessed Introduction*, or, *A Summary of Blessings* (*mengenjianjie*, 蒙恩簡介). Photo by author.

A roll-down projector screen at the hall is used during "video trainings" (*yingxiangxunlian*, 影像訓練), Mandarin appearing on the screen and through the speakers, overdubbing transmissions from the "blended brothers" (相調弟兄) in the church's administrative headquarters in Anaheim, California. Fold-out chairs and tables (for "love feasts" (*aiyan*)) are stacked at the back of the hall, and at the front there is a large cupboard containing a table-tennis table which is often wheeled out after meetings. (The background "clackety-clack" sound of a "ping-pong" game is very much associated with my memories of the hall. See figure 6.) Brother Sui, who introduced himself as "Cephas", and his wife live upstairs surrounded by ministry books and computer software boxes. I often visit them to borrow books and discuss the church's history (I am especially interested in the famous "rebellion" that occurred here in the 1980s (Lee 1990)[55]). I often bump into church members in Jingmei by chance. A pair of evangelising "trainees" often stand outside the metro station or wander up and down the road outside the market ready to pray with anyone willing (figure 7). Several members own restaurants and market stalls nearby, so I visit them from time to time. This is the skeletal demographic ecology in which the church ministry is reproduced and made sense of.

How is organic action understood to work in practice? An orthodox church answer would be the following: it works through being "saturated", "constituted", and "living in oneness", with "the ministry". In a word, through being "truthized" (*zhenlihua*, 真理化). Being truthized is the means

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[55] See Fred 1975 for a detailed account of the 1966 church "rebellion".

by which the church infrastructure is lived as "the organic Body of Christ"[56]. There are key speech and body practices then, through which the church ministry is circulated, enunciated, and enjoyed. Each may be characterized as a tight coupling of collective repetition with individual innovation. Here we see that rhythm is the all-important means by which "organisation" becomes "organic". However, I will argue that for many of the "regular" church members (a church term), the organisational is not negatively valued but valued to the degree to which, through rhythmic church practice, it *becomes* organic. Repeated practices of turning texts into rhythmic media of intimate interaction, of turning church halls into arenas of spontaneous oneness, of turning family homes into the living conduits of a global Body, of turning resistant individuals into "flowing vessels" of socio-spiritual process, makes organisation and organism into two sides of a wondrously incommensurable, human-divine coin. Let me introduce the practices through which this occurs.

First of all, there is "calling on the Lord" (*zhaohu zhu*, 招呼主). This is likely why the group has been nicknamed "the shouters" (*huhan pai*, 呼喊派) in China. The easiest way to "get into one's spirit" (*jinqu ling*) is by repeating the phrase "Oh Lord Jesus" (*O zhu yesu*) over and over, with enthusiasm. "When we feel that we are down or low, we can lift and stir ourselves up by calling on the name of the Lord Jesus," Lee said, calling it "spiritual breathing"[57]. Many church meetings begin with collectively "calling on the Lord". In a second practice, each morning members are expected to pair up, usually over the phone, and pray over and read through a designated section of "the ministry" (*zhizuo*, 職事) accompanied by two Bible verses. This is called "(holy word for) morning revival" (*chenxing shengyan*, 晨興聖言).

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[56] It seems that the group was ahead of its time in this concern, compare Klassen (2005), Bielo (2009), and Białecki (2017), who write of similar worries of being "religious", "tribal", "exclusive" among post-denominational North American Evangelical Christians. Although they may be drawing up similar experiential roots, I think the similarities are rather shallow- the Local Churches certainly don't embrace casual dress and syncretic exploration in worship practices and meeting style. Theirs is a conformist, anti-syncretic organicism rather than a syncretic one (see also Zehner 2005). Their critique of religiosity and Christian organization might be traced to the millennia-long Daoist critique of Confucian moralism and ritualism (Slingerland 2003), or even to the Confucian contrast between sameness and harmony (Ziporyn 2013), as much as it could to post-modern rejections of "organised religion" (Heelas et al. 2005; Siegler & Palmer 2017).

[57] *Calling on the Name of the Lord,* Chapter 1, Section 1, accessed on 29/08/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=0E1AC67BF9.

Figure 6: Hall 32, outside and inside. Photos by author.

The topics from each of the seven annual feasts are compiled into a series of books which are circulated to all church members, in the hope that everyone would be reading them in synchronisation. Morning revival books are split into readings for each day of the week, except Sunday. It is expected that after a week of daily familiarisation with the topic, on Sundays each person should have something on point to "share" (*fenxiang*, 分享) with the rest of the group. This is called "prophesying" (*jiang*, 講)[58]. Usually morning revival sessions begin with "calling on the Lord". They then move on to "pray-reading" (*daodu*, 導讀) the designated Bible verses. Pray-reading involves taking a Bible verse and reading it in turn word-by-word, or phrase-by-phrase, enthusiastically while the one(s) not pray-reading say(s) "amen!" to each word or phrase uttered. Often the "amens" of a prayer session set the pace of each prayer more than the prayer itself does, so that if a praying person does not keep pace with the collective "amen" timed for the end of a phrase they can find their prayer being swallowed up by the amen-ing. My local elder was quite insistent that I pair up with someone to do morning revival. Here I briefly recount a section of one of our pray-reading sessions.

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[58] The fourth step in the church sloganized method of learning 'the ministry', "PSRP", "pray-reading, studying, reciting, and prophesying" (禱, 研, 背, 講).

Figure 7: Gospelising in Jingmei. Photo by author.

The following is the Bible verse within the *Morning Nourishment* section of the page for week 9, day 6 of volume 2 of the "crystallisation of Exodus" Morning Revival series. The topic of the week is *The Change of Diet to the Heavenly Christ as the Unique Food for God's People.* The reader may be familiar with the story in the book of Exodus of manna (bread) raining down each morning in the desert to feed the wandering tribe of Israelites being led by Moses. This week breaks down the significance of that manna into sixteen different points and explores each in turn. The words are both *about* "Christ as food" as well as, in the practice below, *being* that food. What concerns us here is the transformation of words into "food" through particular practices, that is, the transformation of the "organised" into the "organic", the "objective" into the "subjective", the planned into the spontaneous. Here is the verse:

> And Moses said, This is what Jehovah has commanded, Let an omerful of it be kept throughout your generations, that they may see the bread which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out from the land of Egypt. And Moses said to Aaron, Take a pot, and put an omerful of manna in it, and place it before Jehovah, to be kept throughout your generations (Exo. 16:32-33).

So, brother Huang and I would start our "morning nourishment" session together first by reading through and then pray-reading a verse such as this one. Below is a translated transcript of us pray-reading the above verse:

BH: "And Moses saaaid!!"

GB: "Amen! And Moses said!!"

BH: "Yes, ameeen!! Moses. Said!"

GB: "Amen!!! And Moses said, This is what!"

BH: "Amen!!!! Brother Gareth, And Moses said, This. Is. Whaat!!!"

GB: "Haha, amen!! This is what. Jehovah has commanded!"

BH: "Ohh ameeen, thank you Lord that this is what You commanded"

GB: "Amen, This is what You commanded"

BH: "Amen. This is what Jehovah commanded, Let an omerful of it be kept!!!"

GB: "Amen, be kept!!"

BH: "Be. Kept!!!!"

GB: "Amen!!!!....."

One can see that the "meaning" of the word being pray-read, it's semantic object of reference, is not the primary significance of each utterance. Rather, the designated daily verse become the medium for mutually responsive, rhythmic interaction between brother Huang and I. In the process we "become one with" the spontaneous rhythms, style and poetics of the church-body. Object-Oriented Ontologist Timothy Morton writes that "[d]elivery is precisely the physicality of your rhema, your speech" (Morton 2011:211). Here our rhythmicisation of the Bible verse is our way of distilling the most physical part of our speech so that we might "feed" each other. Although commensality is often remarked upon by anthropologists for its capacity to enable mutual belonging (Carsten 1995), the intimacy of eating together rarely goes as far as directly 'feeding' one another as brother Huang and I are doing with language above. In doing so we approach a mutualistic experience of one another as God for whom the language of the Bible and of the ministries of Nee and Lee is food. We become organically "blended" with one another as "godman vessels" (*shenren qimin*) of the "corporate godman" (*tuanti shenren*). Jiayin Hu, a church member and researcher living in the US, describes the practice in this way:

"Group pray-reading features spontaneity and order at the same time. A certain phrase or word is like a ball being freely passed in a circle: believers voluntarily pick up, play with, and pass the ball in order. Anyone may initiate the reading of a particular word or phrase, reiterate the pervious [sic] reading, or utter a short prayer or praise in the midst of the pray-reading session. Believers usually share a tacit agreement on when the process should conclude" (Hu 2017:175-176).

Hu's last point points to a key phenomenon of church meetings in Taiwan and elsewhere: there is no official, designated director. It is a faux-pas to address elders as "elders" (*zhanglao*), it is just a silent assumption that that is what they are, confirmed by the fact that they attend "elders' meetings". The same is true of "co-workers", "apostles", and "responsible brothers". The reasons for not having a title are similar to those for the church's not having a name[59]. It is understood as a means of keeping things "organic" rather than "organised". Nonetheless, while no hierarchy is explicitly acknowledged, traversing it can have serious consequences in many members understanding (see figure 8). Once, I was asking a close church friend about how elders in the church are appointed and who of those I'd met in Taiwan were actually elders. Like others I'd spoken to, he was reluctant to talk about it. After telling me that there was in fact only one "officially" appointed elder in Taipei, all others being unofficial, he stopped and pointed to the pock-marks on his face. He told me that as an adolescent he had developed a violent skin condition after questioning the legitimacy of one such "unofficial" elder. It was not that he was incorrect, technically, in his criticism, it was that he had stepped beyond his "allotted portion". He had transgressed the organic order of things and was not so much punished for it as he was suffering the automatic consequence of that transgression.

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[59] Here I will note a difference between approaches to organicism in Taiwan and in the UK and elsewhere in advance of the main discussions and descriptions of difference from chapter three onwards. For many in Taiwan there was little problem with hierarchy. This parallels Feuchtwang's (2001) contrast between the Chinese Imperial cosmology in which order was achieved "organically", through "harmonic resonance" between the spheres of the kingdom- Emperor, Mandarins and Peasantry-, and the local, "demonic" cosmology which understood this same order in terms of a command hierarchy. Many church members in Taiwan refer to brother Zhou as the church "president" and to the main church office in Taipei as the church "headquarters" with a wink and a smile, to the consternation of some Western church members who associate being organic with equality. But this does not mean that it is okay in Taiwan for one person to speak while the rest listen for any period of time. All must speak, contribute and live as "the One New Man" (*yi ge xinren*). I still remember, growing up in the church in the UK at the turn of the century, a Taiwanese church sister admonishing an ex-Pentecostal pastor within the group as he over-spoke his mandate: "No Lindsey!! Not the old way!!!".
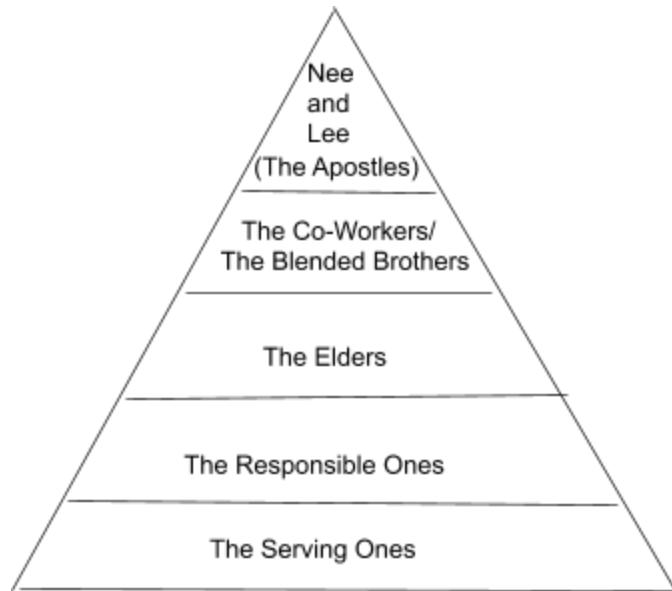
Figure 8: The implicit hierarchy:

The co-workers are the co-workers (*tonggong*, 同工) of Nee and Lee (who are known as "present-day apostles"). In Taiwan, those who are still alive are certainly revered. One brother Liu who I met in Southern Taiwan, came to Taiwan before Witness Lee to begin setting up the Taiwan Gospel Bookroom. After I and some church members from Jingmei spent an evening with him, we dropped him off at his own residence. Those I was with stood in a line and asked for brother Liu's blessing. It seems that there is a scale of reverence for those who are closest historically to the origins of the church. There is some discrepancy in the approach of members to this implicit system. Some get frustrated with others for treating the "blended brothers" with too much reverence ("he's just a brother!" is the typical frustrated response to perceived fawning over leaders). Others simply acknowledge a hierarchy without worry. "Sisters" may act as "serving ones" but all other positions are, implicitly, saved for "brothers".

How then are organizational communications made, if not in an explicit, didactic or command-like manner? They are truthized, through the practices thus described. Thus, when I attended meetings for elders and responsible ones in Taiwan, we began by "calling on the Lord". The *O Zhu Yesus* gradually flow into twenty minutes of prayer: into the oceanic chant someone shouts *Zhu a! Zai mei Niu!* ("Oh Lord! Glory to you!") and everyone responds with a booming "ameeen!". With the change in rhythm, comes a change in the psychosocial quality and purpose of the meeting. While we have hopefully moved away from non-church related thoughts into embodied participation, we now inhabit our church selves with all their implicit knowledge evident in the linguistic fluidity of our prayers. These kinds of unorchestrated shifts between practices are part of the art of a church meeting as a collective endeavour.

The prayers come to an end and the announcements begin, usually led by my host father, "uncle" Yang, who stands up when he feels the time is ready. There is discussion over the meeting to come as well as wider issues reported by each elder. Even within the eldership, there is a circle of older, more respected elders who take the lead. After each elder has his say, uncle Yang will announce the

first topic to be prayed over, referred to as "burdens" (*fudan*, 負擔): a coming conference, a gospel trip, illnesses, weddings and threats to the life of the church. Now we swivel our fold-out chairs around and kneel on the concrete floor to pray, resting our elbows on the seat and bowing our heads. In this way, what would otherwise be thought of as "directives" become in church parlance, the "burdens" of everyone. We might say that the ordered action of a few (the co-workers, the blended brothers) becomes the spontaneous actions of the many (the elders, the responsible ones). But this would be too presumptuous. We can only say that what could be experienced as the commanded action of oneself or of more powerful others, in other contexts, is- ideally, at the very least- experienced as a spontaneously transmitted burden here.

…

The key conclusions of the chapter are that a) we can understand the church as a translocal rhythmic infrastructure of bodies, minds, words, buildings, aesthetics, poetics and interaction; that b) looking at things this way helps us to understand how power is transmitted "organically" and c) that reading the ministry too literally misses its rhythmic elements, the to-and-fro between the organisational and the organic, the subjective and the objective, the sociological and the spiritual, that is, "the drama of their juxtaposition" (Feuchtwang 2001:74). How does this argument relate to the rest of the thesis? First it relates directly to the argument of the next chapter.

My use of the term infrastructure in this chapter forms a pair with my use of the term "world" to describe the church in the next chapter. The church as an infrastructure, in my analysis, forms the "ground" upon which the church as a world "operates". There is no point however at which the church stops being an infrastructure and starts being a world, they are simply two irreconcilable aspects of the same thing[60]. These two perspectives form what I, following Žižek (2009; Žižek & Milbank 2011; see also Povinelli 2001; Bialecki 2016), call a "parallax view". It is stacked on top of the parallax view presented in this chapter between the organic and organizational aspects of church infrastructure. Together, these chapters form the beginnings of an attempt at a kind of *"yinyang* anthropology", which deals in incommensurable perspectives rather than competing elements in a system, as is typical in dialectical anthropology (Murphy 1971; Comaroff 1982), for instance between "structure" and "agency" (Ortner 1984; 2016; Laidlaw 2002) or "society" and the "individual" (Strathern 1990; Cohen 2002). Church members' heightened attention to the "parallactic" nature of

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[60] Those in the church in Jingmei recognize this I argue, but in the language of oneness and difference, sameness and manyness.

the church, which I present in this and the next chapter, leads to a specific kind of "wonder", one that differs from the wonder of "presence" which has dominated discussions of Christian experience in the anthropology of Christianity (Engelke 2007; Harkness 2014; Orsi 2016; Bialecki 2017). (Although it has not been written about explicitly as a form of wonder in those discussions).

I seek to retain the parallax of world and infrastructure, organism and organization which is partly inspired by Hegel's famous bathetic phrase: "the spirit is a bone" (1977:198-208; Zizek 1989:207-209; 2008:76). In the even more cryptic words of brother Zhou: "we have an incarnated God, so word became flesh, became what we can touch, that we can understand, even enjoy to a certain extent, so God revealed himself in a very subjective way- objective way is laughable." Or in the words of brother Zhu "there are two kinds of truth, one is in the spirit and one in the mind". If I were to sum up the infrastructure-world approach, inspired by these notions, of this and the next chapter, with an analogy, it would be the hardware-software distinction. The same virtual world can be "logged on" to from many, many different machines (with the right specifications). Unlike the computer industry itself, however, that world is not translocal but non-local.

Napolitano (2016) describes the Catholic church as a "living infrastructure", a "nexus of affects" and a "passionate machine". The subjects of her ethnography say that the sixteenth-century church, Santa Maria Della Luce, dedicated to Latin American migrants in Rome is a *"world of its own" (mundo a parte)*. She writes: "I agree that it is- and that it is not" (2016:2). I admire the terms she coins but I think her approach swallows up the potential of her "and that it is not". How might the difference between the church as a "world" and an "infrastructure", something passionate and machine-like, be brought to the ethnographic fore? Anthropologists have been too sheepish and implicit with their use of the term "world". They often describe "little worlds" (Stewart 2011; Graber 2013) and "worldings" (Tsing 2010; Zhan 2009; 2011; Stewart 2014) but they refrain from articulating worlds as actual, tangible things of human encounter. They certainly do not describe "big, stable worlds" (my phrase) as I attempt to do in the next chapter. I argue that it is ethnographically expedient to make a strong distinction between the two perspectives, "world" and "infrastructure", they are irreducibly incommensurable aspects of human (and non-human in fact, though I don't go into that here) reality. Although there may be processes of "emergence" of one from the other, they are also two sides of the "same" reality.

In the case of the church in Taiwan, one side, the infrastructure described here, is habitual movement. The other, the world described in the next chapter, is dynamic stasis. One is unified difference, the other is oneness in the midst of difference. One is a "rhythmic infrastructure" of motile

interconnectedness, the other is a "nonlocal world" of experiential sameness. So, we see that the questions of the thesis introduced in the introduction are gradually being approached, building up to the full theoretical and historical accounts of the church as given in chapters five and the conclusion.

This chapter also began a thread of development which continues in the next chapter and is handled explicitly in chapter three. That is, the development of a distinct methodology. As stated in the introduction, spending time in the church in Taiwan, forced me to pay attention to aspects of the church that I had not noticed before: rhythm. Partly I was forced to pay attention to this aspect due to my own relative incompetence in Mandarin and unfamiliarity with Taiwan. But I hope, also, to have shown that there is indeed a level of "rhythm consciousness" in Taiwan, where the contents of ministry are often too "theological" to follow, which is not so present elsewhere. It is not that church language and practice is not rhythmic in non-Chinese speaking congregations but that this aspect is less directly attended to, so exists "below the radar" for many. The church is a means to the end of corporately-achieved, individual salvation for many in the UK, for reasons we explore further in chapter three. It is not that individuals do not experience the church as individuals in Taiwan but that there is a greater sense of enjoyment from the very existence of the church as a strange, unique, globally-connecting entity which is both familiar and new at the same time.

In this chapter, I have described texts and words as part of the rhythmic infrastructure of the church in Taiwan, alongside the equipment, arrangements and bodies which transport and circulate them. It is through them that church members (and ethnographers) attain the "spontaneous oneness" that the church ministry describes. Organisation is the hidden exoskeleton of the church organism for some but for many, these two aspects are wondrously complementary. They form two sides of a living, lively, bodily, affective, composite, daily rhythmic infrastructure. But what are church bodies, brains, books, buildings and banners the infrastructure of? It is to that, which we turn to in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

The Church as a World:

Sameness, Blandness and Non-Locality

"...perhaps one should say that when people referred in former times to 'spirit', what they meant was always inspired spatial communities?" (Sloterdijk 2011:19).

In the last chapter I presented the church in Taiwan as a rhythmic infrastructure. In this chapter, I argue that this infrastructural integrity is the basis for, but not the substance of, church sameness. To capture church sameness ethnographically, I argue, we must think of it as being lived and encountered as a particular kind of "world", though in doing so I aim to help rethink "world" as a descriptive frame of anthropological analysis. The church-world, I suggest, though partly emergent from "translocal" connections (Hannerz 1996), flows (Appadurai 1996), infrastructures (Larkin 2013) and assemblages (Ong & Collier 2005; Sassen 2008; Puar 2012; 2018; Delanda 2016), is in another, important sense "non-local" (Kearney 1995:555). By this term I mean to evoke the sameness of the church despite, not because of, its specific global-local position. Unlike the church-as-infrastructure, the church-as-non-local-world, is not a set of processes per se, but a structured, textured, affective stasis in the midst of movement and difference. There is, I will argue, a transposable "feeling" (*ganjue*), a feeling, in fact, of the absence of feelings, a nonlocal "flavour" to church experiences[61], which I argue is characterised by an aesthetic "blandness" (in a non-derogatory sense). I hold that this nonlocal flavour of the church world is the sensorial anchor, the distinctive "quality of attention (or inattention)" (Phillips 2019:39), around which church notions "oneness", "sameness" and "being in the spirit" revolve. This speculative, but empirically-grounded argument as to the unique sameness of the church, sets the precedent for the following chapters which articulate difference in terms of "orientation" to this sameness.

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[61] This is in a sense an "experiential" flavour, but it is not reducible to experience because it precedes any experience *of* it, just as "language" precedes each individual linguistic experience (though of course it originally arose out of and is in rare circumstances reshaped by linguistic experiences).

The structure of this chapter is as follows: first, I describe a large church event in Taipei attended by members from many different countries. This gives a sense of what is at stake in the argument: despite the wealth of cultural and linguistic diversity within the church, I am arguing that there is a kernel of experiential sameness, a non-local world around which the "churchlife" revolves. The event, representing as it does the wide spectrum of cultural and linguistic differences, is also the setting of members' own direct concerns with, and notions of, church sameness. Outlining these concerns and notions serves as a springboard into our own discussion of the potential bases of church sameness. I trace the "flavour" of this sameness to the Chinese cultural trope of "blandness" (*pingdan*, 平淡) and show how this aesthetic is discernible in church patterns of ritual speech and representation. Finally, I show how anthropologists have thought about sameness within and across religious contexts, before concluding that the notion of "world", as a parallactic complement to the notion of "infrastructure", is an ethnographically productive way of understanding the sameness (and difference) in this chapter and potentially in anthropology more generally. The methodological basis of this argument is outlined in chapter three.

…

It is January 2015. The churchlife in Jingmei is especially cacophonous because of the excitement and concern over the upcoming "2015 International Chinese-Speaking Conference", (*erlingyiwu guoji zhonghua tehui*, 二零一五國際華語特會), to be held at Taipei arena. In the meetings I attend, much discussion goes into the logistics of hosting foreign church members in Jingmei homes during the conference. Trips around Taiwan are planned, as well as a huge "gospel march" through Taipei, complete with a squadron of drummers and bibs, hats and banners for everyone. Many are to perform in choirs during the conference, in the intervals between the "messages" given by the "speaking brothers". They practice regularly. Others are to be ushers and tour-directors. Restaurants need booking, airport pick-ups arranged, and everything in between needs to be organised. There are strong complaints from certain quarters that the "mainland saints" (*dalv shengtu*) are to stay longer than expected, which means that time planned for New Year celebrations with extended families and for returning to work will be impacted upon. Life in the church in Jingmei is suffused with anticipation.

I attended the conference with a friend, brother Chen, born and bred in Taipei but now living in the UK, and his parents, with whom I spent much time during fieldwork. This is one of the so-called "seven annual feasts" (*yinianqici*, 一年七次特會) which structure the international calendar of the church. The opening page of a bilingual booklet given out at the conference outlines the role of the seven annual feasts in connecting the church in Taiwan to the rest of the church-world:

> ...Today, God is speaking continually to His people on earth through the speaking in the seven annual international conferences and trainings. The brothers and sisters from the churches in Taiwan faithfully follow and enter into the speaking of the ministry, actively seizing opportunities to go abroad to participate in the seven annual feasts. Immediately after each feast, various blending meetings, conferences, and trainings would be conducted in Taiwan, in which the brothers would minister to transfuse into the saints the speaking and the burden received overseas. The Lord's speaking in one locality thus becomes His universal speaking among the churches in Taiwan. In this way the saints are constituted with the truth to speak the same thing with one mouth. This has also laid a good foundation for the blending among the saints, bringing the churches in Taiwan into an unprecedented one accord.

> The riches we receive from the ministry have not only become our materials for gospel preaching, nourishing the new ones, small group pursuits, and prophesying in the Lord's Day meetings, but have also become the content of our mutual fellowship in the universal one new man for the bringing forth of the reality of the Body of Christ[62].

The seven feasts then, are conceived as being like portals or conduits through which local church lives are "transfused" (*chuanshu*, 傳輸) and "constituted" (*bei goucheng*, 被構成) with the "burdens" (*fudan*, 負擔), "speaking" (*shuoyu*, 說語), "truth" (*zhenli*, 真理) and "nourishment" (*weiyang*, 餵養) of the wider church-world. In other words, they are vital sites and occasions in which global oneness, social unity, transnational, trans-cultural, translingual, trans-gendered similitude is "br[ought] forth", or, at the very least, attempted. However, we will see that it is understood by many in the church that while these events serve to "blend" the "saints" from everywhere together, into

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[62] ...今天我們的神藉著這份新約獨一職事，在一年七次特會信息中，繼續向全地神的子民說話。在台灣的 眾召會，弟兄姊妹忠信的跟隨並進入職事的說話，積極抓住一年七次特會與訓練的機會，親赴海外參加聚會。特會結束後，在台灣隨即舉辦各式集調，特會以及訓練，由弟兄們將在海外所領受的說語和負擔，供應並傳輸給聖徒。藉此，主在一地的說話，成了祂在台灣眾召會中間普遍的說話，眾聖徒從而被真理構成，得以用同一的口說一樣的話，也為彼此的相調打下美好的根基，台灣眾召會更因此達到空前的同心合意。
我們從職事所得者的豐富，不僅成為我們傳揚福音，餵養新人，小排追求，主日申言的材料，更成為我們在宇宙新人裏彼此交通的內容，以產生基督身體的實際。

"oneness", it is also assumed that the reason these events are successful in the first place is that there is already a sameness of experience common to each church locality.

As we enter the arena, brother Chen is warmly greeted every few metres by old friends and family. The ubiquitous call-and-response church greeting- "praise the Lord brother!" (*ganxie zhu dixiong*), "amen sister!" (*amen zimei*) - resound from all directions. The main hall teems with 30,000 participants. Many are dressed in black, blue, white and grey, but there are patches of vibrance here and there- signs of "new ones" (*xinren*, 新人). One man even has long hair! I note. Large screens project images of "the blended brothers" (*xiangtiao dixiong*, 相調弟兄)- those who give the "messages" (*pian*, 篇) at each of the feasts- standing behind a wooden lectern engraved with the circular symbol of the church (figure 9). Delivering their messages, the blended brothers take it in turns to stand in front of the standard-issue, deeply familiar, blue church-hall chalkboard, dressed in business suits, looking for all the world like corporate executives.

This corporate aesthetic resonates in part with church language- not only are we attending a "conference" (*tehui*, 特會), but "God's economy" (*shenjinglun*, 神經論) and "the corporate God-man" (*tuanti shenren*, 團體神人) are two oft-used church terminologies, while the mission of the group is referred to as "the work" (*gongzuo*,工作). The "speaking brothers" (*jianghua dixiong*) differed praxeologically (Warnier 2001; 2006; 2007; 2009) from executives in the passionate conviction with which they fist-pumped the air, and with the "hallelujah!!!"s (*aliluya*, 哈利路亞), the "saints, isn't this wonderful?!" (*dixionzimeimen, bushi jingcaide ma*, 弟兄姊妹們(這)不是精彩的馬), the "oh how glorious!"s (*o zhen rongyao a*, 哦真榮耀啊), and the sudden breaking into song[63], which interspersed

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[63] A song verse that almost everyone in the church knows. An example from the conference:

> "Oh, the church of Christ is glorious, and we are part of it—
> We're so happy that the Lord has made us one!
> There's a Body in the universe and we belong to it—
> Hallelujah, for the Lord has made us one!"

> 哦，基督有一榮耀召會，
> 我們有分於她–
> 何等喜樂，
> 主使我們合為一！
> 看哪，在宇宙中有一身體，
> 我們屬於她–

their studied, familiar phrases. "The Triune God Himself is One, we can say that this is the most important oneness in the universe!" intones one Chinese-American speaker. Later, those wearing headsets hear, "Colossians reveals that this all-inclusive Christ is both God and man, He is the centrality and universality of God's economy and the mystery of God", a live American-English translation of the Taiwanese brother smoothing down his tie with one hand and gesturing with the other on stage.

Figure 9: The view from my seat at the conference. Photo by author.

5,253 of us were from overseas: 2,592 from mainland China, 655 from the USA, 478 from Korea, 388 from Indonesia, 119 from Russia and contingents ranging from 1 to 93 coming from 45 other countries. The scale and diversity of the assembly was revelled in and awed at: the very number "thirty thousand" seemed to taste good on participants lips as they milled about chatting in-between and during the messages booming out from the stage[64]. There were rumours too of just how many mainland Chinese had been denied access to come here. Those representing each nation were told to stand in turn and parade across the stage to jubilant cries of "amen!!!", "praise the lord!!!" and "hallelujah!!!". I was reminded of the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games. Moreover, this context of articulated church massiveness formed a particularly affective background to smaller scale intimacies. The very entativity of the crowd seemed to sweeten the familiarity of reunited church faces living in separate parts of the world.

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[64] See Stafford 2007; 2009 for the Taiwanese religious, heightened concern with numbers.

On Sunday morning, the screens show white-gloved hands, belonging to suit-and-tied bodies, breaking up a huge circular eucharist wafer to be passed around those seated. In the various Facebook photo albums and YouTube videos that church members put together after the event, the image of the wafer features heavily, demonstrating its importance as an emblem of what the conference, and being in the church, is all about. The videos show not only many shots of the wafer, but the long process of it being made, using a huge oven and a team of bakers. As I learned to see it, the wafer, is an aesthetic materialisation of the parallax of oneness and difference in the church. That is, it is both a huge singular whole and it is the myriad pieces broken and taken by 30,000 pairs of hands. However, it does not so much represent this principle as embody it. We get a sense in the eucharistic moment that the church is the "same everywhere" and that what church members do together every Sunday morning is part of a bigger, cosmic, international process (figure 10).

How much of this simultaneous sameness and difference is a momentary illusion and how much a sustained social reality? Can we understand the sameness and difference of the church as equally real features of its daily existence, of which the above is simply a heightened instance? To what extent does participation in the church make people the same? Might we understand the church as a translocal infrastructure which nonetheless revolves around a kernel of experiential sameness? Finally, might this experience of sameness be a non-local experience *of* something which *is in fact*, in an important sense, "the same"? Let us consider briefly but holistically at how "the church" fits into Taiwanese lives, before looking more closely at sameness as a potential experiential reality.

Figure 10: Breaking the eucharist bread. Photo by the author.

As noted previously, the messages from each of the seven feasts, like the one above, are turned into books, which are consumed daily as "morning revival" in Jingmei. Thus, while the conference is a special event it is also fused into the continuum of everyday life. This everyday life is preoccupied by varying degrees by commitment to the "churchlife". For many who were so called "church kids" (*zhaohui haizi*), whose parents or grandparents had joined the church in China, under Nee, or in Taiwan, under Lee, all close friends and family belong to the church. For those who work full-time for the church as "serving ones" or in church-member-owned companies, such as the cosmetic company which employed my roommate, many daily acquaintances were church members. In these places church meetings are held even during office hours. For these members, the church orientates them towards those outside the church in a particular way: they are potential converts rather than simply other human beings.

One church sister held a creche in her work place so that she could introduce parents and work-mates to the church. Another sister, who sold cloth in the market, gave certain customers better deals if they agreed to attend a church meeting. "My life is the churchlife" my host, uncle Yang, said to me as we readied ourselves to go and meet his financial advisor one day, ostensibly on business, but he would also try and convince her, again, to give the church a try. Of course, uncle Yang did things outside of church contexts, but as a retiree the church structured, focused and filled up most of his time. The average age of church members is over 50 he told me, so there are many retirees like him, with time to spare. One brother Jin said that he didn't think a person should join the church until he was over forty-five. It was shameful (*diulian*), he argued, for a person under that age to be doing the same as their parents. The church in Jingmei did contain a large number of children and grandparents with much fewer generations in between. It was certainly not only true for uncle Yang that "life" and the "churchlife" were virtually inseparable.

For others, the church was a totalising process rather than a taken-for-granted, encompassing aspect of their lives. Praying for the conversion of loved ones, and for more commitment from themselves, they lived with the stated aim that the church would eventually completely encompass their mind and life. If those for whom the church was the taken-for-granted ground of their lives worked on the encompassment of others, these worked on their own (family's) self-encompassment within the church. In my friend's apartment, he had a well-known quote from Witness Lee, son of a Shandong farmer, grandson of a Southern Baptist[65], the late leader of the group, framed and hung

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[65] On his mother's side (LSM 1998).

on his wall. Spoken at an international church conference in Anaheim, California in October 1996, not long before he died, the quote was the following:

> We are in the divine and mystical realm seeing the divine and mystical culture, and we have to speak all these things with the divine and mystical language.
>
> Brothers, please put aside everything that you have heard in the past. From today begin anew by learning this new culture and new language.

> (我們)在神聖奧秘的範圍裡, 看見神聖奧秘的文化, 用神聖奧秘的語言講話出來. 弟兄們, 請你們放下從前所聽, 所講的一切, 從今天起重新學習 這新的文化, 新的語言.[66])

A major theme for the "2015 International Chinese-Speaking Conference", was the eradication of "culture" from within the church[67]. The speakers smilingly chastised church members' "Chinese" habits, often to the hilarity of the audience. Speaking of the US, one Chinese-American church leader said with comic exasperation "after meetings in which we proclaim, 'Christ is our all in all!', Chinese saints go straight from the meeting hall to the Chinese restaurant!". After one conference session, I sat around a table with church members from around the world, listening to one well-known British church elder speaking gravely of the dangers of cultural difference to the existence of the church. There was an exciting, apocalyptic sense of a dark world encroaching upon on the one source of light and life in the universe from all sides, encroaching even, from within one's own cultured body (see chapter three for more on this mood).

Finally, there were those for whom the church life was a totality which neither encompassed their lives, nor was it their aim that it would. The church for them was a life-enhancing *addition*, which they enjoyed and benefited from keeping afloat. Commitment to the church was "additive" (Jordan 1993) rather than life-encompassing, or life-transforming (Hefner 1993). The church was something that sat alongside other pursuits and life-worlds, dipped into here and there. Needless to say, these three generalised positions in relation to the church are not static, but more or less characterise church members' experience at different periods of their lives. Nonetheless, it is the ambition of this chapter to argue that each form of commitment is characterised by a common experience, one that I argue we should understand as the encounter with, and inhabitation of, a non-local world of

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[66] From Lee's book *How to be a co-worker and an elder and how to fulfill their obligations* (摘自, 如何作工與長老, 並如何履行同工與長老的義務), p. 37, 61.

[67] See Appendix E for relations between Taiwanese and Chinese cultural nationalism and the church.

experiential sameness, but which church members themselves understand as "being in spirit", entering "the spiritual realm", or "sharing the same vision". I contrast and complement my understanding of this state of being with dominant concepts of "religious experience" in anthropology, below.

…

Whatever the position of the church in people's lives, when I asked them what they thought was distinctive about the church in Jingmei, Taipei or Taiwan they each prefaced their answer with the phrase or sentiment that "the church is the same everywhere" (*zhaohui daochu dou yiyang*). Moreover, when I asked what it was like to be "in the spirit" (*zailingli*, 在靈裡) which, as we heard in the last chapter, is the core state of being around which the church's ministry gravitates, I received very similar answers. Some said it was a feeling of "peace" (*pingan)*, but most found it hard to describe, they didn't really know. They *did* know however, when they *weren't* in the spirit. Being in the spirit was characterised by an absence of over-emotionality, of over-thinking, of wilfulness, rather than the presence of something specific. One member told me that in contrast to "Buddhism", which was about being "empty", the churchlife was about being "full". From further conversations with church members however, it seems to be even more accurate, to state that the church is about being full, *of a kind of emptines*s.

In the previous chapter I argued that "oneness" was an aesthetic as well as a concept in the church in Taiwan. Here, I want to suggest a wider church aesthetic, which "being in the spirit" is the experiential correlate of. Although the church has been described as "Protestant" (Zimmerman-Liu 2014), Witness Lee rejected this label, declaring at a church meeting in 1992, in Irving, Texas, that "Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism are a threefold chaos"[68]. Nonetheless, in their lack of ornament, rejection of visible hierarchy and their textual-focus, church meetings certainly *look* more like Protestant meetings than Catholic, Jewish, or Orthodox meetings for that matter. "Protestants" have been widely understood to reject the possibility that material things, in themselves, have any value apart from their capacity to symbolise or mediate an inherently *immaterial* divine (Engelke 2007; Keane 2007). Historically this "semiotic ideology" has translated into violent critiques, of the

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[68] *The Satanic Chaos in the Old Creation and the Divine Economy for the New Creation,* Chapter 4, Section 3, accessed 01/09/2019, via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=390BC109C5.

Catholic valuation of materiality and ornament (Orsi 2016), and of the perceived "idolatries" and "fetishizations" of "pre-Christian" places (Cannell 2005a; Graeber 2005a; Keane 2007). Although Protestant critical characterisations of Catholics and other cannot be taken as accurate, there are clearly different attitudes to "things" involved (Keane 1997a; Orsi 2016).

Meyer (2010) argues however, that while many forms of Protestantism shun an explicit concern with aesthetics, anthropologists, as analysts, must understand that Protestant religious experiences in fact arise from distinctive, translocal "aesthetic formations", often characterised by a relative plainness and colourlessness. What may at first be assumed to be a Protestant aesthetic (Coleman & Collins 2000; Meyer 2009; 2011) in the case of the church in Taiwan, however, from another perspective can be understood as an aesthetic of "blandness" and "flavourlessness" (*pingdan wuwei*, 平淡 無味), as a medium of sageliness and divinity, which has deep roots in Chinese history (Jullien 2004; Kondo 2005:209; Sterckx 2011:85). The understanding here is that a "blandness" of personality and aesthetic is the best means by which the way of the cosmos, the *Dao*, might be attuned to, and ultimately inscribed upon one's way of life and action. Pragmatically, this often meant a proscription against attending to "superfluous things" (Clunas 2004). In this section I attempt to parse out these two aesthetic approaches, the "Protestant" and the "Chinese", and delineate the latter as that which precipitates church practice and understandings in Taiwan.

The moral roots of the aesthetic of blandness are evident in the Confucian classic, *The Doctrine of the Mean* (*zhongyong*, 中庸), which Watchman Nee was deeply familiar with (Meng 2018), and which no doubt influenced his own most influential text, *The Normal Christian Life* (*zhengchang de jidutu shenghuo*, 正常的基督徒生活). Explaining the central notions of *The Doctrine of the Mean*, the third-century courtesan Liu Shao, with the courtesy-name "Confucian genius" (*kongcai*, 孔才), wrote,

> In general, in human character, centeredness [as in the ability to remain in the center - *zhong*] and harmony are most valued. And in order for a character to be centered and harmonious, it must be plain, bland, and flavourless. This type of character is thus able to coordinate the five aptitudes and adapt smoothly to all situations (Jullien 2004: 60).

Being centred, harmonious, plain, bland and harmonious meant resisting extremes and particulars, never straying too far from generic and (apparently) universal. In effect, this entailed a particular

attitude towards "things": "treat things as things and refuse to be turned into a thing by things", Zhuangzi, the Daoist, writes (Kieschnick 2003:9). This attitude is evident too, in the writings of the 16th-century politician, Wang Daokun:

> Dwelling in the mountains is a splendid thing, but if you become slightly over-attached to it, then it is like the market-place or the court. The connoisseurship of calligraphy or painting is an elegant thing, but let it ever so slightly become a craving, and it becomes like trade or commerce. Poetry and wine are a joyous thing, but if you become even slightly greedy for them, then they are hell. Hospitality is an untrammelled thing, but as soon as a vulgarian disturbs it, then it is a Sea of Bitterness (Wang n.d. p.7a in Clunas 2004:157).

A comparable attitude is found with the 17th-century scientist, Lu Shiyi, who, to quote Stephan Feuchtwang,

> insisted that the empirical study of botany was worthy of high learning only so far as it revealed the inner workings of yin and yang and the five phases. For a high status Confucian scholar to study the objects of botany as such and for themselves alone would be, as he decried it, 'trifling with things' and neglecting the great precept that 'the principles of the cosmos are [the same as] the principles of my mind' (Henderson 1984:154-5). Which is also to say that study of things or forms without attention to the inner principles was in danger of straying into other principles of alternative integration: heterodoxy (2001:36).

Such heterodox modes of integration were not only manifest in personalistic ties among the Chinese folk population and specific deities (see also Hymes 2002), and the "demonic" view of the cosmos Feuchtwang describes, but in the Buddhist view of things. "Nowhere" writes Kieschnick, contrasting this view with those expressed by Confucius, Zhuangzi and the Confucian literati,

> do we find praise of plain, unadorned Buddhist images and inexpensive stupas, or descriptions of monasteries as simple, humble monastic dwellings. In Chinese Buddhism, such terms were simply not part of the aesthetic repertoire. And the economic harvest of Buddhist philanthropy was applied to a large extent to ornament (2003:12).

How well do these differences in attitude towards "things" map onto the differences between Protestant and other Christian traditions outlined above? Importantly, Feuchtwang qualifies his own remarks, quoted above, by emphasising that,

[t]he Chinese word translated as 'ultimate principles' and as 'formative laws' (*li*), as distinct from physical laws (*xing*), brooks no distinction between what is mental and what is bodily, nor between the moral and the physical (2001:37).

We may infer from this that the different Chinese understandings of "things", and whether they were or were not "superfluous", does not map neatly onto the values attached to the aesthetic differences between Catholicism and Protestantism after the Reformation. Things were not superfluous for Confucian Chinese because they were bodily and physical, as they were for anti-"Catholic", anti-"pagan" Protestants, for whom, in fact, "things" have been not only superfluous, but "dangerous" (Engelke 2005). We must be careful, then, to attribute the plainness of the church in Taiwan's aesthetics to a Protestant concern with the absolute difference between spirit and flesh, creator and creation, matter and morality (Coleman & Collins 2000; Engelke 2007; Meyer 2010).

"Only a person's "blandness" and "flavorlessness" (*pingdan wuwei*) make it possible to encompass contradictory qualities" (2004:60), Jullien writes, commenting on Liu Shao's text, quoted above. He cites another of Liu Shao's commentators, Liu Bing (433-477), who writes, "when the flavour is bitter, it cannot at the same time be sweet; when the flavour is sour, it cannot at the same time be sharp" (2004:60). This principle of the flavourless encompassing all flavours is embodied in the "great stew" (*da geng*, 大羹) which in early China was offered as a sacrifice to "the most exalted and distant spirits". *Master Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals (Lüshi Chunqiu)*, compiled around 238 BC, explains the practice:

In the ceremonies of the Grand Sacrifice, the "dark liquid" (*xuan zun* 玄尊; i.e. water) is offered up in the goblet, raw fish is placed on the offering table, and the great stew is not seasoned (*da geng bu huo*, 大羹不和), because the significance of the sacrifice transcends the flavors (*you yi hu wei zhe ye*, 有遺呼味者也) (Sterckx 2011:86)[69].

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[69] See Appendix D for more resonances and connections between the church eucharist and Chinese traditional sacrificial offerings.

The flavourlessness of sacrificial foods not only represented the encompassment of all flavours but was also understood to make the foods more "vapour-like". According to early Chinese writers, the spirits "eat vapour" (*shen shi qi*, 神食氣). "The most reverent force (Heaven)" the Book of Rites (*Liji*), one of the five Confucian classics read by Nee, tells us, "does not appreciate (offerings) for their taste (*bu xiang wei*, 不饗味) but rather because of the odour of its *qi* [vapour] (*gui qi chou* 貴氣臭)" (Sterckx 2011: 85). "The dichotomy between taste (*wei*) and vapour (*qi*)", Sterckx explains, "sets apart human participants from spirits" (Sterckx 2011: 85).

Like ancient Confucians and Daoists, and more recent, elite inheritors of the intertwined Confucian-Daoist traditions[70], Nee, and then Lee, advocated a complete imbibement of a "central" and "universal" cosmic "element", so that the "normal" Christian would be constituted with nothing but that element, "Christ", who/which in fact encompasses everything. In practice, this means both "blending" with others, blending away all one's peculiarities so that one lives in perfect "oneness" with them, and attuning to that level of commonality at which church members already are "one". 'Christ', in both cases, and like the Confucian 'Course' (*dao*), is the substance of the centre, of the "mean" (*zhong*) or "normal" (*zhengchang*) way. 'Christ' and 'the Course' are between extremes, as well as being the very source of those extremes. Spiritual perfection, in both Chinese Confucianism and the church in Taiwan translates into an aesthetic embrace of plainness, blandness, flavourlessness. Nee's is an advocation of the replacement of the particular, peripheral "self" (*ziji*, 自己) with the "centrality" (*zhongxin*, 中心) and "universality" (*puji*, 普及) of "Christ"[71], who, as the church phrase goes, would "become our content" (*chengwei womende neirong*, 成為我們的內容), and prevent us from being swayed one way or another by the "mind, emotions and will". This rather abstract-seeming prescription becomes clearer in practice when we look more closely at the poetics of church discourse.

"Christ" is perhaps the most used word in the church's ministry. If this word refers to anything, it is to the "spiritual substance", (which has its own "heart's desire" (*shen xin kewang*, 神心渴望) thus

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[70] I outline relevant differences between Confucianism and Daoism in chapter five, but on the matter of "things", in their elite, textual forms at least, both seem broadly to agree.

[71] Christ as "the centrality and universality" is a very common church phrase. It resonates with the title of Tu Weiming's (1989) influential book *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness.*

differentiating it in many church minds from "the *Dao*"), of the "oneness of the church". One cannot keep repeating the same point over and over, using the same words each time, however. One must find ever new ways to say what "we" are about and ever new topics to communicate that "we-ness". In a group so focused upon translocal unity as this one however, the topics of communication cannot be left to individual church adherents. So, the contents of the church are structured and prescribed, as found in the seven annual feasts and in the morning revival. Each of the seven annual feasts focus upon one particular set of metaphors which draw out a particular aspect of what "Christ" is. Each of the metaphorical themes themselves are broken down into smaller chunks. The conference outline booklet of the event described above were in the same format as outlines of all other church conferences. There are bullet points, roman numerals and sub-points, each drawing out a different aspect of "Christ".

After each spoken message at a conference event, there is an opportunity for those listening to "share" (*fenxiang*, 分享). They should share specifically what they "enjoyed" (*xiangshou*, 享受) from the message. Anyone being critical or meandering is very likely to be cut off (usually by a loud chord struck on a piano or guitar, meaning one must stop talking). Often those sharing will simply say which aspect of the spoken message they enjoyed with each of their sentences being punctuated with a collective "amen" from conference attendees. A more skilful approach is to relate some suffering, failure or hurdle recently encountered in life to the topic at hand. In both cases, the effect upon the speaker is likely to be one of individuation. One has contributed one's "unique portion"[72] to the meeting and to the church. For those listening however, the aesthetic effect is to mirror the whole aesthetic structure of life in the church, which I understand as a general pattern of muted wonder: oneness is simultaneously separated out into specificity, manyness, and singularity, while, at the same time, that specificity, manyness, and singularity is collapsed back into oneness.

It is not only that each event and each individual return to the same central messages using different tropes, but that each sentence is punctuated by the amen-roar of the collective, into which the individual is reabsorbed when they have finished speaking. The two aspects of life in the church, the irreducible multiplicity of it and the undeniable unity of it all, form, what I have been calling a "parallax view", and together, in practice, amount to an aesthetic of blandness. That blandness can

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[72] A church phrase: *geren de yi fen*, 個人的一分.

only be attuned to through controlled 'movement' between the one and the many, the central and the peripheral, the deviant and the plain.

How does this compare to the "Protestant aesthetic" I referred to above? Matthew Engelke's term, "a problem of presence", has captured the imaginations of many ethnographers of Protestantism (Meyer 2009; 2011; Bialecki 2009; 2011; Beilo 2011; Keane 2008; Elisha 2011; Harkness 2014). The problem of presence is a problem of "contact" with immaterial divinity from within an inherently material world. Michelangelo's "creation of Adam" fresco is perhaps an archetypal image of the structure of the problem, two fundamentally different kinds of being, asymptotically close to, and so infinitely far away from, one another. The religiosity of an experience, in this case, is the sense of an "in-breaking", a drawing-closeness. "The Holy Ghost is about to fall" proclaims a preacher in Tomlinson's ethnography of Methodist Fiji (2014:ch2), but there is a comparable concern with the proximity of God in other Protestant traditions too.

The "problem of presence", though not usually made as explicit as Silverstein makes it, in the following quote, is one of translating abstract ideas into experienced realities, of making "cosmic conceptualizations...figuratively "real"" (2004:626 in Tomlinson 2014:51). On the side of the Protestant religionist these conceptions assume that a) the divine, is to begin with, separate from the worshipper, and b) that the item, or the action, in question should act as a bridge between the external divine and the human. For the analyst, a) ideas precede practices and items, and therefore b) ideas are distinct from the practices and items that materialise them. What if however, for the communicants or worshippers in question, a) divinity existed in two forms- exterior to and interior to humanity, so that b) the aim of the eucharist, or the church meeting, was not to enable contact, or union, between the external and the human divine, but was an enactment of the divine pattern stretched across the two? Here words and things do not communicate *with* the divine, rather they are said and used in ways that enact "divinity". The key word here is pattern, not presence. The orientation is one of manifesting a divine potential rather than contacting a divinity external to the original situation. There is little sense of the approach of an exterior being, only a sense of communal drawing out of a latent, earth-bound divinity.

There are still problems, but they are less understandable in terms of presence, closeness, in-breaking, than of arrangement, order, harmony. In many Protestantisms, ritual action, ritual

patterning are the *implicit* means of "presencing" God (Engelke 2004a; Meyer 2011; Tomlinson 2014). The problem then is that actions and things- a microphone (Meyer 2011), a pot of honey (Engelke 2005), a prophet's personality (Bialecki 2011)-, can become objects of focus in themselves rather than the vehicles of experiencing an immaterial God. This is what Engelke (2010) calls "thingification". In the church in Taiwan, "God" is the means of a specific kind of patterning and special kind of action. In Klass' (1995) terminology, God is a tuning fork which sets the frequency at which an "ordered universe", "the Body", exists. The eucharist here, is a mode of attuning one's notions of and experience of "God", as a separate entity, to the patterns- more specifically, the parallaxes- which compose the Body of Christ. The problem here is the existence of "superfluous things" which do not conform to those patterns. "Calling on the Lord", for instance, is not about presencing God but about aligning the spirits of the callers with one another and with the heavenly head. No human-divine boundaries are crossed, because both humans and God have their own forms of being divine.

The difference between the Protestant-Christian concern with "thingification" and the Confucian-Christian concern with "superfluous things" is that the former is a worry because it potentially blocks "live and direct" communication with an immaterial, cosmically exterior being. In contrast, "superfluous things" threaten to disarrange the Confucian-Christian heavenly patterns of oneness and isolate the individual from the cosmic centre. What may seem pedantic on paper translates to an entirely different flavour of experience in practice. One is characterised by "passion" and anticipation, the other by "peace" and effortlessness, one by strong feelings, the other by non-feelings. Moving on: concern with the oneness and manyness of the church is not only confined to rituals and ritual events themselves. The concern takes a more pragmatic feel in the church's own research of itself. With a group of church academics, I was involved in some research into the experience of "culture shock" during the conference. The discussions around the research point us towards further understanding the sense of church sameness this chapter is concerned with. Let me turn again, to the New Year's conference in Taipei.

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It is a balmy springtime evening and I am walking along with brother Wang, a professor of linguistics and father of two. Brother Wang and I are walking together from a backstreet restaurant

to a small classical concert in which a young church "brother" is playing violin. We hang back from the rest of our group to discuss the preliminary results of a survey we designed and handed out to the "brothers and sisters" (*dixiongzimeimen*, 弟兄姊妹們) who served as "hosts" (*zhuren*, 主人) and "guests" (*keren*, 客人) during the conference. The "guests", in the survey designed by our small research team, were non-Chinese speaking "saints" (*shengtu*, 聖徒) from overseas. The "hosts" were Taipei locals. The former, over the conference period, stayed in the homes of the latter. Speaking to many guests, they seemed happy enough. They were overawed by the interlude presentations given by different sections of "the church in Taiwan". In one, a hundred or so "young people" dressed in yellow, strummed a hundred or so guitars in perfect coordination. In another, graduates and trainees of the "full-time training in Taiwan (FTTT)" (*taiwan quanshijian xunlian*, 臺灣全時間訓練) immaculately dressed, sang church songs operatically and chanted sections of the church "ministry" in perfect unison.

Western guests had small complaints about the humidity and food, the speech style of some of the Taiwanese conference speakers ("they always sound like they're angry", said one), but in staying together these "overseas saints" were not too disoriented. The survey was designed to assess the degree to which "culture shock" was experienced by either side. It featured a multi-choice questionnaire ("1: completely disagree" ... "6: completely agree") containing statements such as, "I like the presentations by all the age levels (children, teens, college, etc.)"; "I think the main reason helping me understand the messages was the sharing by the audience after the message"; "I think the common language among all the participants in the conference is the vision of the messages"; "I think body language helped maintain a good communication [between host and guest]"; and, "I think differences in diet preferences created problems in my experience in the hospitality". There were sections for comments which asked participants, for example, to, "...please make a list of things that deeply affected you during the conference".

The results of the survey are quantified by brother Wang and our small research team. Statistical variables such as "countries of origin" and "probability values", are put into tables and the "mean" is taken for a series of subcategories of the survey answers, which range from "emphasis" and "delivery" (of the conference messages), to "diet" and "body language", in terms of the overall experience of the conference. These values and percentages were then graphed to give two visual images of the degree to which the conference succeeded at its purpose. One graph is entitled "perception of the

conference", the other is entitled "perception of interaction and communication". Along both Y-axes is written "degree of agreement from 1-6", along the X-axes are listed the subcategories of the answers received. Closest to the Y-axes the team have put the subcategories with the lowest values for "degree of agreement", "language problem", "diet problem" and translation help for example (which are still very high). Furthest from the Y-axes are the higher values, the highest being "vision success" on the first graph and "common faith" on the second graph. So, both graphs show rising curves (figure 11).

It may be tempting to see the survey as something of an appendage or exterior to the conference and the church itself. But this would be to ignore the fact that monitoring and recording the church's state of existence is an integral and everyday part of church practice. It has long been brother Wang's special job to record and report to the church's main office who is and is not attending his local church meetings. These reports are often followed up with "visits" (*baifang*, 拜訪) to those who haven't attended in a while[73]. Academia is understood as another avenue through which the "Lord's work" (*zhu de gongzuo*) might be achieved, and through which "the Body" might be "expressed" (*zhangxian*, 彰顯). We were to present our findings at a Taipei academic conference that summer. In the presentation we stated that,

> "the generic materiality of the conference setting prioritized certain values...specifically what informants' term "the vision of the Body," (or the Body of Christ), reducing the culture shock conference participants might have experienced".

More specifically we concluded that "the conference setting indexed holistic values that almost all participants shared, regardless of local difference in ministerial emphasis". These theorisations sat along graphs and PowerPoint slides which explained that "[i]n the Bible, "vision" denotes an extraordinary scene; it refers to a special kind of seeing—a glorious, inward seeing—and to the spiritual scenery we see from God—Acts 26:19; Matt. 16:17; Ezek. 1:1; 8:3". Our "conclusions" slide read:

- Being multi- or monolingual had little effect on the conviction,

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[73] I understand these reports as fulfilling an analogous role to the *baojia* of Imperial China, these were registrations by which the government kept track of who was living and moving where (Feuchtwang 2001:68-9).

- Participants were speaking about the same things, nurtured by the conference content and setting.

- They shared the same faith, believed the same truths and were seeing the same vision.

- Local encounters humanized the large-scale conference event.

- Foreigners familiarized experiences of local difference:

- Experiences of "culture shock" were mild and had little effect on mutual discourse and trust.

Another participant in the research and presentation was brother Zhou, a highly-respected church elder, who we met in the last chapter. From him it was especially clear that the research we were conducting was an extension of the church life as much as an analysis of it. He saw my own research as another avenue through which the church might extend its reach. From the emails our team exchanged, in which we were still "brothers" and "sisters" and decisions were met with digital "amens", it was clear to me that this was the case for everyone involved. It seems evident to me that the research and its results presented a similar aesthetic structure to that of the church ministry enunciated in everyday church life. The oneness of the church is dissected into sub-points and several aspects while at the same time being reaffirmed in its oneness.

…

It is not only that academia, for those so inclined in the church, is an extension of the aesthetic and shared experience of church participation more generally, but that academia is another mode of attunement to the object of church members' mutual concern. As such we can learn from this academic mode of attunement, about what it is that is shared among church members and how. "The saints reported no significant effects of language or culture upon their experience of the conference" brother Wang told me as we walked in the dark to the concert. "How could that be possible?" I asked, struggling over whether I was in participant or observation mode. "We put it down to the fact that we all share the same vision" he softly explained, "now, are there any anthropological theories which might support this conclusion?". With a strange feeling of participant-observation imbalance, I did help put together the PowerPoint slides above in which I used anthropological theory to help support brother Wang's conclusions. However, a lasting effect of our time together was not so much a support of his conclusion as a fascination with the implicit question to which

brother Wang was responding: how exactly is the church the 'same'? In fact, a closer look at his conclusion provides us with the beginnings of an answer.

Let us start with the word "vision". Given the distinctive complexity of church language, though Brother Wang was speaking in English, the word "vision" he used was no doubt informed by the Mandarin equivalent as used in the church. This word is *yixiang*, 異象, which can be translated more directly as "strange form". "The vision" is often a standalone term used in church circles (see Zimmerman-Liu 2017), but it is incontrovertible that the vision is "of" the church and Body of Christ. So, brother Wang was, we may surmise, speaking of the strange form of the church-Body. Compared to an image replicated in people's minds, the idea of a shared strange, or "unusual", form, an "extraordinary scene" and "a special kind of seeing" this scene, may already be more amenable to anthropological understandings of the world.

"To share", *fenxiang*, 分享, might be more literally translated "dividing up the enjoyment". Thus, we have the following possible retranslation of brother Wang's meaning: "culture and language weren't significantly big problems during the conference because all the saints were dividing up, or divvying out, the enjoyment of the same strange form." This kind of "vision" differs from that we usually associate with Christian history (as recorded in Christian's (1996) account of Marian apparitions in Republican Spain for instance). These kinds of visions are reported by some church members and actively de-emphasised by others (cf. Lester 2008) but it is not this kind of individually experienced vision which is generally being shared. Spending time with "the saints in Taiwan", I found in fact that "the vision" was not, as I initially assumed, primarily considered a mental image replicated in the minds of each church member. Rather, sharing the vision was more like sharing the eucharist bread: everyone takes a piece and internalises it, but no one is eating exactly the same bit. Conversely, the pieces may be of different sizes and shapes, but we are all sharing the "same" bread. Depending upon the situation, this bread may taste differently. Nonetheless, a recognisable "bland" flavour is common to each tasting and each piece.

…

Some may conclude that the church is not really "the same thing" from one time and place to another (see conclusion) but is simply a set of myriad heterogenous imaginings crafted from as many situated positions as there are persons utilizing a common, transnationally mobile set of ideas, practices, products and aesthetics originating with Nee and Lee. This perspective reminds me of an episode of an Australian TV show I once encountered, the premise of which was to "solve" certain mysterious sightings from around the world. One such sighting was of a strange-looking house spider, filmed and photographed in various homes. It had a huge shiny back which seemed to flicker bright green and black, like a holograph. A series of perplexed arachnologists were interviewed who confirmed that they had no knowledge of a large bioluminescent house spider like this one. Finally, a scene was shown in which one such spider was poked with a broom handle. The huge shiny back revealed itself to be the myriad eyes of the tiny baby spiders scattering everywhere, who had been nesting *en masse* on their mother's plain black back.

Often it seems that the thrust of social-scientific analyses of barely imaginable social collectives, like nations, economies, and multinational corporations, are like this. The sameness of these supposed entities disappears once we realise that they are socially constructed imaginaries, conjured ritually (Graeber 2013) aesthetically (Anderson 1991; Mookherjee 2011), narratively (Bhabha 1990), symbolically (Cohen 1985; Rutherford 2012) from myriad situated perspectives. I do not claim that the church is not, also, in an important sense, like this: as analysts we must remain sceptical of the idea that the church, like the nation or the economy, is "the same" in the ways in church members, or nationalists and journalists, imagine it to be. Remaining methodologically atheist, I cannot impute church sameness, for instance, to the spiritual substance of God. Nevertheless, I also do not want to erase its sameness by imputing it to the multiple imaginaries and myriad subject positions of church members too hastily. This would be to assume, as many have done, that translocal sameness is somehow less real than translocal difference. I aim to keep the question of the church's sameness and difference open, at least until the conclusion when I offer my own theory of unity. After all, returning to the analogy above, although there is no such thing outside of our imagination as a huge holographic spider, there certainly is a strange spidery form in existence, irreducible to its components, which fed our imaginings. How then, do we understand the sameness of the church?

…

In this section, I review the sameness of "religious experience" as it has been documented and theorised by three influential theorists of religion in anthropology: William James, Emile Durkheim and Thomas Csordas. Although they do not explicitly theorise religious experience in terms of "sameness", by beginning with their theories of the universal aspects of religious experience, I begin at the widest angle of our anthropological understandings of religion: the degree to which it is the "same" everywhere. After that, I "zoom in" to the more recent literature of specifically Christian religious experience. Finally, through further ethnographic illustration, I try to articulate the sameness of experience which is potentially distinctive to "the church". This experience, which I characterise, following church members own descriptions, as repeated attunements to a "bland", "non-local" "world", forms a parallax with the church as a translocal rhythmic infrastructure, as described in the last chapter. That is, these two aspects- the church as a relatively static entity (a bland, non-local world) and as a relatively dynamic process (a rhythmic infrastructure of organic and organisational activity)- form two incommensurable sides of the same dynamic thing[74].

In spare moments during my time in Taiwan, I read William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Although his emphasis is of course upon variety, there is a common though not very explicitly stated theme which threads together the accounts of religious experience he documents. This implicit model is of a self which, after a sustained period of attempted self-dependence, on reaching the limits of this dependence, breaks open and the "cosmos" (James 2009[1902]:302), "the universe" (303), or a sense of "oneness" (318) floods in, inducing awe and terror by turns. As James himself concedes, his data set is overwhelmingly Western and Christian (72). Nonetheless, I assume this is a relatively good account structure of extreme "religious experience" in many Western Christian traditions and communities, which is applicable too, to many non-Western experiences. Where experiences like this do not occur, are likely not to do so under the restrictiveness of Church authority (Cannell 2006a; Lester 2008). Access to presence, Robert Orsi argues (2016), has always been heavily controlled by the Church.

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[74] This notion is very much inspired by anthropologist Michael Scott's (2013) critique of the discipline's recent bias towards processualism, or "non-dualism", and its denial of the reality of entities. This bias Scott holds arises in part from New Melanesian Ethnography and its concepts of "individual" and "fractal" personhood and in part from continental philosophy, especially the ideas of Gilles Deleuze and his sometime co-author Felix Guattari. One might posit that the popularity of these notions arises in part from academics' own experiences of what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) describes as "liquid modernity", the flow and flux and immateriality of life and labour as often experienced in global, urban (middle-class) centres (see also Appadurai 1996). Anyway, like Scott (2014), I seek in this analysis, to make "equal time for entities".

More influential in anthropology has been Durkheim's more socially-oriented account of religious experience (Wallace 1966; Morris 1987; Bloch 2007). While Durkheim understandably spends less time than James trying to articulate religious experience as such, and more time on the collective forms that "religion" takes, cross culturally, he does argue that religious experience emerges from the presence of other human bodies rather than from particular psychodynamics per se. Nonetheless, we can detect a rudimental assumption that Durkheim and James share as to the structure of religious experience. This is that it involves the individual's encounter with something larger than themselves, be this an actual collective (Durkheim) or an imagined one (James). In both cases, this something is perceived to come from outside the individual or the collective inwards. It is the analyst's job in each case to show how the experience, in fact, is psychogenic (for James) or sociogenic (as for Durkheim). Is there a way in which the psychogenic and sociogenic approaches to religious experiences might be combined?
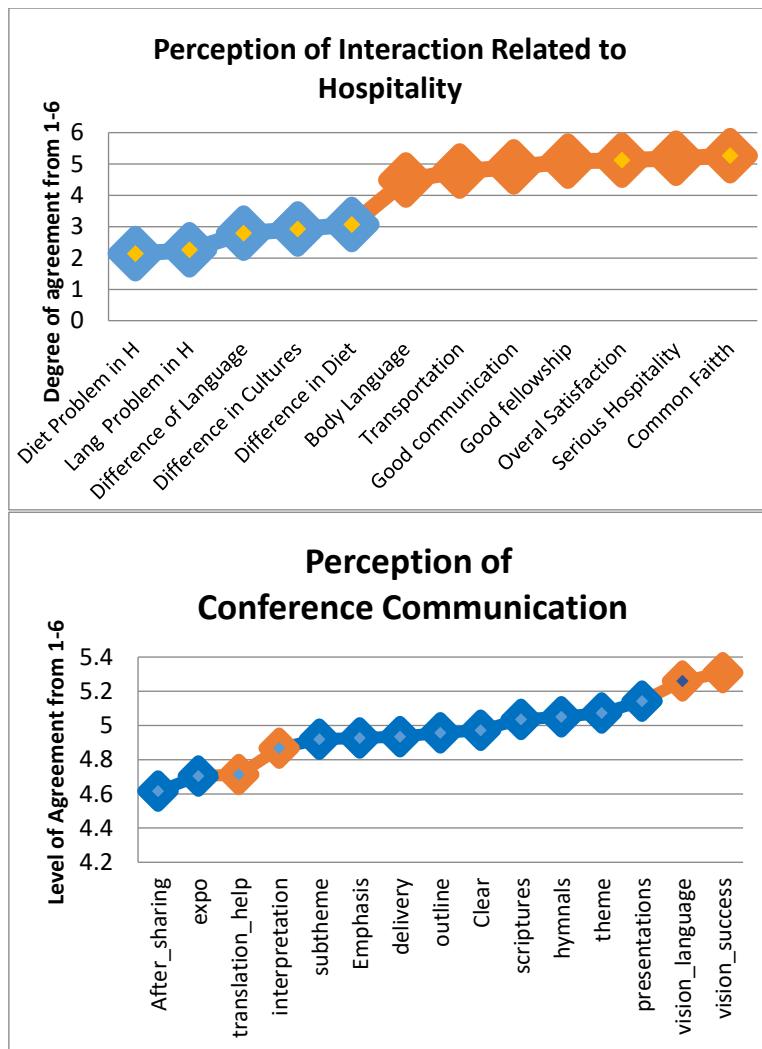

Figure 11: conference research graphs

A most influential example of such a combination is found in the embodiment approach of Thomas Csordas. The idea at the heart of much of Csordas' work, is especially clear in his depictions of the "Bulwark prophecies" (1997b; 2004). The "Bulwark" is a metaphor for the Charismatic Catholic Renewal Movement. Despite this, Csordas does not infer anything from it about the nature of the movement per se, rather he interprets it as a metaphorical way of enunciating the universal embodied condition of human beings. Csordas records three prophecies in which the word-image arose. He linguistically deconstructs these prophecies to show that the prophet, as a mouthpiece for the voice of God, speaks omnipresently, referring to the "Bulwark" in past, future and present tenses. However, the voice of the prophet is still present in parallel: each prophecy refers to the next, recognising the mundane temporality of the human mouthpieces. But it is precisely this drawing out of the subjectivity from the body- whence it becomes God's- that makes the experience, for Csordas, a "religious" one. If we read Csordas' depiction in light of his general theory of religion, we see the prophecies as dialogic celebrations of the "intimate alterity" of human being (2004), in which we both 'are' and 'have' a body. Following Merleau-Ponty, he assumes the body to be both subject and object, writing that,

> "the phenomenologists' error was to make a distinction between the object and the subject of religion when the actual object of religion is objectification itself, the rending apart of subject and object that makes us human and in the same movement bestows on us—or burdens us with—the inevitability of religion" (2004:167).

With Csordas' charismatic Catholics (1987; 1997b) the charisma of God emerges from the linguistic creativity of the speaker, whose linguistic act of "objectification" draws out the universal, embodied condition, that is the parallax of both being and having a body. In contrast, I focus on the parallax between the church as an infrastructure of body, mind and building, and as the irreducible flavour of the church as an inhabitable world. The 'Body' of the church in Taiwan, I argue, occupies a structurally analogous spot in the lives of church members as that of 'the body' in Csordas' analyses of Charismatic Catholics. In the latter case, it is the fact of embodiment- that religionists both have and are a body- from which religious experience is derived. In the former case, it is the fact that, church members simultaneously *are* the church-Body and *observe* it, that the church-Body is both the *object* of their attention and the very *flavour* of their church-being, from which their experiences of oneness are derived.

…

While Csordas attributes religious experience to a heightened sense of embodiment, anthropologists of Christianity have found many other foci of Christian communities which affect their religious experience. Focusing upon language use (Csordas 1997b; Robbins 2001; Keane 2002; 2007; Engelke 2004a; Coleman 1996a; 1996b; 2006; Cannell 2006b; Tomlinson 2014; Bielo 2011; Bialecki 2011; Handman 2014; Haynes 2017), conceptions of the self (Dumont 1983; Csordas 1997a; Robbins 2004b; 2010; Vilica 2005; 2011; Mosko 2010; Daswani 2011; Bialecki & Daswani 2015; Cannell 2017), time (Lester 2003; Cannell 2006a; Gow 2006; Guyer 2007; Robbins 2007; Bialecki 2009; 2017), God (Cannell 1999; 2005a; Luhrmann 2012; Bialecki 2014a; 2017) money (Coleman 2006; Keane 2007; Bielo 2007; Haynes 2012; Cao 2010), sound (Guadeloupe 2008; Oosterbaan 2008; Harkness 2014; Bandak 2014) and the mind (Lester 2005; 2008; Luhrmann 2012), attitudes to material things (Cannell 1999; 2005a; 2013; Coleman 2000; Engelke 2005; Meyer 2010; 2011; Bolyston 2013; Orsi 2007; 2016; Carroll 2016; 2017a), politics (Bialecki 2009; Marshall 2010; 2014; Cao 2011; Napolitano 2016; Boylston 2018), gender (Eriksen 2012; 2014; Mayblin 2010; 2014) and the family (Christian 1989; Griffith 1997; Robbins 2002; Cannell 2005b; 2017; Mayblin 2010; 2017), anthropologists of Christianity (and others), have of course noted many commonalities and differences across Christian groups. Perhaps a key consensus within this literature is that Christians are very often concerned with accessing, mediating and/or containing "presence" (Napolitano 2016:9-10).

In the spirit of Max Weber's analytical methodology of "ideal types" (Weber 1949), I have stated, with others, that "Protestants" assume that divinity is for the most part absent from earthly lives, from material substance and from words themselves, being encountered only exceptionally in moments of immaterial contact through the mind, either symbolically or telepathically[75]. "Catholics", in contrast, find the presence of the divine to be much more easily attained. God has many intermediaries- human bodies (Csordas 1997a), saintly statues (Orsi 2007), sacred artefacts (Cannell 1999; Latour 2004; Orsi 2016), the blessed eucharist (Orsi 2005; 2016)- each of which really transmits something divine, by its very texture and shape[76]. This seems to be broadly true of Greek

[75] There have been a number of calls (Robbins 2012; 2016; Reinhardt 2016; Hovland 2017) to resist somewhat the inclination of many anthropologists of Protestant communities to infer that the experience of transcendence, given the supposed Protestant emphasis on the "absolute difference" between the material and immaterial, is virtually impossible for them.

[76] Though many ethnographers (Christian 1989; Orsi 2007) have documented the effects upon Catholic communities of the Second Vatican Council (1962) which sought to "modernise" the Catholic church by deemphasising the miraculous potential of words, bodies, artefacts and shrines and to induce a more "doctrinal", "text-based" concern in Catholic adherence.

orthodoxy too (Carroll 2016; 2017b). On the furthest end of the spectrum of presence, from Protestantism, is perhaps Ethiopian Orthodoxy, for which the divine is often *too* present and must be ritually regulated and distanced so as not to become dangerous (Boylston 2018). Although each of these traditions have very different semiotic ideologies (Keane 2007; 2018), that is, different interconnected notions about what words and things can and should do, they each show a concern for the presence of divinity as an external force or figure which, to varying degrees, penetrates human lives.

How exactly does it come to be that God is envisaged as a separate being, such that the height of religious experience becomes about mediating that separation? Csordas provides an answer: this separation is a creative image of the distinction between the intertwined aspects of embodiment[77]. The bedrock of this understanding is the embodied condition. My bedrock on the other hand, is the potential fact that the church is both the same as and different from itself, it is a world and an infrastructure, an object and a flavour. Again, how we might understand these samenesses and differences as equally real aspects of life in the church in Taiwan? Anthropologist of Christianity, Jon Bialecki, asks a not dissimilar set of questions in relation to the Vineyard, a large network of Evangelical churches.

He notes that throughout the events and conversations of fieldwork with this group, he too "had a nagging sense of some insisting commonality" despite the "wealth of difference that denied any easy totalization" (2017: xvii). His solution is to take up the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "diagram" as an analytical frame of ethnographic description. He chastises what he calls the dominant "nominalist" strain in anthropological thinking, which he writes, "precludes thinking about *generative commonalities*" (2014:5), resulting in "object-dissolving-critique" (from Robbins 2003:193) which denies the possibility of writing about translocal, "complex objects", such as "Christianity" (Bialecki 2012), "ritual" and "religion" (Bialecki 2017). More importantly, "nominalism" denies the reality of those objects which Christians themselves perceive themselves to be tangibly and obviously a part of, such as the Catholic church (Napolitano 2016), the Vineyard

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[77] See Sangren's article on "the dialectics of alienation" (2000), Stewart's (1993) evolutionary theory of religious anthropomorphism, Feuchtwang's (2007) argument that religion is a heightened mode of attention to communicative structures, and Robbins' (2009) argument that the strong cosmological discontinuities of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity provide idioms for those on the self-perceived peripheries of global power centres to think and live with, for alternative answers.

movement, "the lord's Recovery" and even the *corpus mysticum* itself (Mersch 2018[1938]; Zizioulas 1985; de Lubac 2010[1946]; Orsi 2016)[78].

The concept of the diagram allows for simultaneous sameness and variation across multiple scales of analysis. A diagram is a "repeatable set of relations between forces" (2017:199), an "abstract ma[p] of how forces play out that point[s] as much toward the different potentials in outcome as [it] do[es] toward a similarity in relations or constitution" (2017:69). Bialecki provides a helpful meteorological illustration of this idea: "a tornado, a waterspout, and a fire tornado are all expressions of the same relations of forces even if the particular constituting material varies in each case and water spouts are notably different from fire tornados" (2017:69). The form of the diagram is conceivable as being the result of a set of intertwined "problems", such as the "problem of presence" discussed above. These "problems" are actualised in specific empirically tangible "solutions" (see Bialecki 2012). Repeated "actualizations" of the diagram, as a patterned form of "virtuality", result in specific "social assemblages", with characteristic but never entirely predictable "shapes" and "textures" (these latter two are my terms).

Bialecki is concerned with what it is that makes the Vineyard distinctive: "How is it", he asks, "that the Vineyard produces novel experiences, and how is it that these novel experiences are not corrosive of the necessary regularity and recognizability that are required for them to stand at the heart of the Vineyard?" (2017:19). His answers come principally in the form of descriptions of the specific experiential "thresholds"- of "saliency", "exteriority" and "surprise" for instance- by which Vineyarders recognise "God" as an agent in their minds and lives (see also Bialecki 2014). These are the core elements, he infers, of the Vineyard's "charismatic diagram" (2017:199). Utilising Coleman's (2010) concept of "part-cultures", he explores moreover the situations and scenarios within which the diagram interacts productively or destructively with other diagrams.

Although diagrams are "abstract", Bialecki also notes that the architect of these notions, "Deleuze's claim was that the virtual [of which diagrams are specific forms] was so necessary to think through the possibility of change or production of the new that rather than considering the virtual a mere heuristic, it should be given an *ontological* status" (2014:2), that is, it ought to be understood as

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[78] We cannot say these things are 'real' in the same ways that their adherents do, but we certainly cannot neglect the (more complicated) realities they do possess, as entwined, distributed ideas, experiences and "macromaterialities" (Hann 2014; cf. Robbins 2014:162).

actually existing in the world (cf. Hodges 2008). In this case it seems reasonable to me that we might develop the notion of a diagram in less abstract and more ethnographically specific directions. I propose replacing the term "diagram" with the term "world" and thinking of worlds in more tangible, less visualist terms[79]. It seems more ethnographically conducive here to think of the church as a tangible, even tastable world. This world, like the (rather bland) flavour of the church eucharist, has a particular set of qualities (a "flavour"), which "travel" as qualia, that is as "experiences of sensuous qualities" (Chumley & Harkness 2013; see also Harkness 2015; Chumley 2017) specific to "the church", such as the "taste" of the eucharist. Let me defend the usefulness of the idea of a church world, before returning finally to this qualities-qualia distinction and *its* usefulness for thinking about church sameness.

…

From feeling to worlds

One summer evening in 2015, the Wang-Xu family and I sat in the Korean 'hotpot' restaurant around the corner from their Taipei apartment. When I ask the family what it is that makes the church special to them, the father, 'brother Wang', replies that life in the church is "simple" and "predictable". Sister Xu, his wife, picks up the train of thought and takes it along more Biblical lines. "Jesus washed the feet of his disciples," she says, "in the same way, when we come to the meetings, we wash each other. We are not here to compare, 'my daughter is so beautiful etc', we just share". "How do you get dirty?" I ask. Sister Xu chuckles. "It's not sinful" her husband interjects. "It's not about sin" she continues, "but about contact with worldly things, like going on the metro". Their daughter, Meirong, finally offers her answer, which I feel sums up what her parents are trying to get at very well. "It is just this feeling [*ganjue*]", she says, "when you see others going to make offerings to temple gods [*qu baibai*], it doesn't have this feeling".

Although Meirong and I do not value the difference between Taiwan's temples and the church in Taiwan in the same way, on some level I knew exactly what she meant. In preparation for fieldwork I read as many texts on "Chinese thought" (Waley 2005; 2013) and "Chinese religion" (Overmyer 1986)[80] as I could. I was excited innumerable times by the apparent resonances between what was

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[79] See Classen 1997 and Howes 2005 for critiques of the dominance of visual metaphors in Western intellectual history.
[80] Two equally problematic notions of course! (Shih 2009; Feuchtwang 2010; cf. Ziporyn 2013).

written about ancient and modern "Chinese religiosities" (Yang 2008), and the church ministry and practice I was already familiar with. Furiously underlining depictions of centuries-old traditions and their revivals, which word for word seemed to describe aspects of the cosmology and practice of the Local Churches, it seemed undeniable to me that those in the church were "doing the same thing", as other Sino-Taiwanese religionists, in a different form.

However, as I travelled around Taiwan, the temples and gatherings I encountered of Buddhists, sectarians and popular religionists were so far from the interior of a church meeting hall, the demeanour and tone of conviction of church members so different from those of spirit mediums, funeral processionists and those bowing before images and incense pots, that my prior, text-based sense that this was the same thing done differently faded completely. Spending as much time as I could wandering around Taipei temples, so garish and endlessly stimulating, the church became more and more strange to me. Not in the contents of its beliefs, but in the nature of its aesthetics. Why would they reject the synesthetic bliss of temple worship for the blandness of meeting halls, often windowless and always mind-numbingly plain? I was initiated into the highly popular Taiwanese sect, *Yiguandao,* ("the way of unity"). Attending their meetings, brimming as they were with colour and noise, synesthetic and syncretic fusion, I could only be struck by the aesthetic differences between this group, its buildings and rituals rooted in but expanding beyond the traditional Chinese pantheon, and the church. The differences were so great, that they made all the amazing similarities I had noted before seem superficial. In this final section of the chapter, I seek a descriptive framework that might account for this discontinuity. Having established the possibility that church notions of sameness are at least partly founded in a common structure of feeling, distinct to this group, I want to suggest understanding this feeling not as psychogenic but as the flavour of a non-local church world. Thinking with notion of "worlds" makes more sense, in this case, than thinking with those of "psychology", "culture" or "society".

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The "root metaphor" (Turner 1974)) of "religious worlds" (Paden 1994; Orsi 2007; Ishii 2012) has been a mainstay of ethnographic description for some time. Whether they be "cultural" (Holland 2001 et al.; Choy et al. 2009), "social" (Luckmann 1970; Strauss 1978; Unruh 1980) or "cosmological" (Abramson & Holbraad 2014), for many ethnographically-inclined social scientists, the world is in

fact "a world of many worlds" (De la Cadena & Blaser 2018; cf. Ingold 2018)[81]. Roughly, we can understand the growth of the use of the term "world" in anthropology to be coterminous with two interrelated theoretical developments, one epistemological (Ingold 2011a; Jackson 2012), the other political (Latour 2002; Holbraad & Abramson 2014). In the former it is held that in order to fully understand another group of people from their own perspective, the long-time aim of ethnography, it is not enough to describe them as living in a "community" or a "society". These latter terms evoke a set of human beings who have their own representations, practices habits, but who basically live out in the open, on the earth, in the same world as "us" who are trying to understand them. This may be technically true, but if we are to understand what it is like to be in that society or community, we must begin differently.

To themselves, this approach holds, most groups of people are not just another set of human bodies with their own representational and practical habits. They are rather the inhabitants of a whole world, which, for them, includes all sorts of other beings and perspectives, and that is why they act in the ways they do and say the things they say. For ethnography to be accurately evocative it is better that it begins with the premise of a world than with that of a representational community or society. Beginning this way, one is more likely to be able to capture what Schutz (1967), following Husserl (1970 [1936]), calls "the natural attitude" of the "life-world". For anthropologists especially, the term "world" evokes the sense that for those living within a specific community, the latter includes not only a group of interacting human beings but other material and immaterial things with their own powers, auras, autonomies which make the community/society what it is (Orsi 2007; Sahlins 2017)[82].

However, this epistemologically-motivated understanding of worlds also, for some anthropologists, has a relativising effect upon "the world" of conventional scientific and common-sense, "secular"

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[81] Some anthropologists even call these worlds, "universes" (Klass 1996; Dumont 1980:xlvii). In the conclusion, in which I outline the anthropological theory of the thesis, I argue that the ethnographic language of "worlds" and "universes" is only really justified if one employs the kind of "poly-essentialistic" analytical frame I describe there. We can only refer to social, cultural and cosmological entities as worlds and universes if we understand them to be one kind of unit among myriad in people's lives, not as life-encompassing totalities. Otherwise we impute to ourselves a god's-eye view (Zhan 2011; Holbraad & Abramson 2014) and imprison our ethnographic subjects in reified analytical cages. Here I help lay the ethnographic groundwork for the final chapter, by showing how those in the church in Jingmei are concerned with the church as a distinctively as a life-encompassing entity, the outlines of which are nonetheless within their purview.

[82] Some, uncomfortable with the reificatory potential of the term "world(s)", prefer to write of "worldings" and "world-formation" (Tsing 2010; Ong 2011; Zhan 2011; 2018; Ishii 2012). The problem with this approach is that it doesn't allow for the possibility of worlds as things, which people encounter as the products of others' actions in the world as much as they are the ongoing effusions of their creative action (cf. Graeber 2014), I address this point directly in the conclusion.

understanding. This is the second guise of the first, epistemologically-motivated, anthropological notion of 'world(s)'. If others live in worlds they take to be "the world", maybe "our" world is just one among many, and not, as is assumed, the container of other worlds. In fact, it is suggested that describing other worlds as if we had a bird's eye view of them is a form of conceptual colonialism, seeing others' worlds as in fact conceptual projections onto our, the "real", world (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Latour 2002). As Blaser and De la Caneda write, "a world that has granted itself the right to assimilate all other worlds…by presenting itself as exclusive, cancels possibilities for what lies beyond its limits" (2018:3)[83].

This, for some, radically changes the way analysis ought to be done. This is the second, politically-motivated, lineage associated with rethinking the notion of 'world' in anthropology. Here, no longer are we able to access and describe other worlds as they are, we only encounter inhabitants of other worlds who say and do things which do not make sense in ours. Accordingly, we must do the analytical work to straighten out these apparent contradictory or nonsensical words and actions. But this straightening out is not in fact an act of comprehension of another world but only an extension of the analyst's own. Anthropology here is analytical story-telling which never leaves Plato's famous cave, using unfamiliar 'shadows' on the wall to expand the cave's conceptual or imaginative horizons (cf. Crapanzano 2004). This is in fact the founding gesture of the "ontological turn", though others have interpreted it as precisely an unwarranted and reificatory approach to others' worlds (Bessire & Bond 2014; McLean 2017).

There are two problems with each of these approaches, which this chapter seeks to help remedy. First, they each assume, to varying degrees that we are all trapped in worlds, like flies under a glass. Worlds are inescapable (except, in the first approach, for the anthropologists moving between them), and those inhabiting them are not wise to the fact that theirs is one world amongst many. Everything "within" the world is intellectually and/or sensorially graspable, but the world itself is

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[83] In contrast, in his book *World: An Anthropological Examination*, Pina-Cabral lays out his own approach in the following terms:

> of late, anthropological theory has been oscillating between two alternative options concerning world forming. There are those who follow a metaphysical path in proposing to reenchant the world, with all of the rhetorical charm that goes with such excesses (Viveiros de Castro [2009] 2014; Kohn 2013); there are others, such as myself, who have opted to stick to the more pedestrian path of building a scientific analysis of what it is to be human in the world, for which you have to assume that all humans share common paths of humanity and of animality, and that only within these paths does it make sense to be a social scientist at all. Social analysis is carried out by persons in ontogeny, and it is to be received by persons in ontogeny. Verisimilitude, therefore, is an indispensable feature of all successful sociological or anthropological description, as any social scientist who has had to defend a Ph.D. thesis well knows. And verisimilitude depends on assuming the background of a common human world. This approach is, no doubt, less exciting from a rhetorical point of view because it obliges us to the constant exercise of critical attention implied in the fact that we are always part of what we observe and that there are insuperable limits to certainty (2017:5-6).

not. In all their interpretations and gestures world-inhabitants unwittingly butt up against the walls of their world. Moreover, it is assumed that if the world itself, as a "world", was accessible to its inhabitants then all the beings and habits within it would disintegrate under the cold glare of relativism (cf. Geertz 1984).

This chapter suggests a perspective in which, like the approaches above, worlds have different structural, aesthetic, imaginative horizons. I keep the term world because I understand communities to be more-than-human (Morton 2019), but also to be inhabitable, imaginatively, sensorially, perspectivally, like strange, enterable objects (Sloterdijk 2011). This is to follow the vocabulary of those in the church who speak of "entering into" ("the Body", "the enjoyment", "the spirit", "the oneness") and "getting out of" ("the mind", "the emotions", "the will", "the world"). From this perspective, people can be the victim of colliding worlds, with one world encompassing or disintegrating the other. In a sense, although we potentially inhabit different worlds, we all have one foot on a common ground- the ground of death and other undeniables (Ingold 2011a). Though, we may forget this and see it from within our particular world-bubble. This leaves open not only the possibility of meeting across worlds but also of worldlessness. Worldlessness may be both liberating and life-destroying (Bessire 2014).

The second point is that, the worldliness of their worlds can be important to many of their inhabitants. I show, in the next chapter, that unlike church congregations elsewhere, those in Jingmei are especially concerned with the form, the texture, the sound, the feel, even the (non) smell of the "church world" itself, not with the church as a means to other ends (i.e. self-perfection and salvation). As my awkward use of the terms "society" and "community" above is intended to confer, the term "world", as used so far in anthropology, leaves behind the anthropological tradition of distinguishing between the qualities of social forms, as in the use of the concepts of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft*, and their many derivative concepts (Loomis & Samples 1999). As we saw in the last chapter, church members are keen to distinguish between the church as an "organization" (like, "Christianity") and as an "organism", the true Body of God. This suggests that the qualities of a world can be key values in themselves which motivate actions and words, as much as the values implicit within the world itself do.

To many, these issues will be overly familiar. Why not just use the more familiar term "culture(s)"? The degree to which "culture", and/or "society" (Strathern 1995; Kuper 2009), is or is not an actually-existing or integrated whole, and with what kind and degree of influence upon thought and action, has been perhaps the defining debate of anthropology (Keesing 1974; 1990; Gupta & Ferguson 1992; Candea 2015). The idea that culture is a 'thing' has largely been rejected however. Rather, to the degree that we still use the concept at all, it denotes ways of seeing, thinking and acting, which for the most part occur without conscious direction. "The nice thing about culture" as Strathern (1995) writes, "is that we all have it". The notion of a world then, for me, does not replace that of culture, though I do not use the latter concept as such. If I were to use it, the question of how worlds and cultures interact would be an open one. We might see worlds as products and features of cultures, part-cultures (Coleman 2010: 800, see below) and inter-cultural dynamics (Bashkow 2004; Robbins 2004b). It seems to me that culture would be one of the grounds from which worlds are figured (out).

The holism of the culture concept has largely been exposed as a rhetoric (Thornton 1988), and a method of ethnographic description (Strathern 1987). Before the "writing culture debate" (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Willerslev 2016), the assumption of a cultural totality in many contexts was that of the anthropologists, and it informed the structure of their writing. With the concept of 'world' however we might leave open the question of totality as an ethnographic one, i.e. one which those we write about might help us to answer. As a rough map of concepts, I would consider Taiwanese society to be the bodily and material infrastructure of "Taiwan" and Taiwanese culture to be the sum total of knowledge and awareness which that infrastructure enables. Needless to say, that Taiwanese culture and society are neither easily differentiable from one another or other cultures and societies in practice. Nonetheless, neither culture nor society here is the same as 'world' in the analytical work it does. I do not in fact think we can write of a 'Taiwanese world'. Within Taiwan there are potentially many worlds, which may be "smaller" or "larger" than Taiwan for those who are concerned with them. The question of the relation between these worlds and Taiwanese culture and society, to the extent that the latter concepts are being seriously employed, should be addressed ethnographically in each case.

Anthropologists of Christianity have noted that the religion of their focus is often both world-breaking and world-making (e.g. Robbins 2004a; Jorgensen 2005). While Robert Hefner's focus upon the "world-building aspect of religious conversion" (1993:3) helpfully points to the ways in

which conversion can become a means through which the microcosmic and macrocosmic arenas of people's lives become both the infrastructures of personal transcendence and the basis for "an authoritative culture and cohesive religious structure" (1993:19), my use of the term "world" refers to an actual thing. Moreover, my use of the terms "taste" and "flavour" is not metaphorical, in the linguistic sense of this term (Harman 2005; Morton 2014). Rather it is synecdochal, because members, I claim, really do taste the flavour of the church. It is not that taste is dialectically and semiotically entwined with a flavourless "social life" (cf. Manning 2012). The two here, social life and taste, are inseparable. Nor is it the case here that certain aesthetic and sensory practices serve as a means through which a community is imagined (Anderson 1991; Coleman 1996b; Sneath et al. 2009)[84]. Rather, these practices are aesthetic and sensory encounters with(in) a world.

The church sense of sameness is neither local, nor translocal, neither global nor glocal, though it is dependent on all these kinds of "placings" and "sitings" (Luke 1994; Appadurai 1996) for its persistence. The sense of sameness does not travel with members on the plane when they fly to or from Taiwan to a conference (unless they "church" on the plane), for instance. Rather, it is waiting there for them when they arrive, are picked up at the airport and taken to a church meeting. This is the sameness which has been described in this chapter and is described by church members. I argue that this sameness is a world and that this world is non-local. That is, it is not understandable by looking at it locally, at the specific conditions of a church meeting or collective, or in terms of the translocal bodies that feel it. Like climate change and the weather (Morton 2013), the flavour/quality of the church is encountered as a qualia/taste, by these bodies and collectives at specific meetings, but the actual flavour, as with the flavour of church wafers, is not there in those meetings as such. The church-quality in this sense is a "hyperobject", that is, "a bundle of entities massively distributed in time and space that forms an entity in its own right, one that is impossible for humans to see or touch directly" (Morton 2019:40).

I understand the church to be a transnational social form reproduced and encountered from myriad different individually, historically, and socially situated perspectives, or better, "orientations", which

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[84] It is not my claim that all communities have a flavour, nor that they should all be treated as worlds. It is not just an ethnographic question of whether a community is world-like or has a flavour. When I suggested some of these ideas to one colleague, they responded with surprise that I thought they were at all innovative. "Well of course social entities are things in the world," he said, "if our informants say they are then they are". In contrast, I would claim that a good number of informants should say that a community is a thing and that this is significant to them. Then we should corroborate these claims, by experimenting to see if they make sense as analytical and descriptive frames. As Astuti (2017) writes, there are many ways in which we can "take our informants seriously", not all of them are ethnographically or anthropologically sensible.

nonetheless has a flavour of non-locality and a non-local flavour (of blandness). This is to recognise that although 'the church' may have many faces, it is still a thing, a materially complex thing, engaged, ignored, stepped into and out of, participated in or observed from many different angles, but still having certain definable qualities. A Taiwanese church acquaintance living in the UK organised my accommodation in Taipei, and immediately on arriving, though there were differences in the detail, I could say, "there, that there is 'the church'". He, of course, could do the same thing in the UK. I may well be wrong, but I am fairly sure that either of us could go anywhere and if we unexpectedly encountered a meeting under the auspices of 'the church', we would recognise it as something we had encountered before. Is this not grounds for assuming that it is indeed, in some sense, the same thing? Every church meeting that I have encountered have had a discernible common flavour. Is the commonness of this flavour reducible to the sameness of "me" across each context? I do not think so. It is to a method of discerning difference in relation to that sameness that the next chapter is devoted.

Chapter 3

The Church as Atmosphere:

A Methodology of Discerning Difference

"From the podium, Nee begins to speak about the "sound" of a Christian life. He argues that the Christian life should have a certain musical tone, or pitch. That tone is triumphant, like a shout of victory"

Chang 2017:19

In chapter one, I attempted to introduce the church as a distinct rhythmic infrastructure tying together bodily, verbal and interactive habits with texts, events and aesthetics. In chapter two, I presented another side of things. This time the church was a distinct non-local world of shared Christian blandness. I argued not only that the church-as-infrastructure is implicitly attended to as a parallax of "organic" spontaneity and "organised" structure but that the church-as-world forms a parallax of translocality and nonlocality with the church-as-infrastructure. In this chapter, I explicitly demonstrate and discuss the analytical methodology which implicitly informed the arguments of the previous two chapters. I show how my time in Taiwan shifted my ethnographic attention and my theoretical orientation. Through interaction with Taiwanese Christians, I learned to attend to the different forms of Christianity I encountered as ends in themselves rather than a means to other ends. More specifically, I learned to attune to the church in Taiwan as a kind of atmosphere with a relatively unique shape, size and texture[85]. I learned to understand the differences between forms of Christianity in Taiwan (and potentially elsewhere) in terms of different objects of attunement.

Confluent with Throop's (2017) notion of "attunement to worldly conditions", it is my understanding in this chapter that repeated forms of attention (Stafford 1995; 2007; Zigon 2014; Duranti 2015; Throop & Duranti 2015) to certain aspects of being Christian, reinforces a certain existential "orientations" (Ahmed 2006; 2014) to life in general. It is my argument moreover that the emphases of Nee and Lee draw their significance from different orientations to being Christian,

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[85] See Stewart 2011; McCormack 2018 on "atmospheric attunement".

which are evident today amongst church members. In their brilliant ethnography of transnational Daoism in China, Palmer and Siegler (2017) make a distinction between the "ontological individualism" (2017:20) of North American Daoist tourist-practitioners and the "cosmological attunement" (2017:21) aimed for by Chinese Daoist monks. Taking inspiration from this distinction, but altering it a little, I see attunement as the approach of both those church members who demonstrate a primarily "Nee-style" orientation to the church and those who demonstrate a "Lee-style" orientation. It is just that the former are ultimately attuned to the destiny of the *self* (in a form of apocalyptic individualism), while the latter are attuned to the church as an end in *itself*. While the Nee-orientation displays a "self-sacrificing" approach to the church (in the pursuit of millennial salvation), those closer to Lee's style, orient toward the church as simply a larger self to be played with, admired, kept afloat, and extended.

In this chapter, I trace my own journey in the field from the assumption of a Nee-style orientation to the church, to the (self-relativising) ethnographic "discovery" of a Lee-style orientation via descriptions and discussions of encounters with three Christian figures I met in Taiwan. Only the last one is actually a church member, but meeting each figure shifted my understanding of what being a Christian is about for many in Taiwan and pointed me towards alternative understandings of the much-used notions of individualism and holism (e.g. Munro 1985; Otto & Bubandt 2010; Slingerland 2018). This approach participates in a recently-emerged, friendly critique within the anthropology of Christianity (AoC), headed by anthropologist of Brazilian Catholicism, Maya Mayblin (2017). She takes issue with what she terms "the earnest turn" in the AoC which, Mayblin argues, takes those at the self-defined orthodox centres of Christian communities, saturated as they often are with earnest seriousness, as overly representative of the communities in question. In taking these informants as exemplary, the nature of what these communities are and do is skewed. In contrast, Mayblin and others (Mayblin & Malara 2018; Malara 2018; Reinhardt 2018) suggest that more attention be paid to those who are more "lenient" and apparently peripheral in their religiosity. I understand my journey through the church as one ending, in this thesis, with a "rear view mirror perspective" on the church, one viewed from the apparent periphery of the church-centre, one which in turn casts that "centre" in a whole new light (see Tsing 1993 for a comparable approach).

Some church members no longer read Watchman Nee. An explicit contradiction between Nee and Lee is rarely ever voiced amongst church members. Nonetheless, there is a recognition that their emphases are different. This is usually interpreted as Lee's "standing on the shoulders" of Nee,

culminating in the former's finally reaching the so-called "high-peak truth" (*gaofeng zhenli*, 高峰真理). Watchman Nee's *Lessons for New Believers* (*chuxin chengquan kecheng*, 初信成全課程) are read in some church locations, such as in Jingmei, with new church members. But then it is assumed that a progression will be made to Lee. (Although, many church publications in Taiwan do not have any named author, and I had to make enquiries to check whose words they were). The morning revival series, conference subject matter and footnotes of the *Recovery Version Bible (huifu ban)* are all taken from the teachings and speaking of Lee. Still, there are many church members in the West who, like my family, were readers of Watchman Nee before they were readers of Lee and the church literatures.

The way that I discerned the significance of the church community to those in Taiwan was through contrast, contrast between "the church" as I encountered it during fieldwork and my own childhood, adolescent and undergraduate encounters with Nee, Lee and the international social entity they co-founded. This methodology of contrast is a version of the, often implicit, comparative project which has always informed anthropology (Evans-Pritchard 1956; Geertz 1973; Douglas 1978; Strathern 1988; Candea 2019). If we are to make clear the perspective from which the target population is being understood, "[i]t is therefore necessary", writes Van Der Veer, "to engage one's implicit comparison and make it more explicit" (2016:8). In this chapter, the comparison is between the European and North American church populations I encountered as a child of church members, and the Taiwanese church populations I did fieldwork with. However, my aim is not to make a statement about the differences between the two populations, but to use these differences to articulate, all the more clearly, the relatively unique approach to the church as a global-local entity in Taiwan, which informs the descriptions and analyses of the thesis.

Initially, I found that my prior familiarity with the church elsewhere did in fact inhibit my appreciation of those church notions and practices in Taiwan which were practiced and spoken elsewhere, but may still have been significant for interesting reasons for those in Taiwan. I tended to gloss over practices and concepts enacted and spoken in Taiwan which someone with no prior contact with the church may have paid more excited attention to. However, this familiarity did allow me to detect a set of differences, orientational differences, which perhaps precedes, historically and biographically, the difference between things said and done in one church place and another. It was not the differences between the words and actions used in Taiwan and in the UK, and elsewhere, that struck me but the difference in how words and actions were approached. That is, in Taiwan,

with a relative playfulness which was unconcerned with meaning and sincerity as such, but with a 'keeping afloat' of self and others (see chapter four), with a concern for continuous movement and rhythm, and with well-timed and poetic speech acts (chapters one and two), with the actions of others rather than the feelings of oneself (chapter four), and with the atmospherics of cosmic re-integration rather than primarily with personal salvation (see below). Paying attention to these distinctive forms attunement to church texts and practices allowed me to put these familiar notions and practices in an unfamiliar light and to "discover" an alternative set of orientations to church-being.

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My earliest memories are of a blood red book with the dark silhouette of a thorned Christ on the front cover, called *The New World*. I grew up excited about, fascinated with and only a little disturbed by an increasingly familiar picture of the "end times". Following his Dispensationalist teachers, Nee taught that the aim of our lives was to secure a place in the predetermined cast of 144,000 "overcomers", those "perfected" Christians who qualified as members of "the Body" and "Bride" of "Christ". All other Christians would spend one thousand years in the "outer darkness", missing out on the great "wedding feast" prophesied in the Book of Revelation. They were to be perpetually "trained", to make up for the imperfections of their lives. At one conference I attended in the UK the "speaking brother" said (and we heard) with great satisfaction that "we are the 0.0001%". Although hubris is not at all encouraged in church congregations in the West, it seems fair to say that theirs, like Nee's, is a Christian, spiritual elitism. It is my understanding in this first part of the chapter that this approach to being Christian was, perhaps unsurprisingly, not very dissimilar to Nee's own approach. It was, that is, an eschatological approach, in which Christianity was an exciting means of escape from the world, rather than an ecclesiastical form of increased participation in the world, as I found it to be in Taiwan.

Let us look more closely at the context of Nee's writing to understand the social conditions under which his teachings became so influential. These will then provide a comparative base from which to understand orientations to Nee's and Lee's ministry, and the church collective, later on, in Western countries (the UK, Poland and the US) and in present-day Taiwan. To anticipate the argument, I will suggest that the perception in Nee's time of civilizational collapse induced a similar

eschatological ethic as that found in Western church congregations today, where the numbers of church members are comparatively very low and are isolated from the Christian mainstream. In both Nee's China and today's "church" in Western countries, the perception is that the world around is relatively hostile and broken, and that Nee's message is a way out. Taiwan is a different place. There, the world around was not perceived as particularly hostile, but in the conversion narratives I heard, it did feel, compared to the rural childhoods of many of the older members, relatively closed off to them. The church, for them, was a form of cosmic reintegration and participation rather than escape.

Nee and Christianity in China

Some trace the existence of Christianity in China back to the first century CE, when the Apostle Thomas is alleged to have travelled there via India (Perrier & Walter 2008). A bas-relief found in Jiangsu province, dated to the Later Han Dynasty (25-220 CE), is purported to depict Thomas alongside mother Mary and another figure. A less contested beginning is pinned upon a "nine-foot high marble stele" dug up in Shaanxi province (Bays 2012:1). Engraved at the top of the "Nestorian stele" is a title- *A Monument Commemorating the Propagation of the Da-Qin* (Syrian) *Luminous Religion in China-*, and a picture of "a Christian cross rising from a (Buddhist) lotus blossom" (Bays 2012:7). From this, scholars usually begin the history of Christianity in China at AD 635. From another stele dating to AD 781, and a few manuscripts sealed in a grotto in Xinjiang in the year 1005, it is evident that there was a good degree of syncretism, between Daoist, Buddhist and Nestorian terms and images, involved in the adaptation of Syriac Christianity to the Chinese context (Palmer 2001; Reigert & Moore 2006). After a period of tension between Nestorians and Catholics in China, all mention of Christianity disappears with the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and no significant re-encounter occurs until the seventeenth century with the coming of Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits (Gernet 1980; 1985), to which we return in chapter five.

While previous attempts to convert Chinese *en masse* to Christianity had, by and large, failed, the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century marked the beginning of a slow process of indigenization (Bays 1999; Bays 2012; Uhalley & Wu 2001; Standaert 2001; Standaert & Tiedemann 2009; Lian 2010; Mungello 2012; Malek 2002). A sociological and ethnographic literature documenting the "immensely varied Chinese Christian world" of today (Bays 2012:1), both within China (Madsen 2001; Cao 2010; Kang 2017) and elsewhere (Rubenstein 1991; Yang 1999; Muse 2005; Ng 2012; Yang et al. 2017) is steadily growing. Given the innumerable Christianities,

Chinese communities and individuals involved, no singular theme emerges which could be said to characterise either "Christianity in China" or "Chinese Christianity". Nevertheless, it is broadly true that, before the beginnings of the Protestant missionisation, the few Catholic converts that there were had adapted their religion to village life, such that it was largely lived as a local religion (Madsen 2001; Menegon 2009), sometimes rubbing up against other village religions (Thompson 1996), but for the most part being commensurate with ancestor veneration and the festive rhythms of local life (Stafford 2010:195).

It was with the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864) that the revolutionary and translocal potentials of Christianity were most catastrophically demonstrated. Hong Xiuquan's claim to be the son of the Christian God and brother of Jesus was a direct affront to the emperor, the long-time "son of heaven" (Kuhn 1977; Weller 1994; Spence 1996). At the height of his power, Hong claimed followers across five provinces. It was only after foreign intervention, and up to one hundred million war-dead, that the movement was finally quashed. "Religion" and "politics" have never been as ideologically or pragmatically disentangled in China as they have in the Post-Reformation West (Chau 2008; 2011). Hong's proclamation of his relationship with the divine was a de facto political challenge. The body-politic in China, at least until the end of the Qing dynasty, has always been intimately mediated by divine imaginaries (Feuchtwang 2001). A different form of divine union, to that of the Emperor with Heaven (*tian*), Hong's union with the Christian trinity, was, it seems, intrinsically connected in the minds and lives of the Taiping rebels to the establishment of a new social order, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom.

The first indigenous churches to arise in the twentieth century, the True Jesus Church (*zhen yesu jiaohui*), also known as the Universal Correction Church, and the Jesus Family (*yesu jiating*), displayed commitment to both millenarianism and communalistic social reform (Lian 2010; Inouye 2011). The True Jesus Church, an indigenized version of Seventh Day Adventism, "united into one collective family, with all the members "offering their belongings to the Lord" and changing their family names to Ye (from *Yesu*, the transliteration of Jesus)" (Lian 2010:51). Like Buddhist sectarians of previous generations (Ownby 1999), the Jesus Family, hailing from Shandong province, foresaw the imminent coming of "the Great Harmony", but with Christ replacing "the mother of No-Birth" (*Wusheng Laomu*), as its bringer. Like the Shandong "Spirit Boxers" of the Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901), who "requested the gods to attach themselves to our bodies [*qiushen futi*]" such that they "were invulnerable to swords and spears", the divine "descended" into Jesus Family

members (Lian 2010:72), realising their "vision of an authentic mystical communion with God as the basis of Family life" (Lian 2010:78). Paralleling Maitreyan Buddhists' "Boat of Dharma" (*fachuan*), their central "apocalyptic metaphor" was that of the "Ark", which in their leader, Jing Dianying's words,

> ferries [the saved] across the boundless sea
>
> As hardships and afflictions fly wildly by.
>
> Outside the Ark,
>
> The sea is ferocious and mankind cries in pain;
>
> Inside the Ark,
>
> Animals dance and birds in unison sing (Lian 2010:73).

Watchman Nee, and the "Christian Assembly" (*jidutu juhuisuo*) which he led, were contemporaneous with the True Jesus Church (1917-) and the Jesus Family (1927-1952). Common to each group in these formative years were their millenarian visions. Becoming a Christian for their converts, meant forming a new kind of society which would bring a desperately desired order to the world. This was in part because this period, the years roughly between 1839 and 1916 were experienced, according to Bianco, as "the crumbling of a world, a civilization, a *Weltanshauung*" (1971:1). Christianity, for these groups, was a means of escaping the destruction of one world and entering the harmony of another.

Perhaps unlike the other groups, Nee's rise to leadership was founded upon his direct valorisation of "death" as the door to "the Kingdom". Lian Xi records the words of Yu Chenghua, "an eye doctor who became one of Nee's lieutenants in the Little Flock church in Shanghai", who had the following response "to the sight of truckloads of severed human limbs after a series of Japanese aerial bombings in Shanghai" (Lian 2010:156): "Let me be counted among the severed limbs of the trucks. Yes, I am already dead. I have been nailed to the Cross with Christ" (Yu 1997:18 in Lian 2010:156). The mass suffering of those attracted to Nee's teachings symbiotically (Harman 2017) incorporated the sufferings of the female mystics whose writings would form the death-embracing foundation of Nee's ministry. "Taking the cross" and "dying with Christ" are common church tropes in some corners today. The "death" experienced by church members like Yu Chenghua in internecine China,

retroactively became the *same* "death" valorised by Christian mystics, that is, the death-defying death of Christ[86].

Stealing copies from Margaret Barber's library, Nee had introduced himself to the writings of Jesse Penn-Lewis: *Dying to Live, The Centrality of the Cross,* and *Soul and Spirit.* Nee's seminal work, *The Spiritual Man* (*shuling ren,* 屬靈人), written in the midst of life-threatening tuberculosis at age twenty-four, as is often remarked (Chang 2017; Chow 2013; Starr 2016; Cliff 1983), is heavily indebted to Penn-Lewis' arguments regarding the soul and the spirit[87]. The idea of a "hidden organ" distinct from the soul appealed to Nee and Penn-Lewis for very different reasons. Nee, alongside millions of other Chinese, was dealing with death and destruction on a civilizational scale, but also with his simultaneous attraction to Christianity and repulsion from its Western Imperialist frame. Penn-Lewis was dealing with being a Welsh woman in a heavily English, male-dominated Christian scene: "several prominent Holiness leaders warn[ed] that Keswick [an annual Christian convention central to the Holiness movement] was "being threatened by the presence of mercurial and over-emotional Welsh people such as...Jesse Penn Lewis" (Lian 2010:164). In 1906, among other times, Penn-Lewis spoke out publicly against this prejudice:

> It will be of very grave importance to the whole Church of Christ if Keswick officially sets its face against women speaking to audiences when, at this time, God is using women in a very marked way. The whole current of life moving through the spiritual Church is towards clear and open ground for women in the work of God (Jones 1997:197)[88].

However, both Nee and Penn-Lewis found meaning in their unconventional anthropology from a place of intense bodily pain. In the second preface to *The Spiritual Man,* Nee suggests of his illnesses that "this very frailty affords me a deeper insight since I suffer more weakness, sickness and pain than most people" (Nee 1968:19). Of Penn-Lewis, Lian Xi writes: "Frail since the age of ten and plagued by chronic depression and "bouts of pleurisy and neurasthenia" in her youth, she burst upon the revelation one day that it was dying not doing that produced the fruit", and that it was through "helplessness" and a "deeper understanding of SELF crucified" that one became "meet" for God's

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[86] See Cannell 1999 for a comparable case of identification with "the dead Christ", via pity, amongst the Bicolano in the Philippines.

[87] "One of Nee's earliest co-workers, Zhang Qizhen considered that "The Spiritual Man was what Nee wrote down in the words of Mrs. Penn-Lewis in Chinese"" (Hsu 2013:46).

[88] See Appendix H for more on gender and the church's beginnings.

use" (Lian 2010:163). The idea of the "organ" of "the spirit", buried deep within human beings, the dwelling place of God, but as yet unknown to the patriarchal system which oppressed both Penn-Lewis and Nee, would be the road to symbiotic union of their struggles into a singular history of "the Lord's Recovery" (*zhu de huifu*) of the "church".

Through Penn-Lewis and Barber, Nee discovered Madame Guyon (1648-1717), "[a]n enchanting French mystic...who was once imprisoned in the Bastille for her role in the Quietest controversy"[89]. She,

> had long been popular among Pietists, Quakers, Methodists, and adherents of nineteenth-century revivalism in North America. She yearned for the destruction of the "vain, pompous edifice [that] human art and power had erected." The horrible ruins that resulted would enable God, she wrote, to "rear His sacred temple in us." Such teaching found a curious resonance among the Little Flock. Equally appealing was her intoxication with physical pain for the love of Christ. "I so esteemed the cross" she wrote, "that my greatest trouble was want of suffering as much as my heart thirsted for" (Lian 2010: 176).

As for Nee and Penn-Lewis, Guyon's mysticism also had its roots in pain. She was "excessively ill" as a child and was "neglected by her mother, who sent her away, at the age of four, to a Benedictine convent". She was then "ravaged by unending misfortunes, including smallpox (which destroyed her legendary beauty) and the early loss of her husband and young children" (Lian 2010:177). Guided by Penn-Lewis, with whom he corresponded, Nee fused these pain-laced mysticisms with the precise, technical, "premillennial dispensationalist" eschatology of the British Brethren, especially as articulated by the aristocratic John Nelson Darby (1800-1882). Drawing upon the Book of Revelation, under this scheme, Nee preached, as mentioned, that there will in fact only be 144,000 "overcomers", who, at the time of "the great tribulation" at the end of this "age", together form the "perfected bride of Christ". This overcoming, corporate bride would "reign" with Christ over the earth for one thousand years. During this millennium, all other Christians, Nee declared, will be cast out into the "outer darkness" to compensate for their spiritual imperfection. Nee assured his flock that they were positioned at the final stage of history to fulfil "God's heart's desire": "We have the blueprint of God's plan in our hand" he proclaimed to the jubilation of his growing congregations (Lian 2010:177).

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[89] "The "Quietist" heresy was seen to consist of wrongly elevating "contemplation" over "meditation", intellectual stillness over vocal prayer, and interior passivity over pious action in an account of mystical prayer, spiritual growth and union with God (one in which, the accusation ran, there existed the possibility of achieving a sinless state and union with the Christian Godhead)", (*https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ Quietism_(Christian_philosophy), accessed 18/4/2019*).

Like the other indigenous Christianities discussed above, Nee's Christianity was attractive at this period of great unrest in China because it promised the hope of a better, more unified world. Unlike these other Christianities, Nee's vision was systematically implemented on a nation-wide scale. He and his co-workers held regular "Overcomers' Meetings" (*desheng juhui*, 得勝聚會), trainings and retreats. He produced a constant stream of Christian journal publications and drew weekly crowds of hundreds and thousands at their central headquarters in Shanghai. They owned a training centre on Guling Mountain and a publishing house, the *Shanghai Gospel Bookroom*, a precursor to the *Taiwan Gospel Bookroom* and the ten-million-dollar American publishing company, *Living Stream Ministry*. By the 1940s there were over 70,000 "Little Flock" adherents. On top of the symbiotic foundations of Nee's mystical embrace of death, there formed then a symbiotic relation between the Brethren's technical eschatology and the institutional structure of the early church-group, which aimed at producing the perfected bride which God desired.

While Penn-Lewis had emphasised "the spirit" as a deep, mystical dwelling place of the divine, Nee understood the spirit in more communal terms. Church members must rely upon one another to discern what had its origin in the spirit and what in the soul. The human being was pictured as a vessel, a cup, destined to be filled with the "waters" of God. These vessels needed to be "perfected" through "training" however. Guidance for the path of perfection was in the hands of local "responsible ones" and "elders", region "deacons" and ultimately the overseeing "apostles", such as Nee, responsible for the whole church. A key image was that of the "ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom" in the Book of Matthew (25:1-13). Half of them were "foolish" not having enough oil in their "vessels" to light their lamps. The foolish ones thus had to go away and buy more oil, in which time the bridegroom arrives and the "wedding feast" begins. By the time the "foolish virgins" return, it is too late and they are not let in. "Truly I say to you, I do not know you" (25:12), responds the "lord" and "bridegroom" to the late ones. "Overcoming" for those in the newly formed church meant "perfecting" and "filling" their "vessels" with the Spirit of God in time for the return of Christ. The apocalypse-like time they were living through only served to reinforce the sense of urgency which translated to a deep commitment to Nee and to the church.

Nee's syntheses of disparate non-conformist teachings were charged with a passion and unique lucidity powered by his neo-Confucian upbringing (Meng 2018), the intense surroundings of a

collapsed empire at war with itself around him (Lian 2010; Kinnear 1973) and the sense of urgency formed out of his own bodily sufferings. This cocktail of contexts and contents resulted in a relatively uncomplicated reformist vision of Christ, the self and the deep, cosmic community of 'the church', which changed disaffected, alienated Christian lives not only in interregnum China, but everywhere. In this next section, I move briefly forward in history to Nee's followers in the West and the contexts of my own upbringing in the church. We see that Nee's vision of a group of "overcomers" was still being put into practice, though in an otherwise very different setting. I turn finally, then, to Taiwan, and to the methodological approach the difference between these settings precipitated.

The Western church experience

Every year, members of "the church in the UK" participate in a "European young people's conference" for high-schoolers. It is held in a little Polish mountain village near the Slovakian border, fifty miles south of Krakow. We stay with villagers in huge wooden houses separated into male and female dorms. Each morning we do morning revival and are expected to memorise one hundred verses over the week, each one "signed off" by an adult. Dorm rooms are inspected daily, so are expected to be kept tidy. There are three meetings per day, held in a large white tent, where we sit in shirts, trousers, blouses and skirts, or in the conference themed T-shirt we are given at the beginning of the week. "Outlines" and pens rest on our laps. Aside from trips to Poland, there is the annual 'winter school of truth', also aimed at high-schoolers, which is of a very similar format to the Poland camp. A 'college-age conference' is held at a venue in the Welsh countryside each year too. Other events for the whole family are held regularly in London, where there are several church districts and a training and conference centre, and elsewhere, such as in Cambridge, where, until recently, there was a tea shop and bookstore run by church members selling Nee's and Lee's books.

Aside from the many East Asian church members who came to visit our house and temporarily live nearby, it was not obvious growing up that this was a "Chinese church", as my parents' friends called it. "Chinese" values and aesthetics were not explicitly embraced, though they were evident at least in the many illustrations and analogies Nee and Lee used. "I don't know why there are so many Chinese saints in the church," the Editor-in-Chief of LSM once said, "does it really matter?". There were enough non-Chinese members for the origins of the church and its leaders to be virtually irrelevant to most UK members, the universality of the church's significance being emphasised over anything else. There were in fact participants from every corner of the world: Latin America, the

Caribbean, Africa, North America, Eastern Europe, Russia. Nee and Lee were understood as "seers of the divine relation" as the phrase goes (Lee 1997), but their Chineseness was largely irrelevant to this[90].

My 'loss of faith' and ultimate rejection of 'the church' at age eighteen, emerged from a, quite sudden, embodied sense of relativism. A feeling dawned upon me that this, the church, was not the only way of going about things. It was on a six-week summer trip visiting church homes and attending trainings and conferences in California, that it dawned on me that 'the church' is in fact one group of people among myriad, trying to make sense of their lives and the world in which they are lived. I did not "choose" this relativistic shift in thinking, rather it came upon me after spending increasing amounts of time with people outside of the church and outside of Christianity altogether. Thinking I was finished with the church, I nonetheless returned to it in writing up my anthropology undergraduate dissertation (Breen 2014). Writing that was a difficult process of disentangling the ways of thinking and speaking I had learned in the church from the secular, analytical understanding of it as a particular group of people, required by anthropology. To some extent I managed this, but I was yet to shift my understanding of the church as 'one group of people among many', to one aspect of church members lives among many. I had described 'the church in the UK' in terms of a set of 'non-dualistic' ways of thinking and acting, but in doing so I had made members minds and lives too isomorphic with the church itself. Inspired by Emmanuel Levinas, I depicted the church as a theologically-defined 'otherness' which members redefined their 'selves' in relation to, without thinking too much about the particular forms and histories of the otherness and the selves involved. The depiction, encouraged by those I re-acquainted myself with and spoke to in the church in the UK, was an all-or-nothing process of transformation and encompassment of one 'thing', "the self", by another, "the church".

In Taiwan, which I understood to be both the origin place and heart of the church as an international community, my fieldwork taught me that the church is not only a community among communities but that communities, like "the church", are things within a "a great buzzing, blooming confusion" (James 1890:488) of things. Communities are strange kinds of things, existing in between and within, not over and above, other things. Usually, one can tell quite easily whether a particular "thing" is

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[90] Although, there were ideas that "the Lord had moved to China" because it was a place innocent of the man-made, corrupting traditions of the Christian West. Moreover, I heard many non-Chinese members complain that it was easier for the Chinese to be spiritually perfected because Chinese culture (with the stereotypes of tea-drinking over alcohol-drinking and studiousness over debauchery) was more conducive to "the churchlife".

the "same" thing from one day to the next, or if encountered in one place or another place: it looks, feels, tastes, sounds, smells the same in each time and situation. Communities are more difficult to discern however. I came to realise that in my undergraduate dissertation I had still reproduced the basic logic of church participation that I had grown up with. The church was a means to an end, a contingent social container for the enactment of the self-other logic of church participation I had described. I concluded that although anthropologists could learn positively from the ethic of embracing otherness I had presented, they should also learn by counter-example not to confine this ethic, as did the church members and, I argued, as did the so-called "ontological turn", within particular modes of representation.

This argument parallels the church as a corporate means to a self-perfecting end in the Nee-style church imaginary characteristic of church members, like my family, in the UK and other Western countries, and in pre-communist China. The paradox of becoming corporate as a means of self-salvation, was epitomised in the stories of those who were said to have almost undoubtedly become "overcomers" before death. They were said to have become so "blended" into the group that they were barely noticeable, hardly anyone knew their name. This approach to group living produced particular kinds of wondrous experience, characterised by heightened anticipation. When a church meeting was reaching particularly cacophonous emotional heights, I heard on more than one occasion someone say, "and this is just a foretaste of the New Jerusalem!" to exuberant cries of "amen!".

…

Today's Taiwan is a different place, to both Nee's China and to non-conformist Christian Britain. There is much less of a millennial bent, and so the church is not primarily understood as a means to an end. When I ask a group of church members how Taiwan has changed over their lifetimes, they agree with passion, that while all the technological innovations make life much more convenient, they miss the open doors of their younger years. They reminisce about oyster farming in their hometowns, about how much worse the typhoons were in the 1980s, about the arrival of cars and buses, price increases and they agree that, compared to before, "now you can go anywhere in Taiwan". One middle-aged seamstress complained over the background chatter of the impact on her business of increased levels of imported clothes. But there was a chorus of assent when she proclaimed, "before, nobody closed their doors, we came and went as we pleased" (*conglai dajiadou bu guan men, jiu guanlai guanqu*). The closed doors of Taipei, it was suggested, are one of its most

alienating aspects. This nostalgia for openness was a shared sentiment, reiterated by another in terms of trust: "Today, everybody is out to con you" (*xianzai, dajiadou yao pian ni*). While older church members felt closed off from the city that encompassed them, younger members felt closed in. They complained about the dense competitiveness of school and work, which teachers and bosses seemed to take advantage of. They complained with strained hilarity of the repetitiveness, boredom and meaninglessness of their jobs and classrooms, in which a foot put wrong felt like stepping off the world. The youngest members seemed peculiarly worried with the potential to "get lost" in Taipei. There was a general consensus that the church is better than other Christian groups because of its home-based intimacy, because of its interwovenness with everyday life, because it was like being in a "big family" (*womendou shi jiaren*).

Jingmei was once more visibly interconnected with the world around it than it sometimes seems to be today. 'Jingmei' (景美)- 'beautiful scenery'- was once called 'Kengbe', 梘尾, a name which alludes to the "tail-end" of the old system of canals and irrigation ditches which stretched across the city. Today, the water lies beneath a dense web of apartment blocks, shopping outlets, and market stalls. One the one hand, this part of the city is especially sensorially porous. We are crowded together in fumy, humid intimacy. Even the faded yellow-grey apartment blocks, built so rapidly in the 1960s and 70s, look squeezed. With multi-coloured clothes hanging out of grilled windows and stains dripping from flaky walls, they ooze the history and inhabitations that make them. I get the impression, as I gaze around from a busy pavement, that these homes have slumped down here together after exhausting journeys or grown out of each other like coral. But while sounds and sensations move between these homes, people often do not. These interpenetrations are largely anonymous. Many in the church only encounter their neighbours face-to-face when they come to complain about the noise of church meetings, or conversely when knocking on their doors on team gospelising missions. These encounters, in my experience, were awkward for everyone involved, god statues and disapproving grandmothers often making the atmosphere seem especially hostile to the "good news".

At times, the hidden, inner elements of Taipei do spill out onto the outer, public elements of the city, but they do so as intrusions for others rather than communions with them (Lingis 1994). Such spillage occurs in the early hours when revellers pour out of the faded yellow *Holiday KTV* building on the other side of the street to where I live. On several occasions, daytime karaoke singers have burst in on church gatherings in a beloved restaurant nearby. The lives that occasionally spill into

each other in Taipei, in fact share very similar senses of urban alienation, despite their apparent external dissimilarities. Taipei's karaoke singers, for instance, express similar sentiments to those I encountered among Taiwanese church members. The images they use to articulate and placate feelings of urban alienation, tell us something about what church members share with others in the city. From there, we might understand better the taste of the church in Taipei, compared to its tastes in pre-communuist China and Christian, non-conformist, Euro-America.

The karaoke songs sung inside Taipei's karaoke clubs also express nostalgia for old ways of life, and bewail the chasm between Taipei's "not and noisy" (*renao*, 熱鬧) streets and the "cold and lonely" (*lengqing*, 冷清) hearts of those who wander them (Yu 2004: 130). One popular karaoke song, for example, sings,

> Taipei is cold tonight
>
> And with fine night scenes
>
> The signs along the streets
>
> The flashing neon lights
>
> Shine on my despairing heart (Hung 1996 in Hatfield 2001:74)

Such songs emphasise nostalgia for "lost home towns" (*guxiang*, 故鄉, Tw: *kohxiong*). "Within urban life", for many Taiwanese, writes Donald J. Hatfield, "lurks the spectre of *kohiong* where gatherings would not be the product of struggle but, rather, would be natural". Many such home towns are no longer viable living options. When old brother Chen and I go to visit his now empty "old home" (*laojia*) in a nearby township, its former glory is only faintly discernible amidst the piles of rubble, chipped paint and rotten furniture. Though "[k]araokes…markets, temple festivals, banquets, and generally cities…are arenas for effectual gatherings", Hatfield continues, "they are also sites of bitter struggles, where human sentiment (*jincheng*; M: *renqing* [人情]) is thin and intentions are uncertain" (2001:75). These may not seem unlike the sentiments of "Nee's" China and "my" UK, but they are in fact less violent, less despairing and so the solutions to them do not reach as far beyond the present world.

Crucially, Hatfield writes that the loneliness of the karaoke singer is often framed as "the workings of fate as a quasi-environmental force", and that this loneliness is often recognised and responded to by an "inanimate object" (2001:76; see also Harrell 1987), which, I note, is often in fact, the moon. "The moon holds sentiment, speaking to the uneasiness I feel" one famous karaoke song sings for example, "The moon has already emerged from the hills, to accompany me in my complaints", croons another (Hung 1996 in Hatfield 2001:76). Similar feelings and solutions for the loneliness of city are represented in such classic Taipei films as *Rebels of the Neon God* (*qingshaonian Nezha*, 青少年哪吒) and *A City of Sadness* (*beiqing chengshi*, 悲情城市), where the moon features heavily. The suddenness of Taipei's urbanisation is a trauma that has nonetheless produced more prize-winning musings in literature, photography and film on this East Asian city than perhaps any other. It is not surprising that the moon, the symbol of family unity made edible as mooncakes during the mid-Autumn festival (Stepanchuk & Wong 1991), would also rise as a symbol of connections lost with urbanization.

Witness Lee often spoke of "the church" as being like the moon. The church is envisioned by him, as the feminine counterpart of God, just as the moon is the feminine counterpart of the sun in *yin-yang* symbolism (R.Wang 2012:28). The moon does not reflect its own light, likewise those in the church need not worry about trying to be god-like, Lee said. All they need to do is "eat Jesus everyday" (*meitian chi yesu*) in communion with other members of his Body, then they will spontaneously express the light of God, as the moon reflects the light of the sun. Moreover, like the moon, when the church seems not be there, or to be shrinking, fear not, Lee held, for the church, like the moon is only hidden:

> ...If the moon doesn't shine, don't say that the moon is not there. The moon is still there. Likewise don't say that there is no church; the church is still there. The problem is that the church is somewhat covered, and is not so right with the sun. Thus, it doesn't reflect any light. Although there may be a problem with the church, the church is still there[91].

The moon like the church is the same everywhere, and even when it appears not to be there it is indeed there. The moon alongside the sun also represents the unity of the church and God, and the oneness of divinity and humanity. Just as Chinese *yinyang* cosmology understands that the moon

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[91] *Life-Study of Genesis,* Chapter 4, Section 3 accessed on 19/09/2019. via www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=33B8F04646.

and the sun are simply two sides of the same universe, so humanity and divinity, God and the church are two sides of the same reality. "In the Bible the church does not bear any particular name" Lee says,

> In this respect, the church is like the moon. The moon does not have a particular name; its name is simply the moon. We do not name the moon the American moon, the Chinese moon, the Korean moon, or the German moon. There is only one moon, not many moons. However, we may speak of the moon in Seoul, the moon in Osaka, or the moon in Shanghai. This does not denote many moons, but one moon appearing in different cities …When the one moon is seen in Seoul, it is the moon in Seoul. When it appears in New York, it is the moon in New York. There is only one moon. The moon in America is the moon in Korea, and the moon in Korea is the moon in China. There is only one moon, but this one moon appears in different cities. Therefore, it is correct to speak of the moon in a certain city. It is the same with the church.[92]

The moon here is packed full with significance: it is the hope of enlightenment, unity, and permanence in dark, fragmented, unpredictable times. Moreover, if the roundness of the moon and mooncakes signify cosmic family unity in traditional Taiwan, I do not think it is so far-fetched that the eucharist in the church in Taiwan plays an analogous role for communicants. The eucharist, a round wafer, is a connecting node between the different scales of church meeting members attend. However, I am precisely not arguing, as others have done for other groups, that eating the eucharist "signifies" the church as a global-local, cosmic entity. Though it may well do this, for some in the church. Rather, it seems more accurate to me to say that, in Taiwan, to eat the wafer is, potentially, to taste the flavour of the church community. Gone here is the early twentieth century emphasis in the church on suffering, death, overcoming and millenarian perfection. The accent in the church in Taiwan is much more presentist: the church itself provides, here-and-now, what life beforehand did not. Eating the moon-like eucharist wafer here, *is* cosmic reintegration.

However, there are problems in the church now, as there were then. In amongst the Taipei's sounds and sensations, church members claim to oneness often involves a delicate dance with the city. On the one hand, city forms seem to intrude upon church members lives, they manifest a difference from the church which, for many, is repellent. Such was the case with the beaming golden Buddha, that 'old brother Yu' and I walked past as he shook his head at the ground muttering "terrible, terrible",

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[92] *Vital Factors for the Recovery of the Church Life,* Chapter 4, Section 3, accessed on 19/09/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=3FB9F74941.

despite the fact that his whole family is Buddhist! This intrusion was not only that of a gleaming golden thing, but of a familiar entity of which this thing was an instance. The Buddha statue was both an object in its own right and an unexpected sensory extension of the "thing" that plagues old brother Yu's life: "Buddhism". Likewise, the fumes of cars and burning spirit money, perfumes of passers-by and incense, the fragrance of coffee shops, market stalls, and open doors, the stench of dried drains and a shrinking river, invades our bodies whether we want them too or not. The many forms of Jingmei pervade our stomachs, noses and souls as much as they set the scenes of our everyday lives. They can pull us in too many directions at once, or in directions we loath to go.

Where sensory effusion was embraced by some, for many church members it was an affront. As we rode the skytrain out over the east side of the city, one Shanghainese friend said that Taipei reminded her of the dreary pastel paintings of an Italian modernist I'd never heard of. The aesthetic mood on the phone screen she showed me indeed captured something of the city's fascinating dullness. I, and others I met, found a unique charm in old Taipei's dull, shambled monotony. Nevertheless, monotonous it is, and the garish, dragon-topped temples scattered throughout the city are refreshing aesthetic relief, to some at least. To brother Chen's parents, who I often walked around with, they were more threatening than relieving. They complained about the cancerous effects of the smoke, smirked at my comments of appreciation and loathed to accompany me into their golden, dingy interiors. It is not only the unity of the church that is treasured. It is the particular aesthetic qualities of that unity which are embraced. Things whose qualities radically differ from those of the church, qualities which, in Meirong's words from the previous chapter, give a particular "feeling", are rejected for that reason before any other.

On the other hand, the Taipei landscape reveals parts of church members they might otherwise lose. Urban sensory invasions are also familiar and make Taipei-ers feel at home here without them completely knowing why. This is easier to realise once they, and the places they have grown entwined with, are separated for a while. Such is the case for my friend, brother Chen, who was born here and first introduced me to the family with whom I live. He now lives in the UK, but when he comes to visit, we wander around and he almost weeps in longing for the city that encompasses us. Through glass walls we vicariously taste steaming hotpots, dim-sum dishes and salty bowls of noodle soup. He is reunited with elements of himself that he'd half forgotten.

As we take scooter rides together he and others point to the tastiest joints- the ancient bubble tea stand on Xindian lane with its eternal queue; the shrimp cake store down a nameless alley; to where they used to work- that nondescript office block on Wenshan road or the gargantuan army barracks in Neihu district; to a scooter repair shop, with the well-known owner lounging inside it; or to the secret residence of an ex-Prime Minister; to the school ground near the Yang-Xie home, where they used to play. These sights conjure up remembered tastes, faces and tales, crystallised in the narratives that would often follow our driving past them. The dishes, sights and stories that the "brothers and sisters" are keen for me and other visitors to experience are what in part compose "Taiwan" for them. It is disheartening if these flavours and images are not recognised as unique to this place: faces drop when we visitors suggest we've already come across them elsewhere, we are denying the special contributions these edible aspects of our hosts' sense of self have made to a shared world. So, while the church, like mooncakes and the karaoke-singer's moon, was a mode of cosmic reintegration, it ultimately came at a paradoxical cost: relinquishing the cosmos from which one felt estranged in the first place, and the modes of identification that came with it.

Brother Chu's parents were from Guangdong. They were part of Chiang Kai-shek's fleeing entourage in the late 1940s. He is a high-ranking army officer. His entire career has been focused around preparing for a mainland attack, which is strongly related to Taiwan's majoritarian dream of being recognised as a national entity in its own right. He is rather incensed when, as we walk along a pebbly beach during a break in our trip around Taiwan, with a couple from China and a couple from North America, he picks up a large flat stone to show brother Huang and his wife, sister Yan, from Fuzhou. "What is it?" brother Chu asks. "I don't know, a stone?", replies brother Huang, looking to his wife in perplexity. "Look! At the shape", brother Wang says, getting exasperated, "what does it remind you of?". "Err, I can't think...", "a leaf?" sister Yan offers hopefully. We have stopped walking now and brother Chu looks around for support. There is a group of young girls sitting by a basketball court, watching their male friends play. "Meimei!" (an affectionate term meaning younger sister or relative) brother Chu calls to one of them, limping over with his bad leg, with determination. She walks towards him and he offers her the stone, "what does the shape of this stone remind you of?" he asks. She cocks her head and swiftly replies "Taiwan!". Brother Chu throws up his hands in combined relief and annoyance.

In the more controlled confines of the church, Taiwan enjoys greater recognition than it generally does on the international stage outside them. The fact that there were thirty-thousand 'brothers and sisters' gathered together for the Chinese-speaking international conference at Taipei arena and

not at Beijing stadium places Taiwan, not China, at the heart of the Chinese-speaking world that really matters. In the church exhibition centre, on Xinyi road, all the key localities of the church are labelled on a huge map of the world. All have church "training centres". Anaheim, California; Malabon, Philippines; Moscow, Russia; Hamilton, New Zealand; Jakarta, Indonesia; Seoul, Korea; London, England; Bangkok, Thailand; Subang Jaya, Malaysia; Mexico City, Mexico; Hong Kong; Tokyo, Japan. 'Taipei, Taiwan' is labelled "a nursery for the spread of the Lord's Recovery". In the church-world, Taiwan is the origin-place of everywhere. Through the church, Taiwanese members, in a sublimated way, re-centre their nation on a world stage (Feuchtwang 2014). Nonetheless, in joining the church-world, Taiwan is still not recognised by church members from outside it with the same kind of feeling as it is by fellow Taiwanese. In this sense, as with brother Chen living in the UK and his parents' distance from "traditional Taiwan", the original alienation from the city many feel prior to joining the church is both alleviated, through participation in the churchlife, and exacerbated, through joining a world that does not recognise Taiwan apart from its being in the church. A desire for reconnection with *the* world becomes a concern for the oneness of *a* world, which further detaches one from the world one originally sought to reconnect with.

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In the last section, I sought to differentiate the church in Taiwan from the church elsewhere. In this section I describe the Taiwanese Christian context in which we might understand the distinctiveness of the church in Taiwan, not only from the church in Nee's time and in Western localities, but from other Taiwanese Christianities. Here I note both a comparatively shared orientation to being Christian in Taiwan, and, the orientations to being Christian specific to the church in Taiwan. The first encounter I describe, which helped shift my attention towards an alternative significance to being Christian in Taiwan than I had assumed, was with a man that my friend, sister Wu, referred to as the "Rear Admiral". He is a man she deeply admires and looks to for all the answers. He doesn't have time for church meetings, but he does meet up with me now and again for dinner[93]. He is a contentious figure. My local elder, brother Li, who is a Second Lieutenant, blames him for sister Wu's- also a Second Lieutenant- rejection of the church. He often tries to prevent me from seeing him too, lest I am also drawn away. The Rear Admiral (RA) is certainly charismatic. Elder Li doesn't doubt that he speaks a lot of truth, however brother Li does

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[93] See Appendix I for a sample of our written correspondence.

strongly disagree with the RA's penchant for speaking truth anywhere and to anyone. There is a time and a place, brother Li says.

Being a converted atheist, I found that spending so much time amongst church uttering the word "God" (*shen*) and its synonyms ("Jesus" (*yesu*), "the lord" (*zhu*), "Christ" (*jidu*), "the spirit" (*ling*), "the Body" (*shenti*)), left me, after a while, with a sense of rather suffocating nihilism. The repetition of this word, 'God', and its synonyms, which, for me, referred to something non-existent, started to weigh on me. So, I came up with my own referent, such that the utterance of these terms might "mean" something significant to me[94], as a person, rather than (only) as an anthropologist. I came to understand "God" to refer to a particular kind of relation to the world around: an attentiveness and openness to one's situation as a potential ground of otherness from which to figure oneself[95]. This is a version of "panentheism" rather than "pantheism": "God" is *potentially* rather than *actually* everywhere, depending upon how one approaches things.

I explained this idea to the RA, after he said that his conversion to Christianity had meant attending to God's influence through any possible avenue around him. My explanation had at the same time been empathetic to this and a riposte to it: didn't commitment to the Christian God severely curtail, in practice, the avenues through which "God" might be encountered? The RA's account, begun a while later, showed up the experiential vacuity of my idea. His "testimony", tears and all, showed me that "God", if we are to understand this phenomenon from others' perspectives, cannot be reduced to a life logic, no matter how dynamic the formula. God has an effect and flavour within "believers' " lives which is fundamentally non-generalisable (see Orsi 2007). "God" is often a character rather than an idea.

I had just been interviewing Jianghui, a middle-aged receptionist at the RA's barracks, who had become very upset recounting the death of her father which sparked her acceptance of Christianity. The RA's speech was perhaps a merciful way of redirecting attention away from his sobbing friend. "I was born in Changhua province" he began,

> "And somehow, maybe 15 years old, I decide to, you know, [go] far away from home, and er, to attend
> the preliminary military school. I choose [becoming a] soldier as my path, my career. So, at that time,

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94 See Engelke & Tomlinson 2006 for an anthropological genealogy of the Christian need for "meaning".
95 See Miller 2013 and Shortt 2016 for comparable theologies.

I…was wholly independent, away from home, away from my parents and then you know one guy, one guy, not tall, [a] small thing, and a group which emphasized on strong ['strength'] and discipline and something like that, and that raised me for the whole career, even until now. So again, I have some question about God and if what I learned in my career, and what I learned in my career, [that] I must be good, I must be strong, and disciplined, I must be a general or Admiral, or, and [show] strong leadership, [be] smart and, er, [act] with great capability, power, authority. So, you can achieve your goal.

And that's how WE, not even just soldiers, you know, the whole society, we use that way to you know try to set up our own value. Y'know, that's a kind of self-discovery journey, because I was so far from home. And I saw some individuals, y'know they feel free- not like soldiers, so disciplined, who always take the communal opinions as the first priority, they [the individuals, were] always concerned about their selves. They always emphasize "I have the freedom", "I'm talented", "I want to do [things] in my [own] way, not your way, not the mob way". Y'know "oh" I saw something different, [I saw] some guys different[ly], and, gradually, I noticed "oh that so-so their whole society, even the human being we can … easily divide it into two parts". I call it conservatism and liberalism: Some pursue their own way, some emphasize the individual performance, and SOME "okay, I have to comply with the social protocols, social, yknow, rules", and [they're] trying to, yknow, make everybody satisfied.

And then ok I can build satisfied, oh, I'm building up, and that's soldiers, they always consider about others first. But and me… very peculiar but somehow… I saw one thing- even in that way, we in that way define ourselves- and I thought oh actually they have the same quality, maybe even approaches, two different approaches, but the same quality. They are BOTH self-centred. They are BOTH self-discovery. They are both self-salvation. So, I found one thing, oh, oh that is the whole situation of the human being. But again, STILL, [I] question[ed] about God. Because you have to obey, y'know all these churches tell us-you have to obey God, God will bless you. You obey God, God will give you what you want. Then, somehow, I dig into myself- if I obey God, God bless me, if I obey God, God will give what I want. Then? Okay, who is God?

Who is the Lord? I'm Lord, not God. Because I do this, so you have to give me something. To compensate MY efforts, to compensate MY words, so aalllll the good moralities, aalll the good things become evil. Why? Because I use that to manipulate everyone. You see I'm a soldier? ('yes') Now I'm a Rear Admiral? Always can dominate different kinds of people, different kinds of things. And trying to show, ok you can see, ok that's all MY [inaudible]. I EARNED it. I EARNED my respect. I EARNED your trust. I EARNED God's blessing. Finally, while I saw Jesus, while Jesus on the cross, he said "my God, my God why have you abandoned me?" My God? In that situation you still call God YOUR God? That means he comply every word of God, and God said to Him "yes I'm your God but you obey me and this time I will crush you" [crushes his fist in his hand]. "You obey me and this time [crys], I won't stand with you", "You obey me [voice wobbling] and this time I will banish you from heaven to hell". But even in that time Jesus say "MY God…". Do you know this "My God" this very important thing, I cannot say anyone

"My wife" I cannot say to Jianghui, say to Jiaxing [sister Wu] "hey you're my wife", that's IMpossible, because we have UNIQUE relations, INTIMATE relations, and even in that time, I saw a man, a true man, who claimed "I have the truth, I obey God only you are my God, I obey God only because I love you, I obey God no matter what you have done to me, I obey God because I love the people you love, OK?"

So, while he's on the cross he says, "Father forgive them". WHAT? I abuse you, I mock on you, I reject you, I beat you, I use every mean method to torture you, and even, in the end, I CRUcify you. But, even at that moment, he praaay for us [crying] "forgive them... [croaky, hoarse voice] ...for they do not know what they have done". Look, that's against the human basic instinct. That's against my knowledge, against my knowledge about God, about human.

So at that time, I know one thing, I have no such life as Jesus have. So, I know one thing. THAT's real life. THAT's the life God want[s] to give us. Notwithstanding, not abuse, not condemn anyone, but willing to give Himself (the RA is battling against a particularly noisy restaurant), sacrifice His glory, sacrifice His life, just because he wants us to reconcile with our Heavenly Father. Just because he wants us to have THAT life, because that's the real way in which people and people, we can reconcile. That's the real way we can never despise anyone, THAT's the real way, that's the truth, with tolerance! That's why I believe Jesus, that's why I understand Jesus, I, I understand THOUGHT, I understand the behaviour because [its] not only what I like or not, it's not my favourite, it's not my emotion, it's reality. It really, He DID be crucified by us. That's really touching.

So I know, I know one thing. Now, I have to change my motives, not because I want to- tell everyone "Ok I comply all the moralities, all the rules, all the laws, so I can do something"- No! Because they are good to me. Because of what Jesus has done, I have the confidence, because the great thing is [that] the confidence is not from me, not from myself, but from God. From His grace. From the sacrifice of Jesus, and you have to understand, that kind of God will never abandon me. That kind of God will not... That kind of God wants to give us His life. And to share that kind of life to all kinds of people because that's the only way we can destroy the fame of the human beings. Because we never treat anyone like Jesus did us. That's the truth [cries], that's all, I accept Jesus. Again, I like [that] you question about God, question about his almighty, question about His goodness. And in Jesus I saw all the answers."

The RA is deeply impressed by the Christian story. He stresses an individual identification with Christ, recognising however that while both the latter and he himself are powerful, he (the RA) struggles to experience the same humility as Christ, struggles to interact with others as ends in themselves. He is proud of his status but sees that pride as a cultural trait, which in fact makes him the same as others- true power comes with a Christ-like humility. Unlike Christ's, his power is built upon him reminding people of it on a daily basis. Moreover, unlike Christ's his is a borrowed power, the power of military bureaucracy. He feels that it is only Christ who can truly recognise him for

what he is, aside from his social position, and through the story of Christ's sacrifice he vicariously tastes his own irreducible uniqueness. He often disparages any authority which does not come from himself or Christ, he speaks strongly against Christian conformity. He is not only condemned by those in the Local Church but banned from speaking in his own church. Agamben defines love in the following way:

> Love is never directed toward this or that property of the loved one (being blond, being small, being tender, being lame), but neither does it neglect the properties in favor of an insipid generality (universal love): The lover wants the loved one *with all of its predicates*, its being such as it is. The lover desires the *as* only insofar as it is *such* - this is the lover's particular fetishism (1993:2).

It may not be far-fetched to think that the RA would agree with the idea that Christ, for him, is the ideal lover. In the same way that Jesus loved his father, and loved his persecutors, apparently without hope of anything in return, the RA feels love from Christ- neither individual nor generic-, and he hopes to love others with that same kind of love.

It is not easy to do this however, when the rest of "society", as the RA tells us, is not signed up for this kind of loving relationship with one another. Moreover, the RA cannot treat others aside from his own, self-consideration if he is to remain a Rear Admiral, a position he is undoubtedly proud of. It seems that his main Christian activity is teaching a few of his subordinates every day in his barracks while everyone else is midday napping. Having been in contact with sister Wu now for over two years, it seems that she too is drifting in the direction of itinerancy. No church seems to meet the high bar of expectancy the RA has set for her. We will see that this is a very different kind of Christianity to those within the church in Taiwan. But it is only different by degree. While the Rear Admiral was attuned to the unique flavour of himself as an individual, and his relationship with God, church members are attuned to the church as a unique social being. But both the RA and Jingmei's church members are attracted by the emergent flavour of being that their Christianity provides access to, both seek a form of sociality which is pure participation and not a means to (selfish) ends. Let us turn to another figure, whom I present as intermediary between the church and the RA in his life-focus. His (English) name is "Victory".

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On humid afternoons I go for a swim at the university pool on Shida road. An hour of invigorating freedom from the hassles and anxieties of urban fieldwork. The tiles beneath the cool water are yellow, making it look rather dirty but feel more womb-like than do the blue pool floors I am used to. After it rains, I and other swimmers dodge droplets, which sparkle in the sunlight shining through huge murky windows, as they fall with a thousand "plip"s into the water below: an almost magical atmosphere as one backstrokes through lanes rippling with the motions of others. As I watched my reflection towelling himself down in the mirrored changing room wall one day, a sixty-two-year-old man with thinning wet hair introduced himself, in English, as "Victory". He asked if I believed in Jesus. When I replied in Chinese that I didn't but was very interested in Christianity in Taiwan, he excitedly invited me- given that it was Christmas time- to a carol singing service at his church that Saturday evening. After the church of Presbyterianism (*zhanglaohui*) and the Local Churches (*difang jiaohui*), Victory's church, *Ling Liang Tang* (or "Bread of Life Church" in English), is the largest in Taiwan (Swanson 1981; 1986; Chao 2006). The church in Jingmei's "responsible one", brother Yiqi's, wife attends this church, which is a source of ongoing strife within the household, as did her brother, who lives with them, before he switched to the "more sociable" church in Taipei. Like the latter, *Ling Liang Tang* is an "independent Chinese church" (Rubinstein 1991). Unlike them however, they celebrate Christmas and engage in many recognisably Charismatic-evangelical practices. So, I thought this a good opportunity to understand the church in Taiwan from the perspective of a local rival.

That Saturday I found Victory waiting outside his church for me. He is snappily dressed in jacket, trainers, jeans and an open-necked shirt. His white-grey hair is smooth against his almost-bald head. His face is friendly, and chiselled, wearing a slight smirk. *Ling Liang Tang* has an impressive facade, it looks like a Ritz-Carlton hotel, and overlooks Taipei's Central Park. Inside, the stage looks bigger than the seating area surrounding it. This is very different from my informants' meeting halls: the ceiling is high, there are colourful posters and images dotted around and, unlike the business-attire of the church in Taipei, the congregation is dressed smart-casually as if going to the theatre. The pastor leading the service is female, not uncommon in Taiwanese evangelical churches in my experience (see also Tong & Yang 2017). Stagecraft is explicitly embraced in the synchronised outfits of the choir, and in the decorations, which frame the performance. It is not until the following morning, when I attend a regular Sunday service with Victory, that I begin to see connections between the church in Taipei and *Ling Liang Tang*.

In an intimate interview after the service, Victory demonstrated for me again the tangible atmosphere of God, which had filled him with such passion that morning. He conjured it up by singing "hallelujah" over and over, and speaking in tongues, right there and then across the lunch table we sat at, outside the church. This branch was *Ling Liang Tang*'s original and largest building, sitting atop a steep suburban hill, it looked more like a social housing project than a hotel. During the service, I watched Victory dancing to his own rhythm in the aisles. He sang without words mostly as, his eyes being closed, he didn't see them projected onto the screen. He was euphorically encompassed in wordless holy communion.

Back outside, our dumpling soup and black bean pudding bowls cleared away, he showed me the mechanics of this atmospheric conjuration in miniature. God, as atmosphere, is a self-enclosing envelope which Victory points to: "see?" he asks. I nod, almost feeling it but too self-conscious to climb into what he is showing me. Still, it is obvious that Victory is moved by something affectively tangible which I don't have the tools to tune into. If this is the archetypal religious experience for Victory, the conversation that followed it demonstrated the efficacy of this atmospheric God in his life. Following on from the theme of the sermon we had just heard, in which the pastor prophesied that God would use the church to make Taiwan great again, Victory told me, switching between English and Mandarin, of his theory of the predestined role of Taiwan in God's global plan[96]. Displaying a classically "Chinese" attention to homophony[97], he said we should think of Taiwan as "Tie-won". "We are wonners" he said, "because being *tied* to God we have already *won* the victory over this world". "In fact," he continued, "everything in this world is already ours because it was created by our God". Victory was very keen for me to write a book about him and his theory, so that all the world could know of it.

If the Rear Admiral was attuned to Christ's capacity to love without return, and to the uniqueness of his own relationship with Christ, Victory was attuned to the affective-cum-political power of God as an encompassing atmosphere. He was entranced with the capacity of worship to embagginate

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[96] Sometimes, visitors from evangelical Christianity would come to our home meetings and speak of the importance to God of Taiwan alongside other evangelical topics- charity in third-world countries and miracles for instance. Most would politely say amen after every sentence but there was also a discomfort with these topics and the language in which they were couched. Not having met the sister before, once uncle Yang whispers to me mid-way through one such evangelical's first sentence, "she is not from the church, you can tell by the way she speaks".

[97] E.g. the number four is seen as unlucky, as the term for 'four' (*si*) sounds like the term for 'death' (*si*), while the number 8 is seen as lucky, because the term for 'eight' (*ba*) sounds like the term for 'making a fortune' (*fa*).

him in the atmosphere of God (Povinelli 2011). He felt the power of God not as a potential, millenarian hope but as an actual resource, available here-and-now, to lift him and the nation of Taiwan out of the mires of temporality, in which they were both ensconced. Unlike other anthropologists of Christian temporalities, I was not given the impression that the "already/not yet" temporality of God's salvation (Bialecki 2017:37-45) gave Victory a sense of political ineptitude (Guyer 2007; Bialecki 2009). Rather, it enabled him to think and feel beyond his situation, to attune to the spiritual capacity of his nation. His participation in *Ling Liang Tang* gave him the tools for momentary atmospheric attunement to a palliative power. Despite their differences, both he and the Rear Admiral valued God precisely not as a means to an end, but as distinct end in Himself. Divinity for them, in Agamben's (2000) phrase was "a form-of-life", an "atmospheric thing" (McCormack 2018), a distinct power, with an irreducible flavour, a haecceity, of its own. How does the divine in church in Jingmei compare? We turn to them, finally, now.

"Yi!" (*one!*)

clack – clack – thud

"Er!" (*two!*)

clack – clack – thud

"Saaaan!!" (*threee!!*)

clack – clack – thud

"Si!!!" (Four!!!!)

thud – thud – thud

This is the sound of the Jingmei 'church running team' (*zhaohui paodui*) that emerges from a background noise of panting bodies, shuffling shorts and evening traffic, recorded on the phone jiggling up and down in my breast pocket in May 2015. We take it in turns to chant to ten while running in step with each other along the wide banks of *Jingmei* river, under the shadow of its

graffitied flood defences. Doing this several times a week, we feel more like an army corps than an exercise club, which is indeed no accident because elder Li, a Second Lieutenant in the Taiwanese army, is our most enthusiastic member[98]. When we first began running together- and referring to ourselves, with a smile, as 'the church running team'- we were indistinguishable from the stream of other evening runners running along this popular route. Some of us lagged behind, others sprinted ahead, catching up with one another now and again to exchange a word of conversation, exhaustion or encouragement. Gradually however, guided by Elder Li, we learned to run at a shared pace and rhythm, not one set by any particular body but rather composed out of our collective anticipations of our own and one another's combined capabilities. We took it in turns to count the beat of our feet and it so doing composed a collective rhythm which kept us together and moving forward at the same time. Through shared rhythm, we attuned to one another, and in our attunement we recognised one another as forming a common unit.

As mentioned, Elder Li is weary of the Rear Admiral. He has a different understanding of what being Christian is about. He rarely reads the Bible or the ministry outside of church contexts, he tells me, nor does he often pray alone. This does not mean he does not read or pray often- there are always 'brothers and sisters' at his house. He feels it his responsibility, not to pursue an individual relationship with God, but to help maintain the corporate divinity of the church in Jingmei. Once, for instance, we sat in the municipal sauna with a few church brothers, one Chinese, the others Taiwanese. The dark, sweaty vibe drew us into conversation with those non-brothers we were sweating with, about Beijing, it's inconveniences and its pleasures. Suddenly, elder Li asserted awkwardly, "we are Christians!" (*women shi jidutu!*). It had nothing to do with the conversation and killed it instantly. "Why did he say that?" I asked one of the brothers, as we followed brother Li to the changing rooms moments after his outburst. "Beats me" (*wo ye bu zhidao*), the brother replied shrugging his shoulders. During our church runs and trips to the swimming pool, elder Li would work hard to "maintain the Oneness"- making sure we stretched together by the poolside before

[98] Certainly, Elder Li has a lot to do with why we're here. He enjoys exercise and also wants to improve his fitness. Alongside teaching his classes in political warfare, he is currently retraining in preparation for an expected promotion (he feels pressure because his father is a retired general). At the army college where he is studying, he has formed a swimming team with his fellow students. They have been practicing hard for an upcoming intra-college swim tournament. Crowding around his laptop, one evening he proudly shows us of hall 32, group 5 a video, edited by young sister Liu, a film studies student, of the big day. "Look at that pudgy tummy!" (*kana, duzi hen pang*!) sister Xie yells as Elder Li appears on the screen in his swim trunks. "I didn't know monks were allowed in the army!" jokes brother Jin (*jun you heshanga, buzhidaola*!). We laugh, but Elder Li is not amused, he threatens to turn it off, so we stifle our laughter and continue with more respectful expressions of interest and admiration, exchanging only silent smiles and raised eyebrows. After our runs together, Elder Li and I would speak about how good it made us feel. He was very pleased I thought this and would repeat it regularly to the others. "All the thoughts and worries of the soul dissipate as we exercise our bodies" he once said into my voice recording app. Csikszentmihalyi (e.g. 1997) writes of "flow" as a psychological state achieved by artists, musicians and athletes or anyone who becomes immersed in skilful activity. But church members speak of "the flow" as a social, spiritual substance which moves horizontally through those in the room.

jumping in, helping us teach and encourage church members who were less fit and able, keeping us in step through army-style running chants. During church outings, he would also work hard to keep the group as a group, making sure no one wandered off in sub-groups or on their own. Brother Li had a preference for particular scales of gathering. Once I asked him, "do you really feel that the church is the body of God?" he replied, "yes, especially during the mid-sized meetings". In the sauna, feeling responsible for sustaining the presence of the Body, I think elder Li responded with panic to Its fading outlines.

Witness Lee almost directly equates "spirit" and "atmosphere". Here he is speaking at a "training" (*xunlian*) for all church members in Taiwan in the autumn of 1959. The passage of the book in which the message is transcribed is titled "Touching the Spirit of the Meeting". There is a passage in the following chapter which makes very similar points entitled "Touching the Atmosphere of the Meeting". "The spirit" (*ling*) and the "atmosphere" (*qifen*) of a meeting are very close indeed:

> The most important thing in a meeting is to touch the feeling and the atmosphere of the meeting. What are the feeling and atmosphere of a meeting? For example, in a wedding meeting everyone is joyful, and we touch a joyful atmosphere as soon as we enter the meeting. In a funeral meeting, on the contrary, we sense an atmosphere and feeling of grief. These two examples clearly show that the atmosphere of a meeting is something concrete. As long as we have feeling, we should be able to sense the atmosphere.
>
> Every meeting has its own feeling and atmosphere, and we need to learn to touch and take care of this atmosphere. It would be insensible for us to begin weeping when we enter a wedding meeting or for us to sit in a funeral meeting looking cheerful. We should never disregard the feeling and the atmosphere of a meeting.
>
> Although most meetings do not have such a distinct feeling and atmosphere, there is always a feeling and atmosphere in a meeting. No meeting is without a feeling or atmosphere. Therefore, if we want to have a good meeting, we need to learn to touch the feeling and atmosphere of the meeting...[99]

My understanding of the differences between the three Christian figures described in this chapter is one of different orientations to the various potentials within "Christianity"- "a complex object" which has "always carried other selves within it" (Cannell 2006a:43, 26; Bialecki 2012). For the Rear Admiral, his embrace of Christianity was a means of attending to himself and others as unique loci

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[99] *Lessons for New Believers*, Chapter 9, Section4, accessed on 28/07/2019, via www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=3EB6D9E40F.

in the world around. I would not characterise this as individualism per se. Rather, I would argue that he was particularly attuned to "selves" as distinct things in his world. Meetings with him had an intense atmosphere of personal emotivity, a focus on individual struggle and self-narration. Victory was less attuned to himself per se than to the capacity of God to envelope him in powerful atmospherics. These atmospheres, unlike the Rear Admiral's relationship with God, were something we could, to some extent, share. He pointed to the atmosphere his "hallelujahs" had created, as if it were a tangible thing, and to some extent, it was. He was excited by the idea that this semi-tangible power also encompassed and empowered the nation of Taiwan, which he saw as having a special relationship to God. We might understand this as a specific instance of what Nanlai Cao (2012) calls "spiritual nationalism". In contrast, elder Li was concerned with the mid-sized atmospheric of the group itself. He understood himself to be responsible for maintaining the existence of the group under his implicit command.

I think this way of understanding things has great potential methodologically, descriptively, theoretically. Rather than contrasting cultural logics, or ontologies, of collectivism, holism, dividualism, individualism and particularism for instance, we might attend to the situated but potentially large, shared, sustained "object" (we need not use this word) of focus for those we study. We need not be quick to explain this object as a construction of the person or community or culture at hand. We may instead, pay attention to how this object exists for those we study and see if we might experiment with attending to it ourselves. Closs-Stephens, for instance, notes the theoretical implications of attending to the atmospheric "tonalities and intensities" (2015:1) of UK nationalism during the 2012 Olympic games. Not only does this approach extend our understandings of nationalism beyond those of symbolic boundary and identity creation (see also Mookerjee 2011), but it suggests alternative routes for resistance to the powers of nationalism, for those who would seek them.

To return the group at hand, the collected works of Nee and Lee run into the tens of thousands of pages. It is hard to know which aspects of their ministries are significant for their followers. In this chapter, I have outlined one set of methods for discovering such significances, which we will pursue further in the following chapter. While Nee was reported to have been a visionary, a spiritual seer, rather aloof from the congregations he inspired (Hsu 2013:44), Lee is often described as a "master builder"– his focus was pragmatic, holistic, administrative. Attending to the "affective atmospheres" (Anderson 2009) of different church localities and periods, shows us how the power of each

temperament and focus was and is drawn out by different socio-historical contexts at a pre-representational level. Moreover, we can make sense of textual realities in terms of these differing sensorial ones. "It is a big failure for the elders to practice democracy among themselves" Witness Lee is recorded as saying at a training session in Taipei, in 1960. "On the other hand," he continued,

> if there is autocracy within the eldership, and there is only one man giving commands, we also have a worldly situation. The administration in the church is neither a democracy nor an autocracy. It is not the opinion of the people, nor is it the proposal of one...In order to have the coordination, all the elders have to accept authority and to accept the ordering in the authority. Every elder should know where he stands in this order. As an elder, you have to find out among the elders your authority. Coordination in the church is neither a democracy nor an autocracy but a body principle.[100]

We may understand the "body principle" in Taiwan to extend beyond the eldership of the church. The body principle consists of mutual attunement to the recognisable, semi-repeatable, shared atmospheres which characterise life in the church in Taiwan. Although certainly not democratic in any developed sense, there is a certain bodily, poetic democracy involved here. This does not involve putting forward one's thoughts, opinions or knowledge per se, but it does involve a distributed bodily, sensory participation of in the most basic sense. Each feels themselves contributing to a collective, cosmic endeavour[101]. Part of the reason they are able to do so is because the content of what they should do or say is already provided for them, all that is left is a kind of pure, prelinguistic participation. One can see at this level, that rather than primarily providing an eschatological avenue for escape, as in its early days in China and in places today in the West, the church in Taiwan is a nebulous entity of shared participation, and, as such, is, to a certain extent, felt to be a palliative response to the sense of alienation otherwise felt by many in urban Taiwan. While the haecceity of an object of religious devotion is not reducible to its quantitative aspects, we can differentiate, comparatively at least, between the pitch, frequency and scale of the atmospheric object of church members in Taiwan and those of other Taiwanese Christians such as Victory and the Rear Admiral.

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[100] *The Elders' Management of the Church,* Chapter 8, Section 7, accessed on 02/09/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/.cfm?id=2FCFCE0808
[101] Comparable to Tan's (2003) notion of "Confucian democracy".

Chapter Conclusion: A Relational Fieldsite

The method I have presented here is relational. Strathern (1988) argued in her classic Melanesian ethnography, *The Gender of the Gift*, that she was not presenting a "Papua New Guinean" view of reality per se, but that through contrasting Western (feminist) perspectives with the approaches to gender and personhood she encountered in Mount Hagen, her fieldsite, she was eliciting a set of gendered conceptions which were neither "Western" nor "Melanesian", but were emergent from her own West-Melanesian position as a fieldworker. This analytical method paralleled her conception of Melanesian personhood, "dividualism", in which specific social encounters were conceived to "individuate" dividual persons along particular interactional lines (see Holbraad & Pederson 2009). The writing-culture debate produced a flurry of methodological questions about how ethnography might be done with post-colonial sensitivity towards the positions of field sites within the newly foregrounded "world system" (Marcus 1986; 1995). "Multi-sited" ethnography was a predominant methodology to emerge from the debate. However, inspired by Strathern, numerous influential critiques of that method have since been developed.

Anthropologists (Candea 2007; Holbraad 2008; Cook et al. 2009) have argued that multi-sited ethnography still assumes that ethnographic subjects can be completely represented. In contrast, they argue, we should understand that ethnography, like the situated individuation of a dividual, can only ever be partial. The value of ethnography is not as a totalised representation of (part of) the world, but lies its capacity to elicit fresh conceptualisations through ethnographic contrasts which cross-cultural encounters bring to the fore. The problem with this approach, its critics hold, is that in the process of eliciting fresh conceptualisations, at least temporary reifications, between the home culture and the object culture, must be made in order to foreground the productive difference from which the conceptualisations are elicited. This, ironically, perpetuates the rest-West colonial and post-colonial modes of representation which Strathern's method initially sought to elide. My own approach here, perhaps, avoids this tendency because the difference it highlights is internal to the object of study.

Although, in earlier drafts, I tried to represent the church in Taiwan as an entity independent of my own perceptions, ultimately, I found that "showing my working" was potentially valuable, not as a precursor to the ethnographic study, but as a part of it[102]. I have, I hope, made evident, the

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[102] See Dell-Orto 2003 for a comparable approach using narrative to *Tu Di Gong*, the "locality god" of Taiwan.

inescapability of my starting point. For me "the church" is, and has been, an object of self-transformation, be that self Christian or atheist, involved or academic. Nonetheless, in this chapter another way of approaching church-being is glimpsed, one in which church and self are both one and irredeemably two, in a relationship not of dialectical transformation and becoming, but of parallactic being. Within church contexts, church and self are two views of the same thing, beyond them, they are almost entirely different. "When we perceive an object," Sara Ahmed writes, quoting Robert Sokolowski (2000:20), "we do not just have a flow of profiles, a series of impressions; in and through them all, we have one and the same object given to us, and the identity of the of the object is intended and given" (2006:548). She continues, in her own words:

> Given this, the story of the sameness of the object involves the spectre of absence and nonpresence. For despite the self-sameness of the object, I do not see it as self-same. I never see it as such; what it is cannot be apprehended, as I cannot view the table [for instance] from all points of view at once. The necessity of moving around the object, to capture more than its profile, shows that the other sides of the object are unavailable to me at the point from which it is viewed...

The church is such an object. In their paper entitled *What if There is No Elephant? Towards a Conception of an Un-sited Field*, Cook et al. (2009) recount the well-known Buddhist fable of a king who orders all the men in his kingdom who have been blind from birth to each touch a separate part of an elephant and then describe to listeners what they conceive the object they touched to be like. They all give very different descriptions, thus demonstrating the dangers of a partial view of reality. Like the blind men, church participants' sense of what the church is, is shaped by their histories, bodily dispositions and perspectives. Unlike the blind men, they can communicate and use multiple organs to engage the object in question. In contrast to Cook et al., I hold that there is indeed an "elephant" but that it has more dimensions than a single animal, that it is not easily separable from one's own body and person and that perspectives are not exterior but interior to it. The nature of the object in question, like Mount Hageners' sense of personhood, can be inferred by journeying "through" and "beyond" it, not just "around" it. New perspectives are hard-earned, and old ones can never be entirely shed.

The principal means by which these perspectives are highlighted in this chapter are atmospheric. Atmosphere is a burgeoning topic of focus in the social sciences (Anderson 2009; Stewart 2011; Edensor 2012; Bille et al. 2015; McCormack 2018). It is valuable analytically because it is neither a

thing nor a relation, which are the two analytical foci that social scientific analysis has bounced between for over a century (Jiminez 2008; Scott 2013; 2017; Yarrow et al. 2015). Moreover, studying atmosphere cannot be cloaked in objectivist clothing: observers affect atmospheres are much as anyone else and must participate in them if they are to sense what they are like (Anderson & Ash 2015). Focusing principally upon atmosphere, rather than upon discursive content, opens up new possibilities of comparison, which may be less obvious if only discourse were taken into account. With atmosphere, we are forced to considered spectrums rather than binaries of difference (Delanda 2016). Most importantly, I discovered atmosphere (*qifen*) to be a more important aspect of being in the church than I had hitherto realised.

Bille, in a special edition of the journal *Emotion, Space & Society*, relying heavily on the writings of Bohme, the foremost "philosopher of atmosphere", moves beyond the assumption that atmospheres are "subjective facts" (Böhme 1998: 114) to suggest, again quoting Bohme, that they are "spheres of the presence of something" (Böhme 1993: 121-122). Where they have focused explicitly upon atmospheres, anthropologists have generally contrasted their focus upon domestic atmospheres with the staging of public atmospheres analysed by sociologists and architectural theorists (Daniels 2015:47). The home was a key location in which church atmospheres were practiced and experienced in Taiwan, but these were significant also because they were continuous with atmospheres in more public, explicitly global church contexts. These "intimately immense" (Bachelard 1956) atmospheres, I felt, were foregrounded in Taipei, cared for in their own right, for the pleasure of atmospheric connection. They are there too, with different "tastes", elsewhere, but this is the value of the atmospheric endeavour: it draws out aspects of shared phenomena otherwise hidden. The atmospheric grounds in one time and place become the grounds for conceptual configuration in another, these conceptual figures become grounds for atmospheric figuration elsewhere. Attending to such subtle differences may tell us more about a group of people than reading whole volumes of their "leaders" teaching could ever do alone. In the next chapter, we delve further into the intricacies of church-being in Taiwan, this time with a focus upon discontinuity as a vicarious experience.

Chapter 4

The Church as Vicarious Discontinuity: Sincerity, Belief and Being-Witnessed

Spending time with those in Jingmei, I was most surprised, not with what was said and done per se- with the logico-aesthetic integration described in chapter one-, nor with the nonlocal sense of sameness, or the distinctive church atmospheres, described in chapters two and three. These are what we might call "core aspects" of church participation. Rather, I was surprised by the seemingly peripheral, by the moments in-between, after and before church rituals and speeches, by the orientation to the church as a relatively autonomous *aspect* of life, rather than as an encompassment of it. I encountered this orientation as relatively distinct to Taiwan. I was struck there, by the slapstick humour, the surprising emotionality and the explicit performativity which surrounded and pervaded church meetings. While the church's ministry was enunciated and received with relative seriousness and sobriety, there was a surprising discontinuity, and lack of worry with this discontinuity, between this seriousness and the playful behaviour which immediately preceded and followed it.

This seemingly "insincere" (see below) approach to the church's ministry amounted, paradoxically, to a *greater* continuity between life and the churchlife than I had encountered elsewhere. Church meetings were filled as much with irreverent playfulness as they were with serious, explicit adhesion to the church and its messages. The church in Jingmei was effectively an integral part of the wider community. *Intra*-church discontinuities between serious enunciations and unserious playfulness amounted to a continuity between the seriousness and play of life in the church and life in Jingmei, Taipei and Taiwan as a whole. I argue, in this chapter, that the sharp discontinuity between seriously enunciated church words and practices and the playful sociality which surrounds them is deliberately embraced in order to fulfil the aim of keeping the church "alive" as a thing-in-itself. This amounts to a resistance to "sincere" (Keane 2002; 2007) adhesion to the church, which, I explain, would entail an isomorphism between the self and the church, and the erasure of the latter as a distinct object of mutual attention. However, from a more long-term perspective this discontinuity amounts to a continuity between the church and life more generally, thus potentially erasing the distinctiveness of the church beyond the confines of church meetings.

The problem of this micro-discontinuity-becoming-macro-continuity, I argue finally, is solved vicariously. Unlike other Christian groups, conversion (to the church) was not narrated as "a complete break with the past" (Meyer 1998; Engelke 2004b; Robbins 2007; Daswani 2013), but as a gradual replacement of some interests and activities by others. In contrast to this narrated and perceived continuity between life and life in the church with regard to the *self*, there were surprisingly exuberant celebrations of *others'* entry into the church as a discontinuous, either/or phenomenon. This was especially evident in baptism. I understand this attitude to discontinuity as a vicarious one and argue further that this attitude is more widely evident in the prominent role that being witnessed by "church friends" (*zhaohui pengyou*) plays in the church in Jingmei. Through baptism, church members vicariously witness the boundary of the church in the actions of others; through being witnessed by church friends, members become vicariously attuned to the distinctiveness of the church in themselves. That is, there is an experience of marked existential discontinuity via *others'* actions, rather than members' own. I conclude by arguing that these approaches to church membership point towards the neglected role of vicariousness in Christian community, commitment and conversion.

To outline the sections which compose this chapter then: I begin with playfulness in the church in Taiwan. I argue that playfulness serves to maintain the church's object-likeness and complements the church ministry's strong emphasis upon "eating" and "enjoying" over "understanding" and "introspection". I show how the distinctive orientations of church members- serious and non-serious- dynamically interact with one another, to produce a discrete collective product. I relate these orientations to recent work, in the anthropologies of Christianity (Keane 2002; 2007; Bialecki 2011), China (Watson 1985; Zito 1993; Sutton 2007; Katz 2007; Pomeranz 2007) and ritual (Seligman et al. 2008), and in sinology (Moeller & D'Ambrosio 2017), which contrasts sincerity and/or belief with a concern for ritual form (see also Douglas 1978:25-27; Bell 2008). I conclude that many members are in fact anti-sincere, that is they resist isomorphy between their inner states and the language and practices of the church. This leads me to ask whether "belief" is important in the church in Taiwan, and if so, how? I marshal evidence to support the conclusion that a form of belief via baptism is vicariously important (Davie 2007; 2010). This conclusion leads me finally to understand the church's relation to others, including God, in terms of witnessing and vicariousness. I conclude by proposing vicariousness as a potentially useful anthropological concept for

understanding socio-conceptual holism and community, and by relating this proposal to the core theoretical and methodological concerns of the thesis.

…

"We are not serious" sister Chen says to me, as we walk with her son and husband, to a superhero-themed burger joint in Jingmei. "If we were," she laughs, "my husband would never have joined the church!". Her husband, an independent dentist for whom she works as a secretary, laughs too, nodding at me as if to say, "yes, yes, it's true!". This relaxed approach to life in the church was new to me. To a certain extent, the content and style of what was said in meetings was very similar to that which I had encountered at home and in international gatherings years before[103]. What really struck me now however, were the antics that surrounded church meetings, trainings and conferences, and the general orientation to life in the church in Taiwan. I was often surprised by the relaxedness of those around me after hearing a live or recorded "message", or after reading a text, which implored those listening and reading, in so many words, to "act now, with conviction and urgency" (we must "deny ourselves", "deny our culture", "eat Christ", become "one Body" etc). Milling around in the breaks between these messages, or chatting to church members after a reading session, at first, I expected sombre faces, perhaps quiet tones and a reflective mood. More often however, as soon as the video was paused, the speaker stopped speaking or we finished a text, the room would quickly be filled with the sounds of laughter, back slapping-greetings and the rush to the table of food and refreshments that most often accompanied these meetings.

In Jingmei, before and after church meetings, endless joking around took place. "Fuck you!" brother Jin exclaimed with a huge grin at my host sister, during my first church gathering. "You're ugly!" he continued, showing off his English. Patting bottoms and making sex, fat and bald jokes were common currency in Jingmei. Older church brothers teased one another about who was the richest and joked about the fact that social inferiors called them "brother" in church meetings. On our social media group, ministry excerpts, meeting arrangements and little prayers were interspersed with funny, lurid memes to general amusement. There seemed to be a heightened awareness of the

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[103] Although, I did very much enjoy the fresh significances which saying, hearing and singing these things in Chinese opened up. Some bilingual church members complained that the words of 'the ministry' in Chinese were less precise than in English, evoking certain word images which were irrelevant or distracting. This may have been because they had less familiarity with the English language, but I too found an, at times, exciting polysemy in the ministry in Chinese. Words I was overly familiar in English with suggested new interpretations in Chinese.

contrast between the seriousness of church language and habitus and the silliness of the sociality which preceded and surrounded it. One repeated joke punned on the similarity between (male and female) breasts and the shapes of steamed buns (*mantou*) and folded dumplings (*xiaolongbao, jiaozi*).

A less obvious contrast between serious words and a less-than serious orientations to them, was evident within church rituals themselves. After reading a church text or hearing a message, as mentioned before, there is a time for "sharing". There was often a bustle of excitement over who would speak, friends poked and prodded one another to stand up and say something. Reluctance to say anything was met with a church elder pointing to random church members, telling them to get up and speak. This often induced laughter from others, over their blushing church brother or sister. (I was frequently surprised, however, that despite the initial reluctance to speak, as soon as they were picked by an elder, members gushed out with things to say, almost as if they had been waiting to be picked like this.) A similar nervous excitement accompanied the practice of singing. The church is well known for repeating the same song over and over, a practice encouraged by Witness Lee. A song is usually sung through once, all together. Then it is sung with "sisters" singing one verse and "brothers" singing the next. While one group is singing, the others "pray-read" the verse, standing up in little clusters, often pushing outwards with their fists, speaking the words with loud enthusiasm over the singing of the same lines. Then verses and lines are split by demographic, being divided between age or occupational sets. This practice is found everywhere in the church and the result is a lively, cacophonous atmosphere of controlled spontaneity (Mahmood 2001). In Taipei, an elder would often choose a single individual to sing a verse while the rest of the group encouraged them, pray-reading the verse alongside the singer. The anticipation over being chosen for this was palpable.

When church members were actually "sharing" they did so with utmost seriousness, with loud "amen"s punctuating every sentence. Often, I found that those shouting "amen" the loudest were not in fact paying much attention, they were swiping through their phone or carrying on a conversation. Thus, the general feel of church meetings was one of rapid oscillations between seriousness and giddiness, sobriety and childlike joy, indifference and enthusiasm. They felt like serious games, or better, like serious events with an ever-present playful fringe. The events in which the rather serious-seeming words of the church ministry were uttered and received, I came to understand, were not taken as information-gathering sessions to be acted upon, but as instances, particular textures and aspects, of the "church-life". The words of the "leading brothers" during

conferences and trainings, and of the texts of Nee and Lee, were not, it seemed to me, taken primarily as blueprints or guides for how to live. Rather, the serious bits of church meetings were often treated as a kind of bland, repetitive ritual core which made the time spent before and after church meetings all the more flavoursome and fun.

…

The seriousness of church discourse seemed to provoke a silliness in church sociality and vice versa. While this may appear an unorthodox[104] approach from one angle, in fact it is rather in line with Witness Lee's own approach to language. In the summer of 1978, he spoke the following to a crowd of church members in Boston, Massachusetts,

> The biggest frustration to understanding the Bible is trying to understand it. This thought may contradict our concept. We may think that when we read the Bible, the purpose is to understand it. There is certainly nothing wrong with understanding the Bible, but trying to understand it is a great mistake. We simply need to read the Bible; we do not need to try to understand it. The more we try to understand, the more we will not understand.[105]

The reader may be surprised at my surprise that between serious bits and before and after meetings there was so much playfulness. If we follow Huizinga's (1949) famous thesis, there is a "play element" at the heart of all culture and this play element is at the root of all religious activity. Growing up in the church, playfulness of course was an element of life in the church. The difference between then and the church in Jingmei, is that in the latter playfulness is prominent (among adults as much as children) and is valued. Teasing among adults, and fondness for particular kinds of music or alcohol are kept relatively hidden in the church in the UK, Europe and North America, for fear of "stumbling" the other "saints". Indeed, Nee himself discouraged dancing, alcohol consumption, cinema-going, mah-jong-playing and non-church music [106]. However, Lee's words above suggest that a

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[104] In this section I do not use the terms "un/orthodoxy" theologically but ethnologically: I am arguing that although the playfulness of church members may seem initially (to me) to disregard the content of the church ministry (to be "unorthodox") in fact it enacts the very spirit of those words rather than adhering to them "sincerely" (see below) (so it is "orthodox").

[105] *Crucial Principles for the Christian Life and the Church Life,* Chapter 2, Section 5, https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=3556FA0C00, accessed: 20/08/2019.

[106] E.g. The *Collected Works of Watchman Nee (Set 3), Vol. 50: Messages for Building Up New Believers (3),* Chapter 1, Section 7, accessed no 28/09/2019 via www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=24EBADD986.

contemplative, or even a *sincere (*see below*),* attitude to church messages and texts would be to try too hard to understand them. As Lee goes on to say, all one needs to do is keep "eating" and "reading" the words of the Bible habitually and one "will always receive something spontaneously". "What we receive does not depend on us or our effort," he says, but on the Lord's "timing". An effortful adherence to the words of the church ministry, we may infer, would be not be conducive, from one perspective, to the church's aims. According to the latter, Biblical words, for instance, ought less to be "understood" than to be "spontaneously" significant[107].

However, it is not only that *trying* to understand is detrimental to understanding but that a specific understanding of understanding *itself* is evident in the way Lee uses language. In a "Christian Research Journal'" edition (2009) dedicated to reassessing Witness Lee and "the local churches", the authors, who a few decades before had labelled the group a "cult" and Lee a "heretic", list a series of "misunderstandings" which had led to their previous conclusions. One of them is Lee's use of language:

> Lee's heritage was Eastern, not Western, and consequently did not reflect the rational, didactic, Aristotelian exposition familiar to us, causing us to suspect theological error rather than mere cultural difference. This practice of using paradox and/or significantly postponing clarification—neither to be confused with irrationality, incoherence, or mere relativism—is common in Eastern thinking and in earlier periods of Western writing, but has been virtually erased in contemporary American writing (Passantino 2009:49).

We need not take this East-West contrast too seriously, but it does point to the possibility that both Lee and church members in Taiwan today understand "truth" (*zhenli*) as residing not in words themselves, but rather in the specific gaps in language revealed through the techniques of "paradox and/or significantly postponing clarification". These gaps point beyond language itself (Tseng 1997) to the parallactic realities of the church, as both divine and human, organised and organic, subjective and objective. While Lee does this through paradoxical phraseology, church members do this through their oscillations between attitudes of silliness and sobriety.

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[107] Spontaneity, the reader may be thinking, is a feature of sincerity, but, I hold, this not necessarily the case: spontaneity may be as conducive to producing a particular kind of atmosphere as it is to a 'sincere' expression of one's thoughts or feelings. See below.

The non-seriousness of church members then, does not necessarily equate to a lack of commitment, it may even equate to a commitment to "logophagy" over "sincerity"[108]. The words of the Bible and the Church ministry are to be "eaten" rather than "understood". "You don't analyse your food before you eat it do you? No, you just eat it": I have heard this line many times in church circles. As one devotee proclaimed at a church meeting, "I realised that my problem was not with sin, or the self, or the world, but with eating. All my problems are solved when I just eat this ministry, when I eat the Lord!". A favourite children's song rejoices in "eating Jesus every day" declaring, "He's so sweet!". Another song sings of "masticating Jesus", while another is ominously titled "Some, these days would tell us that our Jesus is not food". Witness Lee referred to the church, at times, as "the recovery of eating"[109].

"Eating Christ" is very much an emphasis which emerged under Lee's leadership and it is closely tied to his shift away from Nee's emphasis on "suffering" towards a focus upon "enjoyment". The playfulness of church members surrounding the apparent seriousness of church words then, treats language as Lee himself treated language: as something to be eaten and enjoyed rather than pondered and understood. In Watchman Nee's first and most famous book, *The Spiritual Man* (*shuling ren*), begins with a precaution. "One thing we must guard against:", Nee writes,

> we should never use the knowledge we acquire from this book as an aid in analyzing ourselves. If in God's light we see light, we shall know ourselves without losing our freedom in the Lord. But if all day long we analyze ourselves, dissecting our thoughts and feelings, it will hinder us from losing ourselves in Christ. Unless a believer is deeply taught by the Lord he will not be able to know himself. Introspection and self-consciousness are harmful to spiritual life (1968:12).

Even more so for Lee than Nee, words are principally a means of *being* God, not of understanding or communicating with Him. Initially seeming like simply a lack of commitment to the official purpose of the group, a few months down the line I saw playfulness in Jingmei differently. "Many people did not like brother Lee because they thought he was too serious", old brother Yu said to me as I helped him around the National Taiwan Museum. "In fact, he was very playful, not serious at all" he continued, "like brother Yang [uncle Yang]- he has this same playful characteristic".

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[108] See Appendix F for a comparative take on "logophagy".

[109] Such as in Taipei, in January 1972: *The Lord's Recovery of Eating,* accessed on 28/09/2019, via www.ministrybooks.org/books.cfm?id=2AEEADDE89.

Comparing brother Yang to brother Lee was intended as a great compliment. Brother Yu saw this playfulness as a sign of great spiritual maturity.

We might infer then, that playfulness is a means of keeping church words object-like and edible, and the church life "spontaneous" and "organic"[110]. The deliberative contrasting between church texts and the social contexts which surround them maintains the church as a thing-like aspect of members' lives. In doing this, church words are configured alongside church bodies and paraphernalia to maintain the atmospheres of enjoyment by which members feel connected both to one another and to the wider church-world. This equates too, to a resistance to sincerity, that is to an isomorphism between oneself and the church. While many church leaders, in the spirit of Nee, emphasise a process of "perfection" through persistently "eating" "the Word" and "the ministry", I understood a different notion of eating to be at work in the church circles I became familiar with in Taiwan. On Sunday afternoons in Jingmei, after a two-hour church meeting, church members would sit for hours together, sipping tea, munching snacks, chatting intermittently. We sat around a table perpetually topped up with tea and food, some falling asleep for a while then waking up, re-joining the drifting conversation as if no interruption had occurred.

Church words in Jingmei, like food in these instances, were treated as a mode of arrangement rather than a means of filling oneself up[111]. Here, it is not necessarily true that "you are what you eat". Certainly, church words are not appreciated in Jingmei for their capacity to express the inner states of speakers. If anything, church language is appreciated for its capacity to *prevent* the expression of inner states. When I asked elder Li how the churchlife had benefited his family life, he said that whereas before he and his wife were always swearing (*ma*) at one another, which led to terrible arguments, learning the language of the church and becoming an elder, with church members always in his home, prevents them today from using that kind of language. The church is a stopgap in his life which prevents the worst of him and his wife from being expressed. That a gap between oneself and the church is somewhat valued by members became evident in one interview with our local "responsible one", brother Yiqi, elder Li's right-hand man. He asked with a smile if I noticed that he did not pray in exactly the same way as the "other brothers" prayed. He was quietly proud of this small difference between himself and the group he was a part of.

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[110] We explore the Daoist resonances of this approach below.

[111] See Appendix F for more on "eating as arrangement", in the Confucian tradition.

I noted then, a certain valuation of a church-self distinction. When church members shared with one another what they were enjoying from whatever it was we were reading together, as noted in chapter two, there was a discernible pattern to their sharings. They would often begin with some issue in their lives, before going on to show how that message of that which we were reading became a living solution to that issue. However, while the direction of people's narratives goes towards closer identification with the church, the fascination of their stories is related to the unique mishaps, failures and trials that lead up to this narrated re-incorporation. (Often the speaker would lose the "spiritual" point of what they were saying and simply recount the anecdote in great length and detail, the "amens" gradually dying out, to the fascination of some and the annoyance of others). This pattern of sharing simultaneously brings out the singularity of the sharer and their existence as a living example of the truth of the shared church ministry. Playfulness, as I came to understand it, was a collective form of this simultaneous resistance to the complete encompassment of church members within the life-logic of the church world and orientation to the church as an entity-like thing of which they are parts[112].

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The significance of play in and around church meetings depends on contrast: contrast between serious church messages and texts and the sociality that surrounds them, but also between church members who embody that seriousness and those who resist it. One Sunday afternoon in Jingmei, we aligned ourselves on two sides of a dispute between our elder's mother and brother Jin, a playful, Korean-born businessman in his sixties at the centre of every church mischief. Sparks flew when I'd asked whether it was best to have grown up within the church or to have come in from outside it. Brother Jin replied confidently that one should be "at least forty-five" before joining the church, to have lived life, become one's own person. It was shameful to be doing the same things as one's parents as a young adult, he said. I couldn't help thinking my host father, a prominent church elder, would have agreed. He was born to church-going parents, but he is proud of the fact that he himself

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[112] I was struck too by the emphasis on performativity in Jingmei. After a "video training" session for example prizes were handed out for attendance, with rounds of applause for each winner called to receive their prize. Western attendees to the New Year conference I described in chapter two, were overwhelmed with the quality of the various performances given in the intervals between delivered messages by elders and co-workers. Very frequently children were brought in to the main room of a church meeting to perform for delighted adults who took endless streams of photographs. At the end of each year segments from church localities around the city take turn to perform a rehearsed set-piece for everyone gathered in local church halls. This performativity, as I now interpret it, is part of a heightened sense of the church as a thing-in-the-world, or better, a world among worlds. The outlines of the church, unlike those of individual church lives, were celebrated rather than being merged into life as a whole.

did not join until he was forty years old. Sister Li however was outraged. "Forty-five!!" she exclaimed, "how can you say it is best to be in the world when we have the option of the church?!" she continued, and "once we have seen the vision, how can we leave?!".

From the vast oeuvres of Watchman Nee and Witness Lee one can extract more than one set of ideas about the significance of the church and life within it. This latent multiformity of the church's ministry would lay dormant without contrasting personalities to draw out its different aspects. Sister Li's is an uncompromising Christian fundamentalism with a crystal-clear vision of how a church member should act, what she should read, where she should go and who she should spend time with. From another perspective however, embodied in brother Jin's playful naughtiness, the whole point of the church, for "God", is to be a prism of human difference through which the self-sameness of "the Spirit" might be expressed. In fact, speaking to unmarried church sisters, they often said that they would prefer to marry someone from outside the church and bring him in. I met many couples for whom this had actually been the case, some with the husband coming to take an active, leading role in the church and others with him dragging his feet a little more, coming "only for the food"[113].

The two positions of sister Li and brother Jin do resonate with Nee's and Lee's contrasting visionary emphases. To reiterate: Nee emphasised the path to becoming 'an overcomer'. From this perspective "the normal Christian life", the title of Nee's most famous book, and embodied in sister Li's argument, is characterised by perfecting oneself as a godly "vessel". This means transforming one's character to become Christ-like and being entirely "constituted" with the Bible and the ministry. Only then will one be qualified for membership of the Body of Christ. Lee's is more strongly a vision of this Body. God's "heart's desire" is to be "expressed" by the "corporate Body" of a global congregation, Lee taught. Like light through a prism, the oneness of God is refracted through church members who are "blended together" as the "vessels" of this Body. Like sap in a tree, Christ as the spirit "flows" through these members and "pours out" through their words and actions, as the Body of Christ. From this perspective, embodied in brother Jin, the *raison d'etre* of the Body is to *refract* the "Oneness" of God. In this case internal church difference is imperative, and the "churchlife" would be difficult if everyone grew up within the church. The difference between one member and the next is what God needs in order to express his latent multifariousness. It is in the moments that we come

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[113] See Appendix G for more on marriage and arranged marriage in the church.

together, with all our difference, that we qualify collectively as the "Body of God", and individually as "godmen".

These different approaches interdependently sustain the vibrancy of the 'churchlife' in Taipei. Sister Li's and others' serious, sincere religiosity 'contained' brother Jin's and other's relative deviance. Conversely, this naughtiness often gave opportunity for Sister Li's and others' displays of serious spirituality. Many of the older church sisters mumbled assent to Sister Li's conviction, "amen, amen" they said. Others' smiled and teased brother Jin for his exaggeration and typical contrariety. "The church is all well and good" he retorted "but without our worldly experience it would be very boring" (*hen wuliao*). To Li's overt supporters it was ludicrous to suggest that being in the church could be a bad thing. Her assertion that having the vision and "living the churchlife" was the only way to exist was undeniable. However, brother Jin was not alone. Other church brothers stayed quiet and smiled at the excitement. Sister Wu, my part-time, outspoken, intelligence-officer research assistant, and sister Liu, a glamourous trainee film director and the daughter of a regularly-attending church sister, defended Jin's basic point that it was imperative that one find one's own way into the church, collecting experience of the outside world along the way.

Moreover, while the majority of regular attendees fully subscribed to the vision of Christian living Sister Li reminded them of, it was precisely brother Jin's naughtiness that made him so popular. At first, I was totally shocked by his antics. He would pat bottoms and make sexual innuendos at any opportunity. He would often refer to "dumplings" while cupping his breast and winking in my direction. Somehow however he wasn't at all perverse. Church sisters responded with mock-scoldings, but they clearly enjoyed his company very much. His wife accompanied him to every meeting. She was extremely dignified and elegant, compassionate and forever worried about my welfare. They were very close. I was often touched by how much they seemed still to be in love. Brother Jin was very active on our online messaging group, forever sending pictures of he and his wife posing with church brothers and sisters around Taiwan and other East Asian countries.

Sister Li was just as valued as brother Jin, but in a different way: most could not articulate "the vision" as she could, so there was a sense in which she was there to do it for them. "You speak so well" one church sister said adoringly to her after she had just been sermonizing about how it does not matter too much *what* we say but that we *should* speak, as speaking is the medium of God's

circulation within the church[114]. Sister Li was stern with and critical of many of 'the saints', chastising them for not living up to what was expected of them. She also had a cheeky smile, irrepressible in the presence of brother Jin's tomfoolery. I sensed in fact, that her sternness was partly an act, just as much as brother Jin's silliness was. In many ways, all bringing their own life approaches to church meetings, each is witness to the other's difference from themselves. The church becomes a medium for this mutual exploration of one another's difference within a context of all-encompassing togetherness and relative conformity.

Lin (2015) writes of the role of mediums and statues in Chinese popular religion being complementary ways of mediating divinity. While the former are more flexible, responsive and personally-tailored, the latter are long-lasting, always available and often partly decomposable, so that bits can be scraped or tugged off them, to be kept permanently at home. Hymes (2002) writes of two complementary models of divinity in southeast China from the Song dynasty (960-1279) onwards and in Taiwan from the beginnings of Han settlement. One is bureaucratic, austere and structural the other involves personal relationships with particular gods. Playfulness for many in the church in Taiwan, was a necessary characteristic for being a 'fully functioning' church member and a necessary approach to the church if it was to be kept alive. There was a feeling of resigned tolerance towards church members who were too inflexible, too unsmiling in their approach to the church life. Their actions and attitudes were referred to as "religious" (*zongjiaode*). In the UK being "religious" was an utter critique, in Taiwan the rigid and flexible, the organizational and the organic, the hierarchical and the egalitarian were treated more like complementary components of the church. Once, around a breakfast table after an early morning "brothers prayer meeting" at the local Jingmei hall, I asked why a particular brother was so unsmiling. I was roundly chastised for not appreciating the circumstances of his life and the role he was playing in the church.

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[114] In his essay "On not getting it," Adam Phillips (2012) suggests that communities are often built upon mutually "getting it," whatever "it" may be. Another way of putting this is that they are built upon fear of the humiliation of not getting it, which to Phillips seems an unhealthy foundation for any community. What if in contrast we were to commune in terms of not getting it? he asks. Communities such of the church in Taipei are not as either/or as Phillips either suggests or proposes communities to be. Nonetheless, his idea does resonate with my own understanding that there are always multiple ways by which a community is adhered to. It is not only that individuals individuate themselves through not getting it, as in the quote above, but that getting it from one angle is not getting it from another, as with brother Jin and sister Li. Most church participants will concede, sometimes before embarking on a testimony or an interview answer, that one cannot "get" God, he is too mysterious. Nonetheless, the church participants gather around a particular mode of attempting to get Him. Given their prior admission, one may frame this as they gather around a particular mode of not getting Him (to not get something one must attempt to, or at least be in the vicinity of someone who is attempting to). As with God, so with Lee's and Nee's ministry: while there are some members who are convinced that they *do* get what the group's founders were saying, many express the fact that they are either trying to get it, or are not getting it in their own uniquely productive way.

It was not, however, just the case that some members were more serious than others. Uncle Yang was as playful as they come. I came to see our basketball playing, golf, table tennis and badminton, and the churchlife as not too dissimilar: each were about keeping something inseparable from the participatory self, afloat. However, during meetings which were not just a small coterie of church brothers, he took on an almost comically austere manner. Often when someone was "sharing" something in a meeting and they were laughing about it, they would turn to brother Yang and defer, "but of course you know better brother Yang", and he would simply nod unsmilingly. I got the sense that he found this role, the role of elder, rather tiring and would send his wife to take his place in certain meetings and she would participate with an air of borrowed authority. It seems to me then that playfulness and sincerity are not simply personality traits but "subject positions" (Tsing 1993:232) recognised and occupied within the church, as a proportional, relational, trans- and non-local whole.

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Might we find some precedence for the interdynamic roles of seriousness and play in the churchlife in Taiwan, in other Sino-Taiwanese traditions of thought, or in other Christian communities? In this section, first I review discussions in the sinological literature on playfulness in the interwoven traditions of Confucian and Daoist thought. Confucianism is often about the maintenance of socially-harmonising ritual relations (*li*, 禮), while Daoism often undermines, even parodies, Confucian attention to social form[115]. I review the Daoist notion of "genuine pretending" which has recently been contrasted with the Confucian notion of "sincerity" (*cheng*, 誠). I review the small influence that Confucius has had on the anthropology of ritual, before articulating a Confucian notion of sincerity. I contrast this with Protestant forms of sincerity as they have been understood in the anthropology of Christianity. I join other anthropologists of Christianity in arguing for a situated understanding of sincerity in practice: that in the church, Protestant and Confucian sincerities sit alongside Daoist-like playfulness. The resistance to and lack of sincerity (as defined in this section), leads me to ask whether church members in Taiwan should be thought of as "believers" which leads me to the final section on witnessing and vicarious belief.

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[115] Froese, for instance, writes: "For the Daoist, ritual, when held up against the spontaneous and yet harmonic movement of nature, will always be comic because it is mechanistic, artificial and forced" (2014:210 in Moeller & D'Ambrosio 2017:75).

Confucianism is not known for its playfulness[116]. At the centre of Confucian teachings is the notion of "sincerity" (*cheng*). Sincerity is very closely associated with Confucius' principle of the "rectification of names" (*zhengming*, 正名). Though there are dissenting interpretations (Moeller & D'Ambrosio 2017:53-7), it seems to be true that Confucius was concerned not only with social harmony at a surface level but that each person would "sincerely" fulfil their duties, so that each social role accurately describes the person that fills it (that is, the "names" would be "rectified"). The concern with sincerity here is perhaps related to Confucius concern with the stability of society more generally: only those who had internalised social ethics and forms, he seems to infer, could adapt to changing situations and stay aligned with "the Course" (*dao*), that is, with the natural order of which humanity is a part. Humour is generally about using words with insincerity so as to create an effect of contrast and surprise (Moeller & D'Ambrosio 2017:60-63). Thus, commentators have argued that humour in Confucianist China has been traditionally devalued (Knechtges 1970; Bai 2005; Yue 2010).

The *Zhuangzi* (c. 3rd century BCE) is a central text of the Daoist tradition. In their recent re-interpretation, Moeller and D'Ambrosio (2017) argue that it offers a parodic critique of Confucian sincerity, the isomorphy between oneself and one's social role, and demonstrates an alternative approach to sociality, an approach Moeller and D'Ambrosio term "genuine pretending". Through humour, they hold, the *Zhuangzi* disentangles its protagonists from their social roles and instead suggests that these roles ought to be performed with genuine pretence, that is with a commitment which does not forget that the role being played does not define the protagonist's personhood. They illustrate the principle of genuine pretending through the example of "watching a movie or theatre performance that stirs our feelings":

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[116] In retrospect, this review of sincerity and play in Daoist and Confucian textual traditions perhaps neglects the more relevant question of the seriousness and playfulness of Daoism, Confucianism and their amalgamation in popular religious folk practice, at the ethnographic level. It seems that religiosity in general, in those contexts, is indeed very often approached with a playfulness not apparent from a purely textual reading of "Chinese religiosity" (Charles Stafford pers comm; Weller 2000: 287). This would make sense of old brother Yu saying that people didn't like Witness Lee because they thought he was "too serious", among other things. A more ethnographically-inclined review of seriousness and play in Chinese religion, might also shift the focus of my argument: that playfulness in the church is often simply part of a "Taiwanese" or "Chinese" approach to religiosity and as such is less intentional in its function of keeping the church afloat than I suggest. Still this would make even more sense of the "resistance to sincerity" I witnessed in Jingmei. Certainly, the following comments by Jordan and Overmyer's, in their book on sectarian religion in Taiwan, resonate very much with my own experience in Jingmei:

> "It seems that most Chinese informants, most of the time, understand their religious exercises in two different ways simultaneously. On the one hand, informants do in fact believe the interpretation which they deliver orally to each other and to curious visitors. On the other hand, they also understand that they themselves are the agencies of the miracles which fascinate them: they themselves are the gardeners and architects of the sacred landscape that they populate with wondrous beings and miraculous events, *and they know this*" (1986:11, original emphasis).

The joy, sadness, or anger we feel is real and actual. It is, often enough, accompanied by immediate and involuntary physical reactions such as a faster pulse rate, laughter, sweat, or tears. There is nothing fake about these feelings and their bodily expressions- they are genuine. At the same time, however, they are not personal. In a strict sense the happiness or anger we feel during these times is not really *ours* (2017:4).

Below I develop this notion of feeling "by proxy", using the concept of vicarious belief, to articulate the constellation of sincerity, play, and belief in the church in Taiwan. What is interesting for us here too, is the symbiotic relationship between Confucian sincerity and genuine pretending in the *Zhuangzi*: the latter approach can only be articulated in parodic contrast to the former. (This reminds me very much of brother Jin's naughtiness and sister Li's seriousness). Let us continue for now, our review of the notion of sincerity.

To complicate matters, an influential recent treatise on ritual, partly co-written by two anthropologists of China, although equally critical of the notion, articulates "sincerity" differently from Moeller and D'Ambrosio. "Sincerity", as they understand it, is "a post-Protestant or post-Enlightenment vision of ritual action". "Such a view", they continue,

sees the "essential" or constitutive arena of action (often read as intention) as something within the social actor or actors, with the external, formal ritual seen as but the marker of these internal processes (Seligman et al. 2008:4).

In contrast to this sincerity, the book celebrates a "ritual" orientation to action which understands that action not as reflecting inner meanings or intentions but as creating "subjunctive worlds" of temporary order, which allay the painful disorder and brokenness which characterises life ordinarily (Seligman et al. 2008:30, 180). Furthermore, they hold up Confucianism as exemplary of this non-sincere approach to ritual. They quote the 3rd-century Confucian thinker, Xunzi's, approach to "ritual", as that through which the "gentleman gives patterns to Heaven and Earth" (Seligman et al. 2008: 17), as a precursor to their own. It is evident that the notions of sincerity and their opposites used by Moeller and D'Ambrosia and Seligman et al. are quite different. So, what kind of sincerity is at work in the church in Taiwan and how might we understand playfulness in relation to it?

Before answering this question, let us turn to the notion of sincerity as it has been utilised in the anthropology of Christianity.

Within the anthropology of Christianity, Webb Keane's (2002; 2007) depictions of Dutch Calvinist attempts to induce an ethical and semiotic understanding of sincerity in Sumbanese converts have been very influential[117]. Keane argues that in contrast with the Sumbanese concern with the precise significance textures and form of social interaction (see Keane 1997a), the Calvinist missionaries sought to teach them that words, actions and things are only important to the extent that they express a prior inner state. Finding significance in words, actions and things which were not intended by their producer, for Keane's Dutch Calvinists, was evidence of "fetishism". Converting to Christianity, they held, was also a process of becoming a "sincere speaker". Keane charts the difficulties the missionaries encountered in their attempts to inculcate this "semiotic ideology" and the strangeness with which it was received by many potential Sumbanese converts. Keane's account gives historical nuance to Trilling's classic argument that modernity is characterised by an ethic of sincerity by, in the manner of Weber (2013[1930]), imputing a role in the development of sincerity specifically to Calvinist ideas and practices.

Although the relationship between humour and Calvinism has not been directly studied, it is likely that laughter- though perhaps one of the "sincerest" expressions humanly possible-, in its semantic opacity, has not, by the majority of Calvinists, been overtly valued. Puritan outcrops of Calvinism in Britain, culminating in Cromwell's famous ban on merry-making, seem to confirm this. In lieu of an ethnographic review of the relationship between seriousness and playfulness in Calvinism per se, we might consult the variety of responses to Keane's arguments within the anthropology of Christianity.

Anthropologists of Christianity have found sincerity to be important to Christians of various traditions (including Russian Orthodoxy (Luehrmann 2017)) but often difficult to sustain in practice

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[117] Although Keane is directly influenced by Lionel Trilling's (1972) Hegelian thesis that "late modernity" is characterised by the pursuit of" authenticity", which in turn arose out of an early modern concern with sincerity (Keane 2007:185), his use of the word "sincerity" seems closer to Trilling's use of the term authenticity. Sincerity, for Trilling, as for Confucius (according Moeller and D'Ambrosio), is about internalising one's social role, enacting it out of desire rather than a mere sense of duty. A concern with authenticity occurs with a heightened sense of the contradiction of the expectation that one fulfils one's role voluntarily (which permits by definition insincerity): ultimately it impossible to know whether one is being sincere or not, because the action, fulfilling one's role, is the same. Authenticity in contrast is achieved when one's action conforms not necessarily at all with one's expected role but with one's inner sentiment.

(Keane 2006)[118]. Białecki (2011), for instance, depicts the "language ideology" of sincerity as it arises in a middle-class Californian home visited by a renowned Charismatic prophet. If Keane argues that language is assumed by Calvinists to be legitimate only if isomorphic with an interior state, such that words involved in conversion will only gain you salvation if they are "sincere" (Keane 2002), the title of Bialecki's article "No Caller ID for the Soul" (2011) belies *his* point that often words spoken within key Christian rituals are only legitimate and powerful when they are understood *not* to originate from within the speaker. The failure of the visiting prophet to excite the congregants when he was not a medium of another's voice (God's) but a sincere speaker, demonstrates the complexity of the relation between the ideology of sincere speech and the dynamics of religious experience.

Further to these ethnographic contextualisations of "sincerity", as a whole-cloth "ideology", other anthropologists have begun to "unbundle" the concept from its association in Keane's and other's (Robbins 2001; Robbins & Rumsey 2008:411) work with "modernity", Protestantism, and even Christianity (Cannell 2007; Haeri 2017). There are of course many non-Calvinist, non-Protestant, religious traditions in which aspects of sincerity, as defined by Keane (privileging interiority and the individual will, spontaneous speech and unornamented expression), become valued and enunciated by individuals situationally and in different combinations. Comparative deconstructions and reconstructions of the concept of sincerity by ethnographers of these alternative traditions, join a growing chorus of commentators who seek to decentralise the Protestant/non-Protestant binary which informs much anthropological work on Christianity (Hann 2007; Napolitano 2016; Carroll 2017b; Brown & Feener 2017). Still, it is useful in this case to note that the sincerity of Calvinism and Confucianism are not exactly the same. Sincere expression and sincere enactment of a social role are very hard to disentangle in practice, but it seems that while the (Dutch) Calvinists were concerned that an inner state would be accurately expressed in "outer" words , the Confucian idea of sincerity as moral perfection, is that outer words (and actions) would gradually correspond with an aligned "inner" state. While Calvinist sincerity moves outwards, Confucian sincerity moves inwards.

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[118] Well before Keane, Bauman documented the "linguistic ideology" (1983:4) of seventeenth-century Quaker congregations which identified "plainness of speech" (8) as that through which they distinguished themselves "as the people of the "pure language," as foretold by the prophet Zephaniah" (1983:7). Although Bauman does not identify these Quaker speech practices as sincere, we can infer a strong affinity between them and the Calvinist semiotic ideology described by Keane (Keane 2007:15-16).

Are church members Calvinistic-ally or Confucian-ly sincere? Given that members are allotted a portion of the Bible and the ministry each day to read through and pray over, and that there is a clearly recognisable, although completely implicit, code of church speech and action, it would seem that they are more Confucian than Calvinist in their sincerity. Indeed, this is the way that many church members, drawing on the words of Nee and Lee, speak about church participation: "just eat" is the prescription, eat the words of the ministry and gradually they will be "wrought" into you, "constituting" you with "the truth", leading ultimately to your "transformation and "perfection"[119]. Many, however, seek to maintain a distance between themselves as individuals and themselves as members of the church, they actively work to maintain that difference and resist total, sincere encompassment by the church. Moreover, church words, for some, become valued precisely to the extent that they do not reflect inner states. There is, we may infer, a mixture of anti-sincere, Confucian-sincere, and Protestant-sincere perspectives at play in the church in Taiwan. This leads me to ask how else we might understand their commitment to the church, if not in terms of sincerity per se, which leads in turn to the concept of "vicariousness".

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I came to understand the playfulness of those in Jingmei as evidence of a different kind of relationship to church words and practices than I had assumed. More than this, I observed that playfulness served to soften the borders between life in the church and life more generally. This was subtly evidenced in the absence of worry about, what in Western church congregations would be considered "worldly things". While there was a sense of discontinuity between church seriousness and church play, this equated to a greater continuity between church and life than I had encountered elsewhere. When my host family picked me up from the airport, on first arriving, we got into their car and they began a steady line of direct questioning: "brother Gareth, when did you get married?", "how old is your daughter?", "how are the saints in Britain?", "how many are there?", "is that an ear-ring you're wearing?", "wow you have a beard, how old are you?", "do you hairs on your chest too?". Struggling to answer in my unpractised Mandarin, I feel uncomfortable breaking the news that I no longer consider myself a Christian, that I am not married, and that I have very little idea how the "saints in Britain" are doing. It turns out that these answers are much less incriminating than I thought they would be. Moreover, I am immediately struck by the fact that the questions brother

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[119] See Harding 2001 who argued that, in practice, Christian conversion always operates on a "speaking is believing" basis.

Yang, sister Xie and their daughter are asking me are accompanied by ABBA's greatest hits booming out from a CD in the car stereo.

I spend a lot of time elder Li's car, who we met in the last chapter. It has a video screen in it constantly playing pop songs, to which the family sing along to. Sometimes, when I popped round to his home to go for a swim or a run with the "church running team" (*zhaohui paobu dui*), elder Li would be slouched on the sofa watching a film, or cartoons with his daughter, shuffling up to let me join. He even performed the dance moves with his daughter to her favourite hits, getting the rice wine out now and again to make a party of it (he didn't drink it himself). Growing up, wine bottles were hidden in bedrooms in case they "offended" others in the church. In Taipei, at least in some corners, wine was a visible aspect of church meetings[120].

When uncle Yang told me about how he joined the church, in his narrative, it was a matter of gradually replacing his love for sport with commitment to the church. In this sense his story was not peculiar. Other church members recounted their transition into the church as a shift from gaming or playing sports. Wei-pong, uncle Yang's step son, gave as his reason for not being a Christian, his commitment to playing computer games with his friends on Sundays. Uncle Yang saw this as perfectly fine, saying that he did not commit to the church until he was in his forties. When I asked him how the church had changed his life, he responded:

> In the first year, I just went to the Sunday meetings. I had a satisfying life with two or three brothers. I was very simple (*danchun*). But then after 1991, [one brother] said, he saw that I was meeting but saw that I was still very simple (*hai man danchun*), saw that I wasn't burning too much (*wanre*), so [he] asked me 'do you want to help us serve, serve as an elder?' Actually, at this time I didn't know what an elder was. They said, 'come in', so I replied 'okay'. Afterwards, I realised, [this was the] Tuesday prayer meeting. Actually, in that first year, I didn't know how to pray, and I didn't really pray. So, when I'd just started, I was satisfied with just the Sunday meeting. But after they asked me to serve as an elder, my life underwent a bigger change. Because on Tuesday had [to lead the] prayers, sometimes [I] had to lead the small group meeting, am I right? Every week, two or three meetings. So slowly they brought me to serve, to

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[120] Every Thursday evening, I attended a Bible-reading meeting sometimes held at "hall number 42" at other times held at sister Yu's apartment. She had just returned from years spent living in the US, her grown-up son still living there. Her husband was not Christian and travelled a lot on business. She wheeled around two fragile, angry dogs in a double-decker doggy-pram and took great pride in her appearance. Her apartment featured a wood-topped kitchen island, a black-tiled bathroom, a flat-screen TV and huge bible displayed on a white marble mantelpiece. She served us wine, and bread with balsamic dips and we generally had a great time reading a bible passage in Chinese and then English and helping one another out with the language and content of the passage, followed at times by frank and passionate discussion.

go visiting (*kanwang*). So, slowly, of course in this way my life very slowly changed. It wasn't that fast. They all had lots of patience with me. Bit by bit, bit by bit.

This emphasis on slow conversion, and a further emphasis on a continuity between life and the churchlife, meant that "belief" was not an either/or event in members own experiences[121]. I learned in Taiwan to relativize my understanding of the role of belief in my own life. The distinct moment at which I stopped "believing" had been a pivotal experience and memory through which I had understood my own trajectory. Before that moment, everything was a certain way, after it, everything was totally different. Partly through a desire to understand that moment, I ended up tracing a strange kind of circle, attempting to heal a rupture between a past and a present life by anthropological means. My acquaintances in Taiwan however, did not seem to recognise the rupture of the believing/non-believing distinction upon which this journey was partly precipitated.

There were several points early on in the field-work when this self-understanding shaped my interactions with church members in Taiwan. Initially, I was not keen to confess my atheism to those whose Christianity I was trying to understand. Emphasising my disbelief in these surroundings did not seem like a good fieldwork strategy. My placement in the Yang-Xie home, and subsequent immersion in the church in Jingmei, was achieved through contacts I obtained through my father, who is a church "elder" in the UK. Without this connection I do not think it would have been possible to conduct research with a group which has historically shunned outside inquiry. Witness Lee is said to have been quite clear about the secrecy of the group. "Unlike the True Jesus Church," wrote Swanson in 1970, "this church has no publicly written history, no public documents, no tidy statistics...'Our work', said Mr Lee, 'is done in secret'" (1970:57-63). When I inquired directly from brother Zhou, who we met in chapter one, I was refused access to the data that I knew the church keeps on itself. Church members however are offered such data freely. During the New Year, everyone is given a booklet containing a statistical overview of the previous year- number of baptisms, financial reports (*caiwu baobiao,* 財務報表). As an active participant in the church in Taiwan, I was even involved in collecting such data (as described in chapter two).

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[121] See Appendix J for a comparison between the relative tensions between "the church" and the surrounding society in the UK and Taiwan.

At one point, these rather deep participations felt increasingly insincere. I confided to "Uncle Yang" and others, that I felt strange praying, for instance, when I did not believe in anything to pray to. Uncle Yang told me not to worry about it, he did not believe until he was in his forties he reiterated, it comes slowly. One memorable response, from another elder, when I showed such discomfort was: "Gareth, you are not praying for yourself but for all of us!" (*Gairui, ni bushi daodu weile ni ziji, jiushi weile women*!). This was not the attitude I had been used to growing up in the UK. There, one prayed because one wanted to (or because one ought to want to).

That "belief" was a different matter in Taiwan than it was in the UK, became particularly apparent during a trip I took around Taiwan, visiting church homes, halls and centres, with two Taiwanese, two Chinese, one Taiwanese-American and one North America church member. One evening, there were many of us gathered around in the living room of a middle-aged couple living in a second-floor apartment in a small town in central Taiwan. On their metal, grated door was the church symbol (figure 12). I vaguely knew their daughter who completed the 'full-time training' in London, housed in an old country estate. The atmosphere in the apartment was intimate and intense. We were going around a squeezed circle each giving our "testimonies" (*jianzheng*, 見證). They were long and emotional, voices were breaking, and tears were flowing around the room. I was close to last in line and was feeling progressively more panicked as the emotional tone of the meeting crescendoed. With my unbelief and halting Mandarin there was no possibility of me matching the profundity of the words gushing out of those around me.

When it finally came to my turn, I spent a long while explaining my teenage experiences of the church, my dramatic "loss of faith" and then gradual re-appreciation of the church through an anthropological perspective and through my fieldwork experiences so far. (In a subsequent church gathering I simply presented my father's "testimony", which everyone seemed more than happy with- when they realised my father's position (a church 'elder') they generally ceased to worry about my own). Having painstaking articulated my story in the hope that it would offer at least some encouragement to others, the room was silent, and faces looked very confused. A middle-aged sister asked feebly "so brother Gareth do you believe or not?" (*na, gairui dixiong, ni xiangxin bu xiangxin?*). "Erm, no…" I responded. The silence came again before one brother Wang, who was leading our trip, proclaimed "so we baptise you!!". He was met with a chorus of excited "amens" while some suggested preparing a bath. "No, no" I cried, "I've been baptised twice already!". Again, there was confusion while brother Chu impatiently concluded, "then you are a Christian!". Everyone's

attention shifted from me to the next testifier who preceded in their attempt to heal the atmosphere I had broken.

Newcomers who agreed to it were baptised as soon as possible, often during their first ever church meeting. This was always a very exciting event. Running the bath taps, getting the towels ready, finding clothes to be baptised in, the anticipation was palpable. The rule is that there must be two "brothers" present who can actually do the baptising. Once, during a Bible-reading meeting at a church hall, there was a young woman, for whom this was her first encounter with the Bible. On learning of this, the sisters began to get excited. "So, do you want to be baptised?", one asked, with wide eyes. She wasn't sure, she didn't know what baptism was about. After some explanation, she agreed. ("Baptism", as used in the church, is a neologism. While other Taiwanese Christians use the term *shouxi*, 受洗, the church uses *shoujin*, 受浸. While the former denotes "washing, rinsing, being made clean", the latter denotes "immersion, being seeped or soaked". From the church's beginning (Cliff 1983) there has been an embrace of baptism by immersion, now much more widespread than then, as a demarcation of death to the world and an entrance into the life of the church.)

Figure 12: Apartment doors with church signs. Photo by author.

As there were only two males present, in the end, despite my protestations, I helped baptise the new-coming woman. As we closed the ceremony with a prayer, the two leading sisters of the group were in one another's arms sobbing into each other's shoulders. I was perplexed, neither the person being baptised nor one of the baptisers were very committed to the whole thing, it was a bit of a

botched ceremony as far as I could tell. I mentioned afterwards that they seemed very touched by the affair and that they must be very happy for this new church sister. "Well actually, I don't think she will return" one said. "Yes, people often don't come back after baptism", agreed the other. But, they explained, every time someone is baptised the angels rejoice in heaven, so they were rejoicing alongside the angels. To me, this confirmed that the change in the interior state of the person being baptised was not what was at issue but the socio-spiritual line between "church" and "not-church" that it exposed.

Speaking to church members about their own baptism, I heard several times that the experience, for them, was not particularly moving at all. It was only much later that they learned to appreciate the significance of it. To me, this confirms that baptism in the church in Taiwan is not really about one's own experience of being baptised but everyone else's. People enjoy others' baptisms because it gives a heightened sense of the church-world threshold, it brings the object of their concern into heightened relief. If I had room, I would argue the same for church weddings, gospel marches and the many other intra-church performances. One long-time church brother confessed to me that, although the church must always be growing, it was well-known that when too many "new ones" (*xinren*) entered the church the "richness" (*fengfu*) of the churchlife was impaired. Meetings with those outside of the church, were less significant for their potential to swell the numbers of the church, than to enable members to vicariously experience afresh the church as a unique and momentous world amongst worlds.

…

I began this chapter by attempting to delineate a complex set of attitudes to the church and its language and practices. I argued that playfulness in church contexts, was less a sign of non-commitment to the church's serious message, than a commitment to the spirit in which that message was originally spoken, by Lee. I argued that, pragmatically, life in the church consists of a play of perspectives and subject positions, of which seriousness and playfulness both are a part. I asked then, whether this meant that church members are "sincere", as both Confucianism and forms of Christianity have been described. I argued that there was a certain resistance to sincerity, because isomorphism between social form and self undoes the possibility of experiencing social form *as* social form. Are then, church members "believers"? I asked. My experiences have taught me that they are

less concerned with their own belief, than with the performance of belief via the baptisms of others. This, in line with the arguments of previous chapters, is a way of attuning to the church as a Body-like entity in members lives. I conclude here with one final piece of ethnographic information: the role of relative outsiders in the life of the church in Jingmei. I argue, finally, that church members orientation to the church, via others' experiences of it, points toward an alternative conception of community and the role of "belief" within it.

…

There were very often "newcomers" to the meetings in Jingmei. Some of these newcomers returned again and again but neglected to be baptised so were referred to as "church friends" (*zhaohui pengyou*). Mostly however, friends and family members would come from outside the church once and not come again, or not for another long while. At first, I wondered if church members were frustrated at having so many come to church meetings but neglect to commit on a more permanent basis. But then I realised that these newcomers were valued as newcomers, that is as relative outsiders. Whenever new ones were there, they were welcomed with a group chant and clap, called a "love cheer" (*ai de guli*), a relatively common practice in Taiwan[122]. This welcoming ritual was part of a whole sense of refreshment and excitement which came with newcomers. The balance between the newness and familiarity of church attendees was a delicate one. Some, like me, after a few months, were not new enough. After a while, they became relatively merged into the group giving no vicarious sense that this was a unique world-thing to be witnessed alongside other things[123].

The notion that the church comes alive most when enunciated and enacted in the presence of those outside of it, is perhaps further confirmed, in an admittedly obscure way, by sister Li's response to my question to those gathered, at my last meeting with the Jingmei group. After conducting a collective interview with everyone there, I asked, "does anyone have any final questions for me?". "Yes" she replied, "are you Jesus?". She was of course joking, but still she went on. "Because when you first arrived, with your beard and long hair, we thought you might be". I looked around the

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[122] "In Taiwan, young children are taught to applaud success by clapping in socially appropriate ways…For instance, clapping in the following way: clap-clap/ clap-clap-clap/ clap-clap means "cheering with love" in Taiwan…" (Perry & Dockett 2002:94).

[123] Sometimes newcomers were overwhelmingly new. On a hike up Yangming Mountain, Jingmei church members met a group of resident foreigners who hardly knew a word of Chinese. Nonetheless, they were invited to a church meeting, which five of them attended. The Jingmei group was overwhelmed however, the meeting became a competition, for some, of who could give the most heart-rending testimony, while others were so shy they hardly said a word.

room and people were on the edge of their seats looking at me with smiling, expectant eyes. I laughed, and everyone laughed with me, then I turned the recorder off.

In some ways, at least at the beginning, I believe I may have embodied for my informants the figure of the "witness" or "watchman", so valued by followers of Witness Lee and Watchman Nee's combined teachings. I and other outsider's may have filled a similar role to that of God, as an entity distinct from His Body, the church. Perhaps the optimal witness for church members was God. God is the ultimate observer, who in observing confirms the significance of the church as a global-local, social and spiritual entity. God, like church friends, strikes that happy medium between self and other, kin and stranger. God-as-witness, referred to as "the Lord" (*zhu*), confirms the cosmic significance of the church without taking away any of its local intimacy.

A notable structural feature of the church calendar is that Sundays, 'the Lord's day' (*zhuri*), put emphasis upon God as a distinct and separate entity, as a father figure. This is especially true once a month, when the Sunday meeting is held at the local church hall, with several sub-groups meeting there, to make up numbers from between 100 and 500. While morning revival and meetings throughout the week are intimate affairs, in which church members "feed" one another with the word and life of God, Sundays at the hall are more like a performance. Attendance at these meetings is recorded as less than that of meetings during the week. There is a stage, though it is mostly kept empty, except for announcements and performances. If meetings throughout the week are co-witnessed by other human beings, this one is witnessed by God.

There is a special section in the church hymnal for Sunday meetings and these songs emphasise God as the "father". Again, church members are expected to "share" something which they enjoyed from the morning revival throughout the week in a rather formal manner. This is understood as an offering to God. Witness Lee envisioned this act as the offering of "sweet smelling fragrance" to God: "Christ is our incense" he said[124]. If church members are focused on "eating Christ" as the Body of God throughout the week, now they are oriented towards "the Head". The rather distant gaze of the fatherly head confirms their existence as its collective counterpart.

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[124] E.g. *The Divine Dispensing of the Divine Trinity,* Chapter 36, Section 3, accessed on 20/09/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=2029FEC1AA.

…

This chapter extends and makes explicit the thesis' ethnographic concern with what Willerslev and Pederson (2010) call "proportional holism". Unlike the holistic analytical telos of "structural functionalism" (Thorton 1988), this approach brings social wholes to the ethnographic fore, it attends to how wholes are situationally achieved rather than assuming that "society" (and other background wholes) unwittingly organise social life. It pays attention to the ways in which the precarious work (and play) of achieving wholeness may always fail, while holistically inclined actors may nonetheless miss their mark. For this approach, wholes are perspectivally-dependant, and proportional to the positions of particular actors. Willerslev and Pedersen write that:

> To study holism anthropologically is to explore the culturally specific work actors do for their cosmos to remain its proportions…Studying holism as an empirical phenomenon requires sensitivity to the different conceptualizations of wholes held by different people, as well as to the sometimes surprising practice by which such wholes are perceived to hold together… (2010:262).

From such a holistic perspective, in conjunction with its more general psychologically and socially ameliorative effects (Freud 1922; Moeller & D'Ambrosio 2017), joking can reshape relations into desired, "holy" configurations of intimacy and distance, rigidity and flexibility. Pedersen and Willerslev remind us that, despite the "totalitarian holism" of his general approach (cf. Kuper 1977), Radcliffe-Brown's,

> key insight was not the well-known idea that joking relationships maintain order, but the equally central proposition that such relations at the same time *keep too much order at bay* (2010:265, original emphasis).

They document their own "shocking surprise" (2010:270) at the apparently unserious way in which their informants, Mongolian shamans (Pedersen) and Siberian elk hunters (Willerslev), engage with spirit-beings. Willerslev, for instance, feels hoodwinked, when, during a bear hunt, his hunter friends mock the animal spirit of the bear as they deal with its carcass. He writes of his surprise (and dismay) when these Siberian hunters displayed an apparently cynical humour towards their own animist conceptions. However, he ultimately contextualises this and other instances of Yukaghir hunters seemingly making fun of their own cosmology within a wider animistic moral

economy of sharing, in which it is assumed, in official Yukaghir accounts, that the cosmos is balanced between the sharing of resources between the human and non-human realms.

As in the human realm, so across the spirit-human divide: it is said to be morally proper that if one side has more resources than the other, the latter can demand resources from the former. Co-present with this cosmology however, is the "unofficial" understanding that many resources are obtained through deception and theft. This understanding is palliative for Yukhagirs because it allays the implications of the sharing economy of official discourse, which holds that any time of human plenty ought to be balanced out with compensation to the spirit world (i.e. human death), that is, by the spirit beings demanding their share of the plenty. In order to maintain the palliative effects of the theft approach to resources, Yukhagirs, Willerslev argues, seek at all costs not to collapse the two cosmic understandings- theft and sharing- into a singular, totalised cosmic understanding.

Thus, Willerslev explains, in their apparently cynical understanding of their own cosmos, Yukhagirs seek to keep sincere adhesion to their "official" cosmology, and deceptive, thieving, alternative understandings, separate. Willerslev and Pedersen argue against understandings that would attribute the apparent cynicism of their informants to "modernisation". Both groups show great commitment to their "non-modern" ways of life. "[T]he work of joking as a holistic practice is to balance between otherwise singular wholes" (2010:262) they write, be these wholes cosmologies, human individuals or the spiritual and earthly realms. Analogously, I understand the intense joking atmosphere in Jingmei, not as a lack of commitment to the church and its precepts, but as an attempt to "have one's cake and eat it": to have the pleasures of cosmic reintegration and connection that the church as a transnationally significant social entity brings, without the social atmosphere in which this can be enjoyed being erased through a logic of becoming sincere and losing the self-church distinction.

Another discontinuity that I argued church members in Taiwan selectively seek to attune to, is that between the church and its environment. Discontinuity between the church and its environment, I held, is witnessed through the actions of others, and reflected in oneself through being witnessed by others. This points towards a different conception of the relation between belief and community than we are used to. Durkheim wrote that,

> Religious beliefs proper are always held by a defined collective that professes them and practices the rites that go with them. These beliefs are not only embraced by all the members of this collectivity as individuals, they belong to the group and unite it. The individuals who make up this group feel bound to one another by their common beliefs (2008 [1912]:42).

In 1972, the anthropologist Rodney Needham, argued that anthropologists had used the term "belief" to denote the significance of people's collective representations around the world too uncritically. His own theoretical, historical and ethnographic investigation into the concept, and origins of the term "belief", found that in fact the term could not be understood to correspond to any specific set of experiences. Despite this, Geertz's (1973) famous notion of religion as a cultural system took belief in that system to be the crux of its significance[125]. Asad (1983; 1993) also famously argued that Geertz's concept betrayed a remnant Judeo-Christian understanding of religiosity being centred upon creeds and only secondarily upon practices. Following Durkheim then, anthropologists have by turns stressed belief and practice (Astuti 1995; Wenger 1999) as definitive of religious communities.

Recent attention to "born-again" Christians, and other converts to world religions, has again refocused anthropological attention upon the nature of belief. Robbins argued that anthropology has been "a science of continuity" (2007:6), which denies the level of significance to "conversion" that converts themselves impute to it. While Christians stress radical discontinuity in their lives and communities through becoming "believers", anthropologists most often, Robbins argues, have, in a rather knee-jerk fashion, sought to demonstrate that conversion in fact carries much more cultural continuity than converts seek to realise. While some anthropologists have proposed, in the spirit of Needham, "writing 'against belief'" (Lindquist & Coleman 2008:15), others have sought to re-think belief (Mitchell & Mitchell 2008; Day 2009; Lindholm 2012) and other modes of conviction (Hansen 2009), heuristically, along ethnographic lines.

In this chapter, I too have attempted to delineate belief as denoting an actual discontinuity in Christian life, which is part of a wider church logic of (dis)continuity. But I have emphasised the belief of the other over that of the self, and in so doing I am trying to point toward a different relation between belief and community than has been operative in anthropology and other

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[125] See Robbins 2007 on the distinction between "belief that" and "belief in".

disciplines. Communities are often implicitly delineated as groups of believing selves. The only difference between the believing individual and the believing community is quantitative[126]. Where anthropologists have directly theorised community, it has been in terms of "identity"- we are those who practice or believe X- and the symbolic operations by which that identity is reproduced. Here, community and identity are practically conflated (Cohen 1985; 2002). Philosophers, on the other hand, beyond their suspicion of the very term "community" as an ideological tool (Bauman 2001; Ahmed & Fortier 2003), have sought to think community *beyond* identity, to philosophise communities of "those with nothing in common" (Lingis 1994). Here, community is most often understood as diametrically opposed to the self, it is self-sacrifice. "Community forms", Alphonso Lingis writes,

> "when one exposes oneself to the naked one, the destitute one, the outcast, the dying one. One enters into community not by affirming oneself and one's forces but by exposing oneself to expenditure at a loss, to sacrifice" (1994:12).

Esposito (2010) opposes the "immunitas" of the "Leviathan-State" to the "communitas" at the origin of community. Following Hobbes, he understands the state as a protective-cum-alienating imposition which preserves the designated rights and properties of each individual, while "breaking...every communitarian bond" and "squelching...every social relation that is foreign to the vertical exchange of protection-obedience" (2010:14). That is, it immunises each individual from the direct influence of any other. *Communitas*, Esposito argues, drawing upon its Latin etymology, in contrast,

> is the totality of persons united not by a "property" but precisely by an obligation or a debt; not by an "addition" [piii] but by a "subtraction" \meno\: by a lack, a limit that is configured as an onus, or even as a defective modality for him who is "affected" ... (2010:6).

The basis of community, Esposito infers, again following Hobbes, is the possibility of death at another's hand. "[T]he communitas carries within it the gift of death", he writes, that is, the gift of one's own potential death, such that community is the unification through mutual indebtedness

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[126] The arguments regarding orthodoxy, orthopraxy, belief and *li* reviewed in the introduction are highly relevant to and have influenced this argument, I refrain from reproducing them here for the sake of non-repetition and word count.

described in the quote above. In line with Jean-Luc Nancy's conviction that "the individual is merely the residue of the experience of the dissolution of community" (Nancy 1986:3), however, Esposito holds that,

> Modern individuals truly become that, the perfectly individual, the "absolute" individual, bordered in such a way that they are isolated and protected, but only if they are freed in advance from the "debt" that binds them one to another; if they are released from, exonerated, or relieved of that contact, which threatens their identity, exposing them to possible conflict with their neighbour, exposing them to the contagion of the relations with others (2010:13).

These arguments of course resonate strongly with the Turners' (V.Turner 1974; 1986; E. Turner 2012) use of the term *communitas* as a liminal, disruptive collective experience outside the bounds of ordinary life. But most anthropological theorisations of community are less indebted to the Turners' performative, experiential approach than to social constructionism: communities are understood to be defined by an order of beliefs and practices which are believed and practiced precisely in contrast to the perceived beliefs and practices of other communities (Anderson 1991; cf. Coleman 2002b; 2014). "Community", writes the anthropologist Antony P. Cohen, is "a boundary-expressing symbol" (1985:15). Rejecting a "morpholog[ical]" approach, he presents community "as a melee of symbol and meaning cohering only in its symbolic gloss" (1985:19-20).

Although at times Cohen recognises community as "that entity to which one belongs, greater than kinship but more immediately than the abstraction we call 'society'" (1985:15), his emphasis is upon community as a "mental construct", a set of symbols with various "meanings" (1985:19). In Cohen's analyses, "communities" as symbols are reproduced by communities as entities, with little requirement of contact with those outside the community, except as they serve as vehicles of identity-reproducing symbolic markers which act to reiterate the messages 'we are not them, we are us', or 'I am me, not her', in various ways. The philosophers, rather unexpectedly in this sense, point to the centrality of encountering the 'not-me' in the production of community as a tangible phenomenon and not as a symbolic construction.

The notion of community I derive from the ethnography presented in this chapter, is somewhere between the philosopher's (impossible) ideal and the anthropologist's identarian set of symbolic

constructions. It is neither a game of "us versus them" nor a melodramatic denial of the self. The church community in this chapter, like human bodies, is a strange kind of thing. In order to attune to its outlines, members need to witness and be witnessed by others. The community alone cannot perceive the community, it needs to do so through and in others (Rutherford 2012). The notions of vicarious belief and being-witnessed, or together, "vicariousness", seek to capture this principle. Throughout these last four chapters, I have sought to articulate a conception of the church informed by, but not reducible to, church members in Taiwan's own perspectives, attitudes and understandings. In the next chapter, I seek to trace those understandings as far back in Sino-Taiwanese history as I can. As with the chapters so far, I seek to articulate my points through contrast, this time between traditional Chinese conceptions of the relations between the social body and divinity, and mainstream Western Christian understandings.

Chapter 5

The wall and the galaxy: The origins of the church in Taiwan

"So we who are many are one Body in Christ and individually members of one another".

Romans 5:12, Recovery Version Bible.

"We are one Body in Christ, having an organic union with Him. This union makes us one in life with Him and with all other members of His Body. The Body is not an organization or a society but is altogether an organism produced by the union in life that we have in Christ".

Romans 5:12, footnote 1, Recovery Version Bible.

"The purpose of God's salvation is to have Christ reproduced in millions of saints that they may become the members of His Body, not separate and complete individual units but parts of a living, functioning, coordinated, corporate whole. Although these parts have different functions, they are not detached from one another. Rather, they are "individually members of one another." Each member is organically joined to all the others. All the members must be coordinated together to practice the Body life that is revealed in this chapter".

Romans 5:12, footnote 2, Recovery Version Bible.

In chapter one, I presented the church in Taiwan as a rhythmic infrastructure parallactically incorporating organisation and spontaneity. In chapter two, I presented another side to the church: the sense of it as a "world". The church not only incorporates organic and organisational modes of interacting, it can also be attuned to as both a non-local and a trans-local entity. I gravitated my presentation of the methodological backbone of the thesis, in chapter three, around another aspect of the church: its atmospheric unicity. Then, in chapter four, I articulated how the church is sustained as an enterable presence through the (dis)continuities and internal dynamics of church participation. Each chapter attempts to graph the church community in Taiwan as a unique ensemble which is both more and less than the lives which compose, and attune to, it. This ethnographic project in turn is motivated by church members' own, comparatively unique, cosmological and practical emphases upon the church as the central, socio-spiritual focus of their church lives.

The "Body of Christ" is so central to the church in Taiwan's vision of what the Christian life should be, that those who pursue their own spiritual growth without regard to this "vision" are liable to be considered "cancerous tumours," as one member put it (following Nee (1997)). "Rebellions" are described as "fermentations", while the rebellious, as I myself once experienced, are "quarantined" (Lee 1990). How did this corporeal corporatism become the central focus of the church? Is it simply a sinification of the Christian message? Or might we understand this orientation more subtly, as the drawing out of a problem *intrinsic* to Christianity, but which remained relatively dormant before its indigenization in China and Taiwan? This chapter aims to contribute to those approaches within the anthropology of Christianity which seek to elucidate the latent "problems" and "paradoxes" which have always been with Christianity, but which ethnographic attention to the pragmatics of Christian lives today can make refreshingly and exactingly clear (Cannell 2006a; Engelke 2007; Keane 2007; Bialecki 2012). These approaches show how Christianity is not only an unfinished story, a cluster of problems yet to be solved, but perhaps inherently incomplete.

Returning to brother Zhu, editor-in-chief of the *Taiwan Gospel Bookroom*, from chapter one: he argued, that that the distinctiveness of the church's language was due to the fact that "brother Lee" and "brother Nee" had gotten closer than any Christian before them, to the "deep truth" of the Bible. Assertions of "deep truths" are liable to make anthropologists uncomfortable. If they speak of "truth" at all it is likely to be "relative", socio-linguistically constructed (Duranti 1993) or "motile" (Holbraad 2009; 2012), rather than "deep". However, in this chapter I suggest that, given Christianity's incompleteness, we can understand our informants as having "discovered", through "translation" in the broadest sense, new Christian "truths" to live by, rather than having only "translated" old ones.

An obvious example of Christianity's incompleteness is the issue of Christian salvation. What exactly is it? As Blaise Pascal indicated with his famous wager, it is not even clear how salvation and living a Christian life are connected. As perhaps many a Christian teenager has asked themselves, if conversion is an irreversible event (Cannell 2006a:38; cf. Gow 2006; Rutherford 2006) why bother living Christian-ly, with all the attendant restrictions, afterwards? This potential gap in the Biblical account of salvation- in which, "whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Romans 10:13)-, we may surmise, led to the Dantean soteriology of many levels of hell, as much as it did to the Evangelical caricature of the afterlife as a game of golf on heavenly clouds. Christianity is still "evolving" (Bialecki 2014b). There are other "solutions" to this and other "gaps" at the heart of

Christianity. The church in Taiwan's "vision of the Body" is one such solution. This "vision" infers that salvation is not either/or but is a matter of the degree to which one is incorporated into the "organic Body of Christ". The key question is, how did this understanding come about, and why does it make such intuitive sense to the many Chinese and Taiwanese Christians who have embraced it?

As noted in the introduction, Nee took ideas that had relatively few adherents in Western countries at the time and swiftly popularised them among tens of thousands of Chinese converts. While the ideas were non-conformist and sectarian in the West (see Appendix J), they seemed to make intuitive sense to many in China, very quickly. The same is relatively true for Taiwan today: there is much less of a sense that "the church" constitutes a spiritual elite there. Rather, is perceived as being just as Christianity should be: "organic", "spontaneous", "corporate".

The previous chapters have shown how the church is lived and understood as strange, alluring thing- an infrastructure, a world, an atmosphere, a vicarious community. In this chapter I ask, 'where and when do these orientations to being Christian come from, and why might they be distinctive to Taiwan?'. Put otherwise, I ask, how did the church in Taiwan develop a corporate model, a collectivist vision, of salvation to a degree which is relatively absent from the history of Western Christianity (see Brown 1988; Mellor & Shilling 1997; Beckwith 2005)? I begin here, with two word-images I derived from conversations with church members. They were intended to deal with the "problem" (or lack thereof, see below) of imagining individual difference in relation to a highly conformist church vision. The difference between these two imaginaries points us in the direction of the rest of this chapter, which traces the formation of the church to two seemingly very different origin points, Imperial China and non-conformist, Western-European Christianity.

In researching for my undergraduate dissertation, I interviewed members of "the church in the UK". Lily was one of the interviewees. She is an Iranian who went to high school and university in California, and has completed the church's "full-time training in Anaheim" ('FTTA'). When I asked if she could clarify the church notion of "blending", she referred me to Leviticus 2:1-16 where the Israelites' preparation for a sacrificial meal offering to God is described. Here, the ingredients are crushed together and then blended into a paste using oil. These ingredients are the cultural and personality differences between "fellowshipping saints", she said. These "natural dispositions" are

not ground away, but into each other through participation, she explained, which enables the flow of the Spirit (the oil). Lily gave a real-life example of this understanding. She spoke of a "brother" who, whilst they were reading of the Biblical Persian conquest of Babylon at a weekly meeting she attended, said something like "oh those blooming Iranians". This split Lily in two: on the one hand as an Iranian she was offended, incensed even; on the other, she felt the comment was an opportunity to "erase" her "old [Iranian] self".

On the back of this, I asked Lily whether she was worried about being "blended away" or "losing her identity" through her incorporation into the Body of God. In her answer, she used the metaphor of the wall running around the circumference of the millennial city of God. Where the members of the Body are the "living stones" (1 Peter 2:4-5) of this wall, one is what one is by virtue of one's position within the wall. She assured me that she did not "want God to make a bunch of Christ-robots". She emphasised instead that only she could occupy her particular place in the wall, not because this was a pre-destined space reserved for her "in heaven" but exactly by virtue of her spiritual growth as a member of the Body. I will use this image to frame my discussion of the relation between individuality and social belonging in Western Christian history. Let us turn to the second image.

In Taipei, thinking of this same encounter, I asked brother Zhou, whom we met in chapter one, a very similar question. Over the course of our conversation this time, I asked him whether he ever worries about being turned into a "Christ robot". He laughed hard while looking at me with utter confusion, "no, I don't" he replied as the laughter subsided. I told him about Lily, and suggested that maybe "losing one's identity" is a "particularly Western concern"? The sentiment of his reply was "have you *met* church members?! They're as different as different can be!". He's obviously right, and I start to feel silly even broaching the topic. He did give me an image to think with however. He said, "the glory of this star is different from the glory of that one, though we will all shine like a star". I surmise that brother Zhou was in fact adapting Witness Lee's own use of galactic imagery, which we met in chapter three, to describe the church. "Who, then, is the moon?" Lee once rhetorically asked, replying,

> The moon is the church. Although it is difficult for us to find a verse in the Bible indicating that the moon is the church, there is, nevertheless, a basis for saying that the church is the moon. Remember Joseph's dream about the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars (Gen. 37:9-11). The sun was his father, the moon his

mother, and the stars his brothers. Based upon this fact, we may say that the church as the wife, the bride of Christ, may be typified by the moon. The church today is the moon. What is the moon? The moon is an object that has no light in itself, but has the ability to reflect light. By itself, the church has no light. But hallelujah! The church was made in a way to reflect the light of Christ. Furthermore, the moon is able to reflect light only in the night time. Today, during the church age, it is the night time. Look at the world. How dark it is! Although the church is really in a dark night (the local churches are lampstands shining in this dark night, Rev. 1:20), she can reflect the light of Christ. However, frequently the church (like the moon) is not very stable, coming up and going down. The church may be the full moon, the half moon, or the new moon. And, when there is no moon, the stars shine. Hallelujah![127]

Both Lily and Brother Zhou are highly versed and trained in the church's ministry. Both, in answering my questions, use ministry-informed, Biblically-inspired imagery and terminology. However, the image of a cluster of stars and of a living wall point us to very different ways of imagining difference and sameness. One suggests a difficult process of reshaping individuality in line with a more valued whole, the other suggests that difference and sameness are simply two ways of picturing the same phenomenon. In the historical account of the church I give in this chapter, I use these two images to orient us toward the very different starting points from which the church's founders began, and from which, in fact, even today, its members differently imagine the shared entity which brings them together.

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I argue in the next chapter that the concept of "attunement" is the best way to understand everyday significances of the church, however it is "value" which is the best notion through which we can understand, in a less fine-grained mode of description, the church's beginnings. If "it is value that brings universes into being" (Graeber 2013), the cross-cultural value which brought the transnational church-world into being should be understood as, "the *simultaneous* unity of individual persons with the divine, and the social unity of the group to which those persons belong". Here, I call this value "oneness". I argue that, in the early twentieth century, "oneness" could be found in two forms relevant to this thesis. One, in the orthodox neo-Confucianism which laid the foundations for Watchman Nee's understandings of Christianity (Meng 2018). The other, was the focus of a certain segment of British, Christian Primitivism upon which Nee explicitly built his own Christian

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[127] *Life-Study of Genesis*, Chapter 4, Section 3, accessed on 06/02/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=18F9D3C007.

ministry (Woodbridge 2012; 2016). These two forms of valuing "oneness" were symbiotically combined and developed in the lives of Watchman Nee, Witness lee and their "co-workers", and in the growing logico-aesthetic church formation they were responsible for during the twentieth century, first in China, then in South-East Asia and Taiwan, and finally, worldwide. Around the value of oneness which these church lives were progressively oriented, gradually formed the church in its current state, using all sorts of Chinese, Taiwanese and Christian concepts, practices and words to forge the unique cluster of orientations, aesthetics and habits which characterise the church in Taiwan (and elsewhere) today[128]. In this chapter, I excavate the value of oneness from Christian and Sino-Taiwanese history, in order that we may better understand the origins of the unity of the church as the central focus of the church in Taiwan. First, I introduce more fully the two concepts guiding this excavation: "value" and "symbiosis".

Value

That the followers of Nee and Lee are especially concerned with oneness may not be very surprising to many readers. Not necessarily because Chinese thinkers and communities are especially renown for this focus (see Ivanhoe 2015; Tien 2012), but because "religion" has surely always and everywhere been about some form of oneness. Church members' heightened concern with "oneness" will for many readers immediately evoke Emile Durkheim. Introducing a recent edition of Durkheim's classic, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Mark S. Cladis engages in the following thought experiment to illustrate the basic argument of the book. Durkheim's depictions of Australian Aboriginal totemism are notoriously factually inaccurate and tinged with social-evolutionist ideas. Nonetheless, Cladis' illustration distils perhaps his most fertile theoretical points, with regard to "religion", and the ones most influential in today's anthropology. Cladis begins "with the Darwinian horde – an amorphous group of early humans driven largely by biological urges":

> Mostly, this population is dispersed, pursuing such utilitarian activities as hunting and gathering. Imagine, however, that one evening they gather as a group, huddled around a fire, and experience a sort of social electricity generated by their collectivity, or what Durkheim called efflorescence. They had experienced something like it before, but this time it is different, because this time they were able to name it. As the shadows lengthened, they had caught sight of a fleeing Kangaroo, thus revealing the source of the group's effervescence, indeed the basis of the members' lives: it is the Kangaroo, and they are the people of the Kangaroo. Now everything changes. With a name- with an identity- comes social membership and the

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[128] This is a process which might be described, following Larsen (2010), as "entification".

distinction between insiders and outsiders. The universe can now be divided into that which belongs to the Kangaroo and that which does not, and from this spring all other classification systems. And with social identity come social ideals: hence these hitherto biologically driven creatures are transformed into socially creative humans. All this springs from a concrete, tangible symbol of their own unity. We have reached the beginning of society, and it commences with the birth of religion: the totem as a symbolic, religious representation of the community (Cladis in Durkheim 2001:xix).

As is especially clear in Cladis' example, in Durkheim's model there are two basic forms of unity: the felt unity of collective effervesce and the symbolic unity of a collective representations. The history of Durkheim-influenced anthropology can be understood in terms of those beginning their analyses with "representation" and those who begin with "experience". The former has culminated in approaches which show how collective representations- utopic political projects (Scott 1998), immaterially present gods (Engelke 2007), sincere, intentional selves (Keane 2007; Bialecki 2011) for example – rub up against everyday materialities (Engelke 2005), and social complexities, which resist codification and incorporation into human projects of transcendence and control. Durkheim's picture of the felt unity of collective effervescence has culminated in phenomenological approaches which "attempt to describe human consciousness in its lived immediacy, before it is subject to theoretical elaboration or conceptual systematising" (Jackson 1996:2). This approach, like the one above, has of course yielded many insightful and beautiful ethnographic descriptions. However, aside from its methodological problems (Knibbe & Versteeg 2008), following Turner (e.g. 1974:24) it tends to pathologize the convictions (Hansen 2009), models (Horton 1967) and the pursuits of certainty (James 2003) which are integral to so many lives, and to romanticize the dynamism, flow, and contingency (Ingold 2000; 2011b) more characteristic of mobile, cosmopolitan existences[129].

The now well-established anthropology of ethics is founded upon a commitment to attend to the space between effervescent unity and representational unity. "In general," writes Lambek in the introduction to *Ordinary Ethics*, "we locate the ethical in the conjunction or movement between explicit local pronouncements and implicit local practices and circumstances" (2010:7). Durkheim perhaps overemphasised the ease of human conformity. Nonetheless, his very notion of two sources of unity points to the potential frictions between them. Unlike Laidlaw, who claims that Durkheim's "sociology is a charter for authoritarian corporatism" (2002:315), Lambek points to how,

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[129] As Jackson himself writes, "a preoccupation with order and structure may be seen as a form of wishful thinking, a consoling illusion passing itself off as a privileged glimpse into the hidden workings of the world" (1996:5).

"…one of the attractions of Durkheim is his dualism, which, like Freud's, recognizes an internal rift and hence a tragic dimension of human being. Ethics is not a matter of smoothly following the rules but of the exhilaration of self-transcendence, as well as the struggle with ambivalence and conflict. Society "obliges us to surpass ourselves" (Durkheim 1973:163); we may do so willingly, even joyfully, but we do so always with a residue of tension" (2010:12).

Stafford (2010), in particular, shows how the existence of established moral norms practically infers ethical self-justification and reckoning in relation to them. An attention to "ordinary ethics" (Lambek 2010; Stafford 2013) thus points us towards the socially and personally productive space between the unity of collective representations (including moralities) and the lived, contingent, affective unities which may or not conform with these representations. Regarding both ethics and morality, the tendency in recent years has been to focus on reflexivity (Laidlaw 2002; 2014; Keane 2014). Keane (2015) locates the ethical in the "natural" and "social" conditions which "afford" reflection upon issues pertaining to the good and the bad. Ethnographers of moralities are more focused upon changes in, and frictions between, collective representations (Robbins 2004b; Zigon 2013), out of which reflexivities arise. Ethnographically, then this shift toward ethics and morality is focused upon evaluation, judgement and decision-making, and the actions and words through which these are expressed, negotiated and acted upon. Anthropologists of ethics and morality tend then to be focused on the conditions and expressions of reflexivity, and upon the difficulties of choosing between, or negotiating, conflicting understandings.

As with ethics and contested moralities, the idea of "value" (Sangren 1987a; 1987b; Graeber 2001; 2005; 2013; Robbins 2015a; Haynes & Hickel 2016), points towards the creative, active potentials of the "space" between the flux, flow and effervescence of everyday life and the, often implicit, commitment to particular ideas and models of the world[130]. However, while today's focus on ethics and morality in anthropology emphasises everyday, micro-struggles or broad cultural changes, value suggests an orientation, however fleeting or established, aimed at producing something (and not only an ethical self as in the "virtue ethics" focus (Laidlaw 2014)). In Graeber's words "value systems create a potentially endless series of little worlds" (2013:233; 2001:257). Value here, as I

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[130] The concepts of ethics, morality and value each try answer the question of what it is that motivates, that drives social life, a question which Marx inherited from Hegel and which anthropology has continued in fits and starts to attempt to answer (Ortner 1984; 2016). As such these concepts might be considered too, alongside the more visceral ones of "energy" (White 1943; Adams 1975; 1978; 1988) and "desire" (Sangren 2009; 2013).

read it, is a long- or short-term orientation, arising from the crystallisation of certain tendencies towards particular kinds of solution, to the moral and ethical problems of life, over than others. Value, to adapt Graeber's definition (2001:ch3), is the importance attributed to some kinds of action over others.

The convergent valuations of "oneness", in twentieth-century encounters between Chinese, British, Taiwanese and American Christians, were the wellsprings of creativity leading to the formation of the transnational entity around which Taiwanese church lives revolve around today. Out of the value "oneness" grew a social entity to "become one" with[131]. The convergent valuations of "oneness" at various points set and reset the church's transnational history in motion. As such they were the driving forces behind the coagulated coming into being of that thing church members call "the church" and "the Body". We will see in the next chapter, that once this thing has become a palpable part of many lives, "value" as such, along with "ethics" and "morality" (concepts which are explicitly devalued in the church in Taiwan), are not as helpful for understanding what is going on as "attunement"[132].

Symbiosis

This understanding, of the church as a coagulated logico-aesthetic entity, is guided by my historical and contemporary understandings of the church in Taiwan. It is supported theoretically by a recent attempt by philosopher Graham Harman to adapt 'Object-Oriented Ontology' (see next chapter) to social theory. Most particularly, I find using his concept of "symbiosis" (borrowed from Margulis 2008), alongside that of value, very helpful for understanding the formation of the church as a global unicity. A symbiosis is "a special type of relation that changes the reality of one of its *relata*, rather than resulting in discernible mutual impact" (2017:49). Symbioses might also be thought of as "phases" (De Landa 2016) in the unfolding life of a unit.

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[131] Moralities might be thought of as collectively established values as to what is good (and bad), ethics involves the negotiations of these values (Stafford 2010). Value however does not necessarily pertain to the good and bad per se. Likewise oneness is not really about being good or bad in any direct sense.

[132] To this extent I step over the dispute between value theorists and theorists focusing on "the social life of things" (Appadurai 1988). For the former (e.g. Graeber 2001), the latter commit Marx's classic act of fetishism in attributing agency to things themselves rather than their makers. For the latter, value theorists display an idealistic ignorance of the material conditions of being which we must all reconcile with. In contrast, I show how value produces things, here a social world, which then must be, or are willingly, reconciled with in ways in which "value" does not provide the best lens for understanding.

Harman's case study is the Dutch East India Company (VOC). He concedes that "we must always remain open to possible evidence that suggests, say, that the single name of the company serves to conceal what was in fact three or four independent though simultaneous operations". His argument is nonetheless that the VOC qualifies as an "object" which has, like all objects a discernible beginning, middle and end, but more importantly, is "irreducible both to its components and its effects" (2017:41.) After critiquing both approaches to entities which depict them having an "eternal character", and those which see them as "a nominalistic flux of 'performative' identities that shift and flicker with the flow of time itself" (2017:47), Harman begins his account of those "symbioses that mark genuine points of irreversibility" (2017:48) in the life of the company.

Harman is especially keen to contrast his own theory with Actor-Network Theory (ANT). He appreciates ANT's emphasis on the "democratic" (see Latour 2005) existence of myriad human and non-human entities linked together in ways irreducible to human social constructions. However, he complains that "by overidentifying an actor [that is, an acting thing, envisioned by ANT as a human or non-human component of a "network"] with its sum total of relations in any instant, ANT does not really allow for the existence of "the same" object over time" (2017:105). As an ethnographer I employ theories to the extent that they best elucidate my material (Navaro-Yashin 2009). Thus, I begin with human values but end, in the next chapter, with attempts to attune to a unit which stretches beyond any human being's control. I begin my account of the church's history with an attention to convergent valuations of "oneness" and how they lead to specific kinds of encounter and increasingly to the formation of the church-unit. At this point my account of the church then adheres more to Harman's insight that "both individuals and collectives are less important than the objects with which they bond". The ethnographic difficulty comes, of course, with the fact that the church-object is partly composed of the individuals and collectives bonding to it. Nonetheless, as Harman writes, this insight "makes it possible to view the careers of humans as variant responses to an underlying object" (2017:54), or "unit" in my vocabulary (see next chapter).

Let me summarise this section, before going on to my transnational account of the church's history. Through convergent valuations symbioses occur. Those symbioses form a relatively durable unit. Attuning to this unit then increasingly becomes a primary value for those concerned with it, not the original value(s) out of which the unit symbiotically formed per se. These attunements and attempts at attunement nonetheless, as forms of creative recognition and social reproduction, continue to sustain the life of the unit, which is no longer characterised by the highly significant symbiotic

fusions which characterised its first coming into being, but by these myriad interactions. To return to Graeber, it is the value of oneness that brings the church-universe into being, but it is attunement which keeps it alive[133]. In this chapter then, I chart the symbiotic "entification" (Larsen 2010) of convergent values of Christian and Sino-Taiwanese oneness. This progression will become ethnographically clearer alongside the next chapter, but it is apparent at the very least in the fact that whereas Nee's and Lee's lives were characterised by highly eclectic reading and openness to outside influences, with regard to the church at least, members today read only Nee and Lee and if they visit other church congregations they are not likely to make it known to other church members. So, with this framework in mind, let us turn to the pre-histories of the church in Taiwan.

Oneness in Christian thought

In A.D. 325 the ideas of Arius, a Libyan Christian teacher and ascetic, were condemned by the first Nicene council, convened by Emperor Constantine. Arius held that Christ was an issue of God the father and as such has not always existed alongside him. This suggested that there is a divine hierarchy and that God is only different from humanity by degree, not absolutely. Known subsequently as "the Arian heresy", despite the condemnation, these ideas have never gone away, being present for example in the ministries of present-day Seventh Day Adventists. Edmund Leach argues that in Western, Christian history "there is a logical fit between the rejection of this doctrine and the acceptance of Imperialism and Episcopal hierarchy" (1972:9). That is, to use a phrase of Isabelle Stengers (2005), the "cosmopolitics" of Christian orthodoxy and subversion follow fundamentally different patterns. This, I will argue below, has not been the case in China: there, orthodoxy and heterodoxy have coexisted as complementary perspectives on the same cosmos (Feuchtwang 2001). Leach points to the development of the iconography of the figure Melchizedek, from the second to sixth centuries AD, which draws upon the fact that in the Bible he is variously referred to as a king and as a priest. Depicted first as a deity equal to Christ and subsequently as a mere priestly intermediary, Leach argues that the Melchizedek iconography demonstrates that "[v]isible hierarchy among deities goes with egalitarian politics among men; isolated monotheism goes with hierarchy among men" (12). The institutionalisation of the Western church was paralleled by Melchizedek's iconographic demotion to a mere man. The ideas covered in this chapter suggest

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[133] I am afraid this goes totally against Graeber's own model, which follows Leach (1965:x) in understanding community expressions of "solidarity and unity" as "imaginative constructs" which don't "really exist in any material sense at all". Events in which "society" is conjured up as an imaginary construct are important to the extent that they provide "arena[s] for the realization of social value" (2013:227). I think Graeber would understand my picture as a fetishization of the labours of my informants. But what happens if both the imaginative arena for the realization of value and the "thing" valued are the same? I would suggest that the question as to whether expressions of solidarity and unity are only imaginative constructs is an ethnographic one not to be settled in anthropological treatises.

that Leach's equation is less universal than he assumed, and that the inverse proportions between divine and human hierarchy are, if anything, peculiar to the West.

The key point for us is that in Western Christian history, the idea of humans becoming divine has repeatedly not fit with the predominant social forms which have characterised most of that history. Leach even suggests that the engine of Christian history has been precisely this misalignment: "As the heretics of one generation move up the social scale and become respectable they become indistinguishable from the established orthodoxy at the top, but that leaves a gap at the bottom within which new millenarian, anarchist, egalitarian heresies will constantly be generated" (1972:13). This account would suggest that, with the gradual historical demise of the Church as divine representative and intermediary, there would be a concomitant rise in Arianism as a socially, as well as theologically, legitimate doctrine. Remembering that we are searching for the origins of the value which drove the formation of the church in Taiwan, let us turn to Dumont for answers as to why this has not been the case.

In his world-historical scheme, Dumont (1980; 1983; 1992) contrasted two basic value systems - individualism and holism (Robbins 2015a). With holism, characteristic of "Vedic India" and most of the ancient world, according to Dumont, each individual finds value to the degree that they embody a social position given by a shared vision of the transcendental social whole. This kind of system does allow for individualism, but only "outworldly individualism". That is, one values one's individuality to the degree that one lives outside the social whole, outside the world, as with the ancient "renouncers", who by no means considered their way of life to be the proper life for most people. The renouncer was, by definition, an exceptional person, "an individual-outside-the-world" (1983:3). Although Christianity first arose in a broadly holistic world, Dumont argues, it had within itself the seeds of an "outworldly individualism" with a communal aspect. According to Dumont, this latter aspect was not discernible within pre-Christian Indo-European civilizations: otherworldly individuals in Hellenistic and Vedic times were solitary. "Sociologically speaking," he writes, "the emancipation of the individual through a personal transcendence, and the union of outworldly individuals in a community that treads on the earth but has its heart in heaven, may constitute a passable formula for Christianity" (1983:7).

The outworldly communality of early Christians was rooted in "an intense expectation of the Second Coming and the End of Days" (Seligman 1988a:17). However, with the institutionalization of the Church, this "eschatological…locus" of communal solidarity became embedded in the sacraments, and in the authoritative ritual actions of the hierarchically-organised "dispensers of grace", who were responsible for them (Seligman 1988a:16). With this, a shift occurred from "millennial visions" which "proclaimed the imminent resurrection of the dead and the impending Second Coming of Christ…to…an allegorical millennialism, divorced from historical processes and events in the mundane sphere" (Seligman 1988a:17; see also Patrides 1964). Nonetheless, according to Dumont, for the first centuries of Christianity, the absolute value of a transcendent God and a "concomitant" outworldly brotherhood of believers encompasses its "antithetical worldly element" in the form of earthly powers and affairs. Thus, in terms of value, priests and politicians form a "hierarchical complementarity" (1983: 15) with the former superior to the latter, "for they are inferior only on an inferior level" (1983:15): ""if the Church is *in* the Empire with respect to worldly matters, the Empire is *in* the Church regarding things divine", and it is the latter which holds "supreme value".

Gradually, however, "the heterogeneity of the world", that is the distinction between a transcendent community of outworldly individuals and earthly politics, "disappears entirely" (1983:8). After AD 800, when popes become delegators of temporal power, the church becomes an "inworldly" institution. The outworldly brotherhood in effect becomes an actual group of people, mixed up with the messiness of earth-bound politics: "The Church now pretends to rule, directly or indirectly, the world, which means that the Christian individual is now committed to the world" (1983: 19). With the Protestant Reformation, the Church is deemphasised altogether. It was with Calvin especially, that the final nail in the coffin of holism and outworldly individualism was hammered. "[H]is Church is the last form that the Church could possibly take without disappearing", Dumont writes, "with Calvin, the hierarchical dichotomy…comes to an end: the antagonistic worldly element that individualism had hitherto to accommodate disappears entirely in Calvin's theocracy. The field is absolutely unified. *The individual is now in the world, and the individualist value rules without restriction or limitation*" (1983:20). From now on "[t]he Church does not make the believers what they are, but the believers make the Church what she is" (Schneckenburger quoted in Troeltsch 1922:320 quoted in Dumont 1983:24). "For all practical purposes", Dumont concludes, the Church had become "an association composed of individuals" (1983:24). At this point, we may surmise, the key Christian value, with regard to the world the individual exists in, becomes "sincerity". That is, that communication, language especially, ought to be a reflection of the interior condition of the individual (Keane 2002; 2007), which is now the only orthodox route via which God can enter the

world. Any valued image of a whole into which these expressions should fit is highly subordinate, if not totally non-existent.

Dumont's account is only one Christian history among many to be told (Zizioulas 1985; Cannell 2005b; 2006; Mosko 2010; Orsi 2016). Christianity, as Cannell writes, is a "complex object", and "Christian thinking has always carried other selves within it" (2006a:7, 26; Cannell 2005b). However, it seems to be true, especially of Protestantism, that it has long been difficult, if not impossible, for Christians to conceptually reconcile union with the divine and a sustainable, non-trivial form of social unity. A Dumontian way of putting this is that, value-wise, individual unity with God and collectivist projects are felt to be mutually exclusive endeavours: "Hierarchical dualism is replaced with a flat continuum governed by an either/or choice" (1983:20). Pragmatically, churches are felt to be particularly conducive contexts within which God can potentially be encountered, but it has been difficult for Western Christians to conceive of union with God as an inherently corporate affair (Griffith 1997; Marshall 2010; Luhrmann 2012).

Seemingly opposed to this reading, in an acclaimed article, Mosko (2010) argues against depictions of Christianity as "individualist" as opposed to the often "dividualist" communities affected by missionization. Aiming his critique especially at ethnographers of Melanesian-Christian communities, Mosko singles out Robbins (2004b), who is inspired by Dumont, for making a hard and fast distinction between Christian individualism and Melanesian dividualism. Robbins (2004b), argues that with conversion to Christianity, his Urapmin informants struggle profoundly with the conflict between their indigenous understandings of moral personhood and the core Christian principle of responsibility for one's own salvation, that, for instance, "my wife cannot break off part of her belief and give it to me" (Robbins 2002). This directly contradicts the "partible personhood" of Melanesian dividualism, where people are constantly composed and decomposed by others. In contrast, Mosko argues that not only are there examples of dividualism being reconciled with Christian conversion in several Melanesian communities[134], but that Christian personhood itself has always in fact been "partible"[135].

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[134] Mosko refers for example to Barker's account of a charismatic "church deacon" of the Maisin in Oro province, Papua New Guinea, who "proclaimed that Jesus, everyone's 'elder brother', died for his younger siblings so that they could be united with him and take care of each other in social amity (*marawa-wawe*), the 'sharing of one's innermost self' ([Barker] 2003: 285) or 'sharing oneself with another' ([Barker] 2008: 55)" (2010: 222).

[135] He argues that Christian conversion, communion, exorcism and sin for example involve "elicitive detachments and attachments among dividual persons" (2010:217), be those persons divine or human.

Robbins (2010b) argues that, whether the conceptual resources for Christian dividualism are there or not, Christianity is perceived and valued by the Urapmin as being individualistic. The "Mosko-Robbins debate" (Diswani & Bialecki 2015:277-9) shows that within Christian vocabulary and practice all the elements are available for a sustained socially powerful dividualist, or holist, vision of the Christian life. In which, in other words, one *is* responsible for others' belief and ultimately, they for your salvation. This makes it all the more curious that such a sustained imaginary, in which "God would become us, we would become God and we would share in the divinity of one another", as my informants have it, has not emerged beyond the unstable apocalyptic historical moments to which Leach referred (see also Cohn 1970; Mersch 2018[1938]:6-7). Even then, the emphasis has been upon collections of individuals rather than upon "dividualist" sociality or participation in a transcendental whole (see Marshall 2010; Robbins 2010b; 2012; cf. Cannell 2017).

Western Christian history can be traced from its origins, in millenarian outworldly communities substantiated out of a shared anticipation of immanent, rapturous change, to the institutionalisation of an other-worldly vision, hierarchically encompassing empirical reality. Through political change this outworldly whole becomes inworldly for all but rebel groups who imagine the divine in a fundamentally different way. With the crumbling of this institutional, inworldly whole, the divine becomes thoroughly subjectivised, the presence of the divine can only be deduced by certain signs and symptoms, potentially discernible within an otherwise godless world (Poewe 1989)[136]. If, historically, Western Christianity has by turns evidenced glimmers of corporatism, comparatively it is clear that it has been modelled after a world-schema quite different from non-Western ones.

Don Handelman (2008) argues that for lives under the influence of Judeo-Christianity the cosmos is one of "inter-gration" rather than "intra-gration". Within the former, thought and action start from a premise of an *apriori* divide- heaven and earth, creator and creation, spirit and matter. Intra-grated cosmologies by contrast begin from a premise of the a-priori connectedness of all things (see also Wagner 1977). With the increased secularization of Christian power and cosmology referred to above, the mechanisms via which the world are formed and reproduced are imagined in terms of

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[136] It is perhaps with the medieval church and its cult of the saints (Brown 1984) that Western Christianity comes closest to the world picture which I argue below broadly characterises Imperial China (Feuchtwang 2001:3-5). However even here the all-encompassing distinction between creator and created, and the idea that death and divinity were somehow fundamentally beyond the cosmos in its everyday state remained.

a finite, mostly godless, whole detached from its creator. These conceptions lead to peculiar attitudes to life's discontinuities (Meyer 1998; Robbins 2007) in which "time after" is "time beyond", leading to the "elevation of death to triumph" (Cannell 2006a:38, 13). Earthly action, power and effect in contrast, are imagined in terms of a "mechanical" causality, billiard balls crashing into one another (Needham 1956). Most especially, with the Calvinist containment of the divine within the "will" (Dumont 1983:21; Keane 2002), power structures are imagined to operate via a "command structure" in which the will of the sovereign is enacted via the determined actions of numerous bureaucratic intermediaries (Hamilton 1989:147). Though there may be myriad exceptions in practice, at a cosmic scale "the Divine" as Hegel had it, is indeed "present in consciousness only, never in life" ([1807]1975: 301 in Cannell 2006a:15). The body politic for a Christian can always easily be, and most often was and is, imagined as fundamentally godless.

That theologically-orthodox Christianity has long shared this basic world picture becomes especially evident if we return to examine the Chinese-Christian encounter of the seventeenth century, spearheaded by Matteo Ricci. There, in contrast to the ways of understanding the world of the Chinese literati who listened to, read and received the missionaries, it becomes especially evident that the latter held a "static conception of order". "In creating the world", Jesuit missionaries explained to their Chinese interlocutors, "the Lord of Heaven put each thing in its place. Had he not done so, there would be disorder" (Ruggieri 1584 quoted in Gernet 1980:4). The world picture painted by these missionaries "form[ed] a perfectly coherent whole in which it would be vain to look for the slightest contradiction". The rule was, "each thing in its place and a place for each thing". This was "a geometrical model animated from without" (Gernet 1980:7, 13). (The transcendence of the creator was deeply connected to the finitude of his creation. As Mary-Jane Rubenstein (2014) has shown, historically, (Christian) atheism has always been very closely tied to the idea that is more than one world.) "Westerners" writes Hamilton,

> "are obsessed with location because the self has no meaning without its being located in space. Accordingly, such a mentality fills space with people and their possessions, and requires that the geographical lines separating people be precise. Disputed lines result in arguments among neighbours, feuds among families, and wars among nations" (Hamilton 1989:151; see also Fairbank 1968:9).

For Jesuits, as for other Christians, the divine was not involved in everyday operations of togetherness. It could only enter into the world via some very special disruptive means: the divinely

appointed authority of the pope and priestly orders, the extraordinary experiences of the mystic, and the rapturous second coming of the millenarians. Even for post-Reformation Catholics, the "presence" of the otherworldly was most often miraculous (Christian 1989; Orsi 2016). Contrast this with Fei Xiaotong's (1993:177) wonderment at how North Americans went about their lives without the reassuring daily presence of ghosts. In fact, Watchman Nee's curt summation of one group of the British primitivists we now turn to was, "mighty in knowledge, feeble in faith, useless for casting out demons in China" (in the diary of E.H. Broadbent (1938:276) in Woodbridge 2012:114). The first notable Chinese figure enlisted within the ranks of Hudson Taylor's China Inland Mission, and under whom the celebrated Cambridge Seven worked as "helpers" (Lian 2010:28), called himself "Xi the Overcomer of Demons" (*Xi Shengmo*). The divine in China was everywhere, in myriad forms. The body-politic was a matter of balancing these divine forms against one another, and against more earthly forms, in the maintenance of social harmony.

This background makes it clear why combining a "deeper" "inner life" and a lived critique of institutional Christianity was so difficult for the British Primitivists from whom Nee learned the Christian life. They explicitly pitched themselves against the hierarchical and denominational Church, and combined elements of sectarianism and mysticism (see Appendix J). As such the frictions Dumont documents between holism and outworldly and inworldly individualisms, and between Leach's Arianism and Trinitarian orthodoxy, were very clearly present in these Christians' lives. Most especially, in their attempts to recover the Biblical church and the experience of God which they felt was lost to contemporary Christianity. On the one hand, they valued deep unity with God as proclaimed in the mystical writings of Madame Guyon and Jesse Penn-Lewis, on the other, they sought to reform the Church through egalitarian, communistic practices and renewed millenarian visions of the church as the apocalyptic bride of God. They had neither the social, linguistic nor the conceptual resources for combining these two values however. Union with God implied an individualistic pursuit of transcendental experience while reform efforts resulted in exclusivism and disastrous infighting. There was no model for their ideal church other than that of a group of overcoming super-Christians who happened to share the same fate and values. Following Dumont's history, it makes sense that their attempts to combine inworldly individualism with communalism had no firm base in practice[137]. Although the ideal flickered into being during the annual meetings of the "Keswick convention", the group ultimately split into various camps pulled by contrary impulses, the sectarians and the mystics, the Exclusive and Inclusive Brethren. What

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[137] See Marshall 2010 for a similar argument regarding modern Nigerian nationalistic Pentecostalism.

the Brethren struggled to achieve in small numbers, Nee helped bring about in a couple of decades on a relatively massive scale. How could this be so? Let us turn to Chinese conceptions of order and oneness.

Chinese Onenesses

Yuri Pines (2000) traces the emergence of the prevalent socio-political ideal of "the Great Unity", or, "the One that pervades the All" (*da yitong*), back to the era of the Warring States (453-221 BC). Even before the first Daoist writings identified the Dao as the cosmological "supreme oneness" (*taiyi*) out of which the myriad things (*wanwu*) of the universe were born, there was an evident consensus among statesmen that "stability is in unity" (Pines 2000:301) [138]. Still, Daoism deepened the significance of this unity, in associating the Dao with the King, "the Single ruler of All under Heaven [*tianxia*]" (Pines 2000:306; Ames 1983; M.Wang 2012; Dean 2012). And if Daoism deepened the concept of unity, Confucianism provided plenty of ways to achieve "coherence" (*li*) in everyday, familial and political relations (Ziporyn 2012; 2013). There were differences of course in the best way through which unity was thought to be attained. Broadly, Confucius suggested "emulation of the past", Mencius (the most important Confucian after Confucius), "the ruler's benevolence" as a solution, and Laozi (the original man-god of Daoism) advocated "non-action" (Pines 2000:311). Both Daoism and Confucianism agreed on some level however, that ultimately there was a oneness that preceded any particular manifestation, all that was needed was to act in accordance with it (*wuwei*), to conform ones habits and desires with it (*cheng*), then peace (*an*) would reign within and without (Slingerland 2003; Shun 2003; An 2004; Tao 2005; Xie 2012).

Already we may note the striking similarity between the arguments these early social, political and spiritual thinkers used and those employed by Witness Lee. The former would quote a saying attributed to Confucius- "Heaven does not have two suns, the people do not have two kings" (天無二日, 土/民無二王)-, the latter used the moon in a very similar way to critique the state of Western Christianity:

> When I was saved, all the pastors and ministers were happy to use the word denomination. Then the Lord
> raised us up to condemn the denominations, and the pastors and ministers stopped using this term.

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[138] Pines writes of the late Warring States period for instance that "even those statesmen and thinkers whose personal interests should have discouraged them from advocating unification...nevertheless shared a belief in the need for unity" (2000:311).

Although they no longer used the term denomination, they still held onto the different names. Do you realize that every name is a division? Every denomination, every naming, is a division. Do not say that our name is "the local church." We do not have a name. The moon, for example, has no name; it is just the moon. We should simply call the moon "moon." Some people have said that the American moon is brighter than the Chinese moon. But there is no such thing as an American moon or a Chinese moon. The most you can say is the moon in America or the moon in China. It is one moon. There is only the one moon. Likewise, the church is simply the church.[139]

The Warring States consensus on unity resulted in and reflected a growing state of cosmo-political integration parallel to the Western, Christian history sketched out above [140]. Although Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism developed highly opposed ways of going about things, they each contributed solutions to the common problem of cosmo-political unity. Compared to Christendom, the relationship between heresy and orthodoxy was, it seems, less stark. As Feuchtwang writes, "there was an interplay between orthodoxies and heterodoxies, both of them in the plural, each reflecting upon the other" (2001: viii). Although historians and ethnographers have delineated myriad communal and individual innovations in practice and interpretation (Weller 1987; 1994; Sutton 2007), the core of cosmo-political thought and practice for at least the duration of the Ming and Qing dynasties, and in Taiwan into the twentieth century, has been the "imperial metaphor" (Feuchtwang 2001). Though, by no means signifying total complicity or conformity, this central set of images signals that, unlike in Christianity, "religion" and "politics" in China and Taiwan have been mutually beneficial to think and act with up and down the cosmopolitical scale, though of course political structures have constrained local communities as much as they have anywhere. This cosmo-political integration rests, I will argue, on an easier acceptance of discontinuity as a means through which unity is achieved.

The world-image to which Western Christianity has been anchored is a picture of a mechanical, spatially defined, geometric order which is principally detached from its maker. The Chinese world-image which formed the background of the church's formative years, in contrast, consists of parallel

[139]*Life-Study of Genesis,* Chapter 34, Section 4, accessed on 25/03/2019, via
https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=1806CECAC6
[140] At this point, responsibility for "oneness" was considered to reside heavily with the sovereign, at least it was by the writings that have survived. As the *Lushi Qunqiu*, a document from the end of the Warring States period (475–221 BC), explains: "The true king upholds Oneness and becomes the Rectifier of the myriad things. The army needs the general, thereby it is unified. The state needs the ruler, thereby it is unified. All under Heaven needs the Son of Heaven, thereby it is unified. The Son of Heaven upholds Oneness, thereby upholding it [the realm]. Oneness means [proper] government: doubleness means chaos" (Pines 2000:308). Michael Puett (2002) and Mingming Wang (2012) argue that in the first centuries of China's first unificatory period, there was a shift from an exclusively hierarchical mode of interaction with divinity as an entity to be sacrificed to more distributed imaginary in which divine beings and essences held together the cosmos and the empire in a multitude of places and forms.

spheres, that of ego, family, village and empire. These spheres form only the middle rung of the three-tiered cosmos of heaven, humanity and earth. These spheres are not related causally as in the Western command structure, but through practices of harmonization. There are of course many ways to picture this world structure, but, following Fei (1992), Hamilton (1989; 1990), Sangren (1987a; 1987b) and others, I think it is helpful to think of it as "water-filled tiers". Each tier represents a sphere, or a domain. If ego can be thought of as the concentric waves forming around a stone dropped into water (Fei 1992, see next chapter), it can equally and complementarily be thought of as a whirlpool.

Ego aims to "centre" the dispersing water-field in relation to herself. Aside from the ego tier, there are the tiers of heaven, earth and all those in between. Each human tier in fact is composed of a centring unit and a dispersing field. Aside from this, there is the essential harmonisation of the tiers in relation to one another. Classically, the emperor is responsible for harmonising the human realm with heaven. This practice, related to the sacred mountains of China which are of course closest to heaven (M.Wang 2012), is called *fengshan* ("wind-mountain"). Geomancers harmonise the human realm with the earth (Freedman 1968), this practice is called *fengshui* ("wind-water"). Gods, ghosts, and ancestors are essential to the harmonisation of the intervening spheres (Jordan 1972; Shahar & Weller 1996). If classic Confucianism is concerned with the harmonisation of tiers and forms, then classical Daoism, in my model, is concerned with the "water" that runs between and ultimately composes these tiers and forms.

Daoism and Confucianism emphasise different but complementary kinds of "oneness"– the Dao and the great harmony respectively. Buddhism is really about the relation of form to substance, claiming, in its classic Chinese form, that one is more "real" than the other. With this image, one can see why sinologists have called Chinese cosmology "correlationist", as it is much more about correlations between the many different forms and levels of reality, and not, as in the "referential" Western cosmos, about an ultimate correspondence between two meta-categories, between spirit and matter, body and soul, creator and creation (Hall & Ames 1998; Graham 1989:319). One can also understand why classical Chinese ontology is classed as both "analogism", in which both the interiors of humans beings and the exterior world are understood in terms of pervasive discontinuity (Descola 2013; Matthews 2018), and "homologism", in which interiors and exteriors are made of the same, continuous stuff (Matthews 2017). Analogism is relevant for thinking across the "watery" unit-domains I described, whereas homologism is the onto-logic relevant within those domains.

Chin (2011) and Chang (2017) suggest strong resonances between Watchman Nee's ministry and principle Daoist ideas. Meng (2018) suggests that a more direct influence upon Nee, who was a third-generation Christian, whose mother nonetheless insisted he studied the four books and five classics of Confucianism, may have been neo-Confucianism. To me the resemblance between the neo-Confucianist Wang Yangming's (1472-1529), Zhu Xi's (1130-1200), and Zhang Zai's (1020-1077) ethical ideals of "oneness" and treating the cosmos as one's own body, and Nee's and Lee's Christianity, is so striking as to make some kind of historical connection undeniable. If anything, the church has become even more "Neo-Confucian", under Lee's guidance, than it was in Nee's day. In the dominant form of neo-Confucianism, articulated most influentially by the above thinkers, a form of togetherness is articulated which is neither holistic nor individualistic in the way Dumont understood. Here, we see the historical significance of the difference between Lily's image of the wall as a holistic way of solving the problem of lost individuality through the tough process of being "blended" into one's unique position in the church, and brother Zhou's easy reconciliation of difference and sameness through the galactic image of uniquely shining stars. In Lily's image, individuality is incorporated as a part of a whole, for brother Zhou, individuality and sameness are simply two ways of looking at a single thing.

This is very important for our understanding of how the church in Taiwan turned out in the way that it has. Let us look at Neo-Confucianism, which is the most socio-politically successful attempt to blend each of "the three religions" of China into a single cosmological picture. Here the fundamental structure or principle of the universe, *li*- the "heavenly pattern" (*tianli*), our centring units in parallel, dispersing water-fields- is said to be potentially obscured by the psychophysical configurations, *qi*, which characterise each individual unit (Ivanhoe 2015:237; Tien 2012:54). Both moral and social perfection is said to consist of "refining" *qi* so that it is more in line with *li*. Unrefined, *qi* may be thought of all the things these units do, say, think, feel, which are not in accord with the heavenly pattern of the universe. A unit with refined *qi* is said to achieve "wuwei", effortless action, because they are so aligned with the dynamic principles of the universe that they need not even reflect to act in accordance with it (An 2004).

This picture, compared to the one drawn above, of Western, Christian images of the cosmos, has direct implications for how one engages with others. Following the picture of the world in which social unity means each having their own place, as in Lily's image of the wall, the key principle of

ethical reasoning is "empathy", "putting oneself in another's place". In contrast, the Neo-Confucian image of oneness says that you and another are already one and the same. One need only attune to the level of oneness at which this is true. "In medical books", wrote Cheng Hao (1032-85), in his commentary on the Confucian *Analects*,

> a paralyzed arm or leg is said to be "unfeeling" or "not benevolent" (*buren* 不仁). This expression is perfect for describing the situation. The benevolent person, or "one with feeling" (*ren*), regards all things in the universe with one body. There is nothing that is not him. If he regards all things as himself, where will [he] not extend? However, if he does not see them [as] himself, why would he feel any concern for them? It is like the sense of a paralyzed arm or leg. The *qi* does not circulate through them, so they are not regarded as parts of oneself… (Tien 2012:59-60, translation slightly altered).

The arch Neo-Confucian, Wang Yangming argued that it was "self-centred desires" (*si yu*), the "self-centred mind" (*si xin*), "self-centred ideas" (*si yi*), and "self-centred thoughts" (*si nian*) which prevented our getting on in the world and from becoming benevolent persons (Tien 2012:54). "A well-known story of a founding father of Neo-Confucianism, Zhou Dunyi (1017-73), reported that he refused to cut the grass in front of his house because he felt intimately connected with it. In connection with this story, Wang averred, 'The spirit of life of Heaven and Earth is the same in flowers and weeds'" (Tien 2012:59). "[F]or Wang," David Tien expounds,

> "the goal was to eliminate one's self-centeredness and expand one's sense of self to embrace all of reality. This entailed a loss of one's "self" apart from other people and things. Self-centeredness, then, was a pernicious and persistent impediment to the moral life. That is why destroying "self-centered desires", which draw a false distinction between one's individual self and the rest of the universe, is the way to preserve Heavenly li and finally form one body with Heaven, Earth, and the myriad things" (Tien 2012:60).

These may seem lofty sources to compare with the everyday lives of church members in Nee's day and our own. However, the ethic and vision of the church resembles that of these Neo-Confucians to a remarkable degree. Being the state-endorsed view of things, the body of the universe that the latter emphasised was in fact largely equivalent to the social order (Liu 1973). In a parallel fashion,

Nee and Lee's "Body" was increasingly that of the church itself as a "great reality in the universe"[141]. The oneness of both "bodies" in question is very much tied to the "denial of the self" (*fouren ji*, 否認 己). Aligning oneself with the cosmic body in both cases leads to spontaneously benevolent and effective action. Paul Chang writes, in this regard:

> As with many indigenous Chinese religions, [Nee's] esoteric knowledge led the seeker to a ground of union with the infinite. It also implied an ethical and, to some extent, ontological holism that insisted that good and evil were, at some level, inseparable and indistinguishable. In other words, Nee's spiritual teachings idealized a kind of oneness with God that transcended rational discernment and evaluation. This meant that, for him, a normative Christian life was spontaneous and effortless. Although the process of arriving at such a state might be difficult and arduous, eventually the Christian automatically expressed the highest virtues of Christ and was able to seamlessly adapt to all the unpredictable vicissitudes of human life without artificiality or exertion. This system had clear parallels to the important Chinese concept of *wuwei*, or "lack of intentionality," a core principle of Chinese ethics (2017:8).

With Nee, oneness was associated with the Christian God. In order to refine one's "soul" (*hun*) one needed others' guidance and discernment. In refining one's soul in line with the brothers and sisters, one allowed God, as "the Spirit in your spirit" to "flow out" (*yongliu*). With Lee and the expansion to Taiwan and elsewhere, oneness was even more tied to "the Body", "the church". Others were not only the instruments for achieving oneness, they were the substance of the oneness each aimed to achieve. "If you love the church, you love God", one church friend said to me as we sat chatting after a Sunday meeting in a Taipei apartment.

Here, oneness does not mean a rancorous struggle to align the self with others but simply attunement to that aspect of self and other at which it is true that the two are one. A key difference between the Neo-Confucianists and Nee and, especially Lee, is their attitude to the "mind". Wang Yangming "urges his students to monitor their own thoughts and feelings, "like a cat catching mice," always trying to identify and eliminate any self-centered of selfish thoughts that arise" (Tien 2012:61; Tien 2010). In direct contrast to both Wang Yangming and to many contemporary forms of Evangelical Christianity (Luhrmann 2012; Bialecki 2017), Nee, as we saw in chapter three, advised strongly against introspection.

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[141] *The Move of God in Man,* Chapter 10, Section 2 accessed via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=0BC4C7CD6B [26/08/2019].

Recently I attended a "question and response" session at a church conference with one of Lee's co-workers in a hired-out budget hotel in the UK. He responded to questions that began with "I think…" or "I feel…" with "well there's your problem right there!". These prefaces were signs that the questioner was already approaching things from within "the mind" or "the emotions" respectively. With the development of the church in Taiwan and elsewhere, oneness became equal to the Body of the church and discernment was something one received from others not through one's own musing. The church in Taiwan fused divinity, oneness and corporatism to an even greater degree than Neo-Confucianism.

Nee and Lee both had a good deal to say about Confucius and Confucianism. Both conceded that Confucians were "ethical" and "virtuous". Lee was even embarrassed by the fact that Confucians were more virtuous than Western missionaries in China. However, in a series of "gospel messages" given in Tianjin in 1936, Nee put Confucianism alongside "Buddhism", "Taoism" and "Mohammedanism". Unlike Christianity, he argued, none had founders who were still directly accessible, as "water to drink":

> How do you quench this thirst? The Lord Jesus said, "But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall by no means thirst forever" (v. 14). An amazing fact is that neither Confucius nor any other religious leader ever said such a thing. The teachings of Confucius and Mencius only tell you to be content and to abide in your poverty. The person Confucius or Mencius has nothing to do with your contentment. However, the person Jesus has a great deal to do with your thirst-quenching[142].

Confucius never showed you how you might live the life of God, Witness complained at a "young-people's training" session in 1975 in Taipei:

> There is a great difference between living the life of God's creatures and living the life of God's sons. For example, both the Bible and Confucius teach submission. But Confucius' teaching concerning submission is merely ethical. The Bible's teaching about submission is related to our living as sons of God. The teaching regarding submission found in the classical writings of Confucius only helps us to live as

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[142] *The Normal Christian Faith,* Chapter 5, Section 5, accessed 25/05/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=1803C1C3C6.

creatures of God. It has nothing to do with living as sons of God. No matter to what degree a Chinese person may practice submission according to the teachings of Confucius, he is still living as a creature of God, not as a son of God.

In one of his writings called The Highest Learning, Confucius speaks of developing and cultivating the "bright virtue." To him, the highest attainment in ethics was to cultivate this bright virtue. Nevertheless, no matter how much we may develop this bright virtue according to the teachings of Confucius, we are still creatures of God.[143]

When I asked brother Zhou how he thought the God of the Bible compared to the Dao of Daoism, he considered the difference to be "total", but also one of a degree of clarity, suggesting even that the Dao and God are one:

Someone tried to link Logos with Dao, in the Union Bible they translate the Logos into Dao. Daoism/Confucianism is philosophy. But many scholars show their disagreement, the Dao in Daoism it is just a kind of philosophy without a person, the Dao has no kind of plan, no economy, wants nothing. If you can tell the Dao it is not the Dao. Totally different from the Dao in Daoism, the Dao has to remain in a mystical, unspeakable realm- the Bible does want to tell you the Dao.

…

The point of this chapter has been to show how the long history of thought concerning "oneness" in China, and the social conditions under which the church developed, paved the way for the enactment of a kind of Christianity Penn-Lewis and the British Brethren had struggled to bring about. We can see here the roots of the church's beginnings in China. We can understand, not only why divine and social union was more easily conceived and achieved in internecine China but also why it has been so difficult to achieve in Western Christian history. "The great harmony" (*da yitong*) was consensually aimed for from 400 BC down to twentieth century China when Confucian social reformers, Nee's contemporaries, were still advocating unity as the only way to salvation. The most famous of them, Kang Youwei (1858-1927), for instance wrote the following, in his *Book of Great Unity* (*datong shu*):

[143] *Life-Study of Galatians, Chapter 45, Section 2*, accessed on 25/03/2019 via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=1504CBC6CA

Having been born in an age of disorder, and seeing with my own eyes the path of suffering in the world, I wish to find a way to save it. I have thought deeply and believe the only way is to practice the way of Great Unity and Great Peace. Looking over all ways and means in the world, I believe that aside from the way of Great Unity there is no other method to save living men from their sufferings or to seek their great happiness. The way of Great Unity is perfect equality, perfect impartiality, perfect humanity, and good government in the highest degree. Although there are other ways, none can be superior (1956:9 in Chan 1963:731).

In Christian history, the *valuing* of "oneness", simultaneous unity with God and one another, is not enough. One needs the appropriate conceptual, linguistic and social-habitual resources, only then can symbiotic social formation be achieved. In the next and final chapter, I use the ethnographic resources of the previous chapters to articulate an ethnographic theory of oneness.

Conclusion

The Delicate Dance of Attunement: An Outline for a Quantum

Anthropology

What is a "whole"? Is it merely the sum of its parts? Or is it more than that? Is it even, as some cellular biologists suggest, less than the sum of its parts (Van Kracken & Rutter 2016)? What does it mean to be "the same", or "united"? Are sameness and difference mutually exclusive? Or do they define one another, even constitute one another, each necessary for the other's existence? Put otherwise, what does it mean to be "one"? This is the question that this thesis has sought to answer. In chapter one, we saw, in some church contexts, oneness reified as utterly "organic", with no "organisational" elements. We also saw glimmers, in other contexts, of ambi-valent attunements to the multiple organic and non-organic aspects of church unity. In chapter two, I attempted to take seriously the idea the church is, in some sense, "the same (or "one") everywhere". I attempted an ethnographic explanation of the religious experience of oneness in the church in Taiwan as mutual attunement to a shared aesthetic felt to manifest oneness as a "living reality". Chapter three outlined a method of attuning to the unique oneness of "the church" and, using the concept of atmosphere, differentiated between different modes of being one. Chapter four sought to delve deeper into the dynamics of oneness in practice by paying close attention to the moody play of silliness and seriousness, distinction and continuity. I argued that there were cultural precedents for these dynamics, and that we ought to understand them, with their vicarious approach to belief, as an instance of "proportional holism". Finally, in the last chapter, I aimed to trace the heightened concern for unity in the church to Chinese and Christian historical sources. I aimed to explain why it was in China and Taiwan that the peculiar focus of the church arose and not in the West, in the centuries before.

In this chapter, we will see that the question of being one has deeply concerned not only Chinese thinkers, Christian, Taoist and Confucian, but, in many ways, anthropologists. How, I ask, might we utilise the ethnographic descriptions of the preceding chapter to elucidate Chinese, Taiwanese and Sino-Taiwanese Christian concerns with unity, sameness and harmony? I consider in turn, how attending to these concerns might help us rethink anthropological theory. For the most part,

anthropology has rejected its old models of, and assumptions about, social oneness, cultural holism and regional similitude (Thorton 1988; Otto & Bubandt 2010; Sahlins 2017). Yet in its wholesale embrace of difference, relationality and process, it is yet to replace these old models and assumptions with new ones which might help answer this most basic but perennial of questions- "what does it mean to be one?"- with clarity and consistency. Utilising the ways those in the church in Taiwan speak about, enact and attune to forms of oneness, this conclusion is an "essay" in the original meaning of the term. At times veering into the polemical, I *try*, to present an ethnographic theory of unity which attempts to offer fresh answers to the deceptively simple question of what it means to be one.

I understand the concepts, practices and social aesthetics of the church in Taiwan to uniquely articulate a problem which has preoccupied Chinese-speaking communities for millennia, but which became especially urgent during the historical timeframe, from the collapse of the Imperial system to the rise of Taiwanese nationalism and transnationalism, under which the church originated and grew. In church vocabulary, the problem is stated in terms of "oneness" and articulated with a distinctive but nonetheless recognisably Christian vocabulary. As we saw in chapter one, a primary meaning of "oneness" for members is the unity of the Christian church. "Denominationalism cuts the Body of Christ into pieces," Lee wrote in 1991[144]. At the time of its formation in the early twentieth century, those in the 'the church' were not alone in their concern for this.

Many Chinese converts found unity to be peculiarly absent in the Christianities they encountered though Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This is clear in a well-known statement given by *Cheng Jingyi (C. Y. Cheng 1881-1939),* co-translator of the Chinese Union Bible, at the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference (in Ng 2012:14). There, he said,

> "As a representative of the Chinese Church, I speak entirely from the Chinese standpoint. . . Speaking plainly we hope to see, in the near future, a united Christian Church without any denominational distinctions. This may seem somewhat peculiar to you, but, friends, do not forget to view us from our standpoint, and if you fail to do that, the Chinese will remain always as a mysterious people to you".

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[144] *Watchman Nee—A Seer of the Divine Revelation in the Present Age,* Chapter 20, Section 3 accessed via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=0BC5C3CF6D [26/08/2019].

It is not hard, moreover, to find precedents for this concern for particular kinds of oneness, in the teachings of the foundational figures of Chinese civilization. Confucius for example differentiated morally between "sameness" and "harmony". Here he is in the Analects:

"The master said, 'The nobleman is harmonious [with others] but not the same [as them]. The petty man is the same [as others] but not harmonious [with them]."[145]

Confucius' concern is not dissimilar to that of Nee's. As for Cheng Jingyi, unity was at the heart of Nee's understanding of the Christian life. However, he was also concerned to differentiate Christian oneness from other onenesses with which it might be confused:

"If a group knows that a certain person is an unbeliever yet capriciously admits him, this group surely is not the church. It is not necessary for God's children to maintain oneness with this group. Since this oneness is not Christian oneness, we need not keep it. We are required only to keep the oneness of the wheat; we do not have to keep the oneness between wheat and tares. Today there are many groups on earth which call themselves the church but include both believers and unbelievers. They want to maintain an outward façade of oneness. Please bear in mind that we are not required to keep this kind of oneness. This kind of oneness instead will overturn genuine oneness. The oneness they want to keep is a oneness we want to escape from. Once we get into that kind of oneness, we spoil the genuine oneness".[146]

In another great text of early Chinese thought, Zhuangzi points out the philosophical issue of the relation between oneness and perspective:

"Looked at from [the viewpoint of] their differences, your own liver and gallbladder are Chu [to the South] and Yue [to the North]. Looked at from [the viewpoint of] their sameness, the ten thousand things are all one."[147]

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[145] 子曰: 君子和而不同, 小人同而不和, *Analects*, 13:23 quoted in Ziporyn (2012:1).

[146] *Speaking to the so-called "Little Flock" co-workers on Kuling mountain, China, in 1948 (Messages for Building Up New Believers, Vol. 3,* Chapter 12, Section 4, accessed on 22/09/2019, via https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=18FF08D5DD.)

[147] 自其異者視之肝膽楚越也. 自其同者視也, 萬物皆一也, *Zhuangzi, 'Dechongfu',* quoted in Ziporyn (2012:1).

Like Zhuangzi, Lee considered oneness to ultimately be a mystery not directly to be understood, but to be glimpsed through shifts in perspective. He said that,

"The truth of oneness is great and profound. The full meaning of the genuine oneness revealed in the Bible is far beyond our apprehension".[148]

Ultimately for Lee, "God" is understood as the perspective from which "the ten thousand things all are one". God, in Lee's words, is the ultimate "ground of oneness". If Nee, like Confucius, emphasises morality, Lee, like Zhuangzi, emphasises mystery and profundity.

However, the problem of oneness in the church is less a conceptual one than a lived one. By attending to the many ways in which those in the church in Taiwan conceive of, enact and fail to enact oneness, we become privy to unique insights into how oneness is a ubiquitous, if often ephemeral, aspect of the church world, and, by inference, of the world at large. The simple assertion that "the Chinese", be they twentieth-century Christian teachers or ancient philosophers and ethicists, are especially concerned with something like "oneness", "sameness", "holism" or "collectivism" would only feed into a centuries-old Orientalist stereotype. In contrast, seeking answers to the question "what does it mean to be one?" by spending time with Chinese-speaking communities and Chinese-language texts has the potential to contribute to an exciting, growing literature spanning the fields of sinology, philosophy, social psychology and anthropology on the question of social, individual and cosmological unity in Chinese-speaking worlds (e.g. Munro 1985; Vermeer et al. 1997; Ziporyn 2012; 2013; Slingerland 2018; Stafford 2000; Stafford et al. 2018; Pines 2000; M.Wang 2012; Weller 1987; Weller & Seligman 2018).

As is clear today, holism is not a cultural trope which blindly determines social relations, nor a social configuration from which certain ways of thinking unthinkingly arise. Rather, 'being one' is a *problem* which has preoccupied Chinese-speaking thinkers and communities at various times and places for millennia. Their solutions- both pragmatic and intellectual- tell us both more, and less, than "how Chinese people think and act": other people think and act in ways that overlap with the Chinese, and Chinese-speaking people obviously think and act in more ways than are expressed in

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[148] *The Genuine Ground of Oneness,* Chapter 6, Section 1, accessed on 22/09/2019, via
https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=14F908DED8

their solutions to the question of social, individual and cosmological oneness. This is precisely the value of asking "what does it mean to be one?" for the thinkers quoted above and their ancient and modern followers: their solutions shed light on a problem that plagues us all. The problem of oneness is one of the many problems of being alive.

Through close attention to how the problem of "oneness" within the day-to-day life of the church in Taiwan, in the history of Christianity and in Chinese traditions, the previous chapters have laid the groundwork for a fresh anthropological theory of unity (which equates to a realist ethnographic method of taking oneness seriously). In these final pages, I lay out the ethnographic and anthropological foundations of the theory, based upon what I discovered to be three core concerns of those I encountered in Taiwan. I first outline these three concerns-cum-foundations, differentiating them from core assumptions prevalent in contemporary anthropological approaches to ritual and religion. Then, I outline the contents of the theory itself with reference to its anthropological, sinological and philosophical influences. Thirdly, I conclude by arguing for the value of the theory as a method of articulating ethnographic distinctiveness.

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Foundation 1: the reality of sameness

The first ethnographic foundation of the theory is the existence of the church, for members, as a unique and momentous thing in the world, which is more similar to itself than to any of the national, cultural, and historical contexts of its translocal existence. On top of the value attached to oneness in the church's ministry, we have seen that there is a highly pragmatic conviction in church circles that there exists an actual similitude across church localities, which is testament to the existence of the Body of Christ as "living", "corporate" thing-in-the-world. As we saw in chapter two, academically-inclined church elders assume that the sociological unity of the church arises from the fact that church members everywhere "share the same vision". The theory outlined here attempts to make sense of this assumed sameness theoretically and ethnographically: how might we describe church lives in a way that recognises the existence of sameness and oneness but does not betray our analytical commitment to depict things as they actually are? This founding question already distinguishes the approach from the majority of anthropological approaches to social unity today, which have rejected holism as both an analytic (Vayda 1986; Thornton 1988; Harkin 2010; Otto &

Bubandt 2010) and as an ethnographic reality (Turner 1974; Leavitt 1992; Tsing 1993). Let us begin with a highly-relevant three-book exploration of "ritual", "pluralism" and "sameness" co-written by an anthropologist of Taiwan, Robert Weller, and an anthropologist of Christianity, Adam Seligman.

Weller and Seligman open their *How Things Count as the Same: Memory, Mimesis and Metaphor* with the following delineation of the book's grounding model and assumptions:

> This book is an attempt to answer a seemingly simple question: How do we constitute ourselves as groups and as individuals? What counts as the same? Note that "counting as" the same differs from "being" the same. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus was surely right when he pointed out that no one can put her foot in the same river twice. Both the river and the foot have changed by the second time. In a sense, she cannot even put her foot in the "same" river once, because feet and rivers change as they interact. Counting as the same is thus not an empirical question about how much or how little one person shares with another or one event shares with a previous event. Heraclitus showed us that nothing is truly the same (2018:1).

Throughout the book, Weller and Seligman represent human attempts at constructing sameness as always pitched against a world in which "nothing is truly the same". In this thesis, I have also been concerned with "how things count as the same". My starting assumptions and the model I develop here however are very different. Although I greatly appreciate the clarity with which the authors spell out a pervasive anthropological assumption, I do not assume that "being" and "counting as" the same are so clearly distinct. Following my time with the church in Taiwan I have come to see attempts at human sameness not as struggles against a "tragic", "fragmented and fractured" (Seligman et al. 2008:30), "broken world" (2008:180) as do Weller, Seligman and their collaborators. It seems to me that their three-book project on "rethinking" ritual (Seligman et al. 2008), pluralism (Weller & Seligman 2012) and sameness (Weller & Seligman 2018) suffers from a common anthropological fallacy: that in order to understand human beings one must take a "human" (or humanist) perspective. Put otherwise, their analysis of ritual is overdetermined by the perspectives of the ritualists whose lives the authors intend to elucidate. They assume that "ritual...is a way of establishing and crossing boundaries, and of making order out of a messy world" (2008:15). "The world always returns to its broken state," they assert, "constantly requiring the repairs of ritual" (2008:30). Ritual, as they understand it "create[s]...a shared, illusory world", "a shared potential space between separate egos" (2008:25), that is, it creates "pockets of order in which humans can

flourish" (42). These ideas seem anthropologically incontrovertible, but I find that such an approach tends towards presentism. That it is, in many cases, ritual is a participation in a social order that historically, perhaps geographically, and surely conceptually, precedes and exceeds each participant as much as it is a "creation" of their current action.

"Systems of harmony" (Seligman et al. 2008:29) I would suggest, are neither illusions nor the prerogative of human beings. The world is no more "broken", "fragmented and fractured" than it is "buzzing" and "blooming" (James 2000 [1890]:488) with myriad nonhuman systems of harmony which exist alongside, within, beyond, and in spite of, human beings. Each of these unities has its own way of being in the world and has its own "allure" (Harman 2005) and resistance to other unities. The social-scientific tendency is increasingly to reify "difference" as the actually existing condition of the world, a difference which somehow precedes the things differentiated (Barad 2007; cf. Puar 2012), against which human beings are cursed to conjure up illusory foundations for oneness, similitude and order. Contrastively, in this thesis, I assume, with Nee, Lee and the church in Taiwan, that in fact the problem is not *too much difference* per se, but that there are *too many ways of being the same.* Looking at things this way, I argue, is, at least in the case of the church in Taiwan, more ethnographically productive than the seemingly similar assumption that the world is full of difference out of which humans try to construct fleeting moments of illusory sameness. Taking this approach, does require us, if only for the duration of this conclusion, to imagine not just the church in Taiwan, but the world in which its members live, as being composed of many kinds of unity, oneness and similitude. Seeing things in this way, we step out of the social constructivist circle in which human "realities" are cocooned in the unifying dialectics of the social production and consumption of "knowledge" (Berger & Luckmann 1967; Couldry & Hepp 2018). Rather, we understand human problems as versions of dilemmas shared across the living world.

Ritual no more creates or recreates order than it translates it into particular circumstances. The church as an institutional and conceptual reality is not re-created through the rituals of any one church congregation meeting at locations around the world on Sunday mornings. What makes a church meeting a "successful" one is the degree to which it instantiates a preexisting, century-old, order in a vibrant, "organic" way. This is another common anthropological fallacy: that because things like money, corporations, nations, economies and gods only exist for as long as humans assume they exist, they are somehow less "real" than buildings, bodies and trees that exist without human recognition (Searle 1995; Couldry & Hepp 2018). This conviction rests on the utopian idea

that if all humans who assume that, for example, money is "real" suddenly stopped assuming this, then "money" would cease to exist (Graeber 2013:230). How likely or even possible is it for this to happen? No more likely or possible than it is for the Amazon rainforest to suddenly be cut down to its very last tree, recent developments notwithstanding. Yet many anthropologists, sociologists and philosophers seem to assume that money, states and corporations are somehow less real than the Amazon rainforest[149]. Not only does this rest on utopianism and the enlightenment ideal of a rational, free-willed, self-transparent human subject, it is politically and analytically very unhelpful. The method of this thesis assumes that money, rainforests, gods, selves, homes and families are equally real, they just have different forms of reality.

Sameness is a feature of the universe. Afterall, in many ways we do step into the "same" rivers again and again. Thinking that, because the river's elementary constituents change, this means that it is not the same thing, is an arbitrary way of looking at the river. Seeing a river as the same river as yesterday is no more a "human construction" than it is a construction of the many living beings who return to it again and again for water. To me, it is clear that sameness of the river is *recognised* as much as it is "constitute[d]". Even if we resist the idea that a river is the same river as yesterday, is it not the same ecosystem or the same water cycle we are stepping into? Sameness and difference are matters of perspective. Neither is more "real" or "illusory" than the other. The academic propensity to see difference (or *differance*) as the true nature of the cosmos, misses out on the perspectives of others and prevents us from learning more from them than how to modify our social constructivist pictures of the cosmos (Latour 2010; Kohn 2013; Holbraad & Abrahamson 2014). Why should a change in the molecular constituents of a thing make it not the same? The assumption that it is not, is as arbitrary as the assumption that it is, and yet this kind of assumption undergirds much contemporary anthropological thinking[150]. We might consider instead that, in the words of Jon Bialecki,

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[149] See Kohn 2013 for a similar argument in the opposite direction: that rainforests are as semiotically constructed as human communities are.

[150] Given that the relative sameness of the inside of a thing from the outside of it is what defines that thing as an entity, Weller and Seligman's denial of the possibility of true sameness is consonant with the current rejection of the existence of true entities in many anthropological quarters. Michael Scott argues that many anthropologists have been so under the spell of what he calls philosophies of "non-dualism", which

> ...assert that terms are nothing but relations. It's relations all the way down and all the way up, in and out and through and through. Nothing but relations; relations cubed. Hence, there are no core essences, no elementary categories antecedent to relations. Things do not enter into relations; they are made up of and inhere in relations (2013:3).

Although Scott is primarily addressing a particular group of anthropologists here, those concerned with "ontology", his remarks, I hold, are diagnostic of more pervasive theoretical assumptions within anthropology today (assumptions Bialecki (2012;2017) calls "nominalism".) As Scott proposes, in this thesis I make "equal time for entities" (2014), and draw copiously on his insight: "that

much like there are biological entities at the level of species that undergo little change, there may be social forms that are seemingly quiescent, in "metastable states" (Simondon 1992), not being pushed at that moment to change one way or the other even if such a change of form is possible at the level of potential" (2014b:198).

By taking sameness seriously, this conclusion hopes to help shift anthropological perspectives in a realist direction. From this perspective human constructions would sit alongside the myriad entities of which they are composed and with which they share the world. The theory of unity sees unities ("onenesses") everywhere, not just in the utopian yearnings of (some) human beings. That indeed is the problem for many in the church in Taiwan- 'which oneness do we attune to?'.

Foundation 2: defining the divine

The second inspiration for the theory is precisely this: that for many in the church, and according to its ministry, *anything* can become a distraction from church oneness. Already, anthropologists of Christianity have shown how the Protestant concern with unmediated contact with an immaterial God results in heightened concern with the "materialities" of their religious practices and language (Keane 2002; 2006; 2007). As noted in chapter two, Engelke (2010) terms the transformation of an entity from a "humble", inconspicuous medium (of divine contact for instance) into a conspicuous object of attention in its own right, "thingification". Here, the aim of "live and direct" (Engelke 2004) contact with an immaterial God, for many Protestant communities, is constantly waylaid by the "stickiness" (Engelke 2005) of inherently material lives. For those in the church in Taiwan, in their pursuit of "oneness", material things were not any more "dangerous" (Engelke 2005) in this respect than (partially) immaterial things- family, the self, words, even God (to the extent that He is distinct from "the church"). Each is a unity in and of itself, which might become one's central focus rather than the oneness of the church, which all other unities should serve and mediate. To begin with the

entities are composed of relations does not necessitate the asymmetrical privileging of relations over entities" (2014:n.p.). Where does this apparent resistance to treating sameness and entities, which I include under the rubric of "oneness", seriously, stem from? It is quite possible that there are good reasons not to take sameness, unity and entativity too seriously, given the spectre of essentialism they have historically been in the shadow of. Before letting sameness and social entities "back in" as analytical categories I hold, we need to rethink more precisely how they exist.

theory makes no distinctions then, as do theorists of "material religion" (Meyer et al. 2010; Engelke 2010), between material and immaterial things.

This assumption, far from making my approach more abstract and removed from embodied existence makes in more realist. The material religion approach is, in a very specific sense, idealist. It assumes, with many Protestants, that the immaterial reality being mediated, in itself, need not be outlined as a thing in the world. It is enough to describe the, often unsuccessful, attempts of Protestant Christians to mediate "God" without being caught up in the material realities of language and things through which this mediation must occur (e.g. Engelke 2005; 2007; Engelke & Tomlinson 2006; Keane 2006; Bialecki 2008; 2011; Meyer 2009; 2011). Conversely, in ethnographies of Orthodox and Catholic communities, in which the materialities of God's presence are less problematic (Christian 1972; Cannell 1999; 2005a; Orsi 2007; 2016; Latour 2004; Boylston 2018; Carroll 2015; 2016; 2017a; Hann 2014) the divine often becomes indistinct from the affective, material ecologies in which it is encountered. This kind of analysis would be much clearer, I hold, if the thing being mediated, from an analytical perspective, was described.

Is the immaterial entity "God" just an "idea", in which case the material religion approach is a new way of exploring the social effects of and obstacles to ideology (Bloch 1974)? Or is God a kind of experience (Lester 2008) or a cognitive configuration (Luhrmann 2012a) so that the material religion focus is a new form of social psychology, showing how local "theories of mind" (Luhrmann 2012) and/or semiotic ideologies (Keane 2003) result in particular kinds of religious experience? Or is "God" a mode of mediation in which the divine as a distinct entity is dissolved, such that we need only attend to people's practices and not to what they are practicing (Bender 2012)?[151] Without

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[151] Bialecki (2014) makes a similar argument concerning what he regards as the anthropology of Christianity's failure to tackle the question of what "God", as a social agent, is. He calls out anthropologists of Christianity for only focusing on how Christians work on God: "…it is the question of how God works on them, which is absent" (2014:39), he writes. He concludes by pointing in some of the directions from which these questions might be answered:

"…if God is built of unconnected heterogeneous objects, each with different substrates from the grossly material to the subtlety [sic] neurological, each with its own range of internal variability or degree of plasticity and each with its own unconnected historical trajectory, then it is of little surprise that, as a greater composite object, God displays an effective "will" autonomous of those who in effect produce Him" (2014:42).

Given that God in the church in Taiwan is understood directly to reside within the textures, substance, forms of church interaction, 'He' seems even more amenable to ethnographic study here than in the American Vineyard church studied by Luhrmann and Bialecki where God appears principally through unexpected thoughts and happenings in individual lives and minds (cf. Bialecki 2008). However, while I embrace Bialecki's challenge to extend Luhrmann's approach beyond the mind, I am not as confident as he that Actor-Network Theory is the best framework for this. Take chief ANT architect Latour's approach to the issue of "harmony" for instance, a vital concept to the church in Taiwan and to Sino-Taiwanese thinking in general (*heyi*). If it is true that "harmony is *post*established locally through tinkering" as Latour writes, does this necessarily mean that "there is no preestablished harmony"

articulating what would count as a successful encounter with "God", and what would not, the material religion approach reiterates the mantra "everything is mediated" without showing what it is that is (or is not) mediated. (The effect, Reinhardt (2016) argues, is to deny the possibility of any kind of transcendence at all (see also Hovland 2017).) In contrast, 'the church', the "ultimate concern" (Tillich 2001) for many in the church in Taiwan, is a described part of the ethnography of this thesis. The key problem here is not that of making the immaterial present in a material world. I think church members realise that there is no such accessible object as an entirely immaterial thing, just as they appreciate that nothing is entirely material. (There are hidden aspects to every thing, whether you are a human interacting with another human or a spider waiting for a fly.) Nor is the problem attaining or practicing a particular mode of sensuous, affective immersion. The key problem here, is mutual attunement to the same thing. In the words of Alfred Schutz, "meaning" here "is a certain way of directing one's gaze at an item of one's own experience" (1967:42, emphasis removed, in Kapferer 1991: 8). This leads me to the third and final foundation of the theory.

Foundation 3: attunement as the third way

As we saw in chapter one, at the centre of Nee's original Christian ministry, from which the church originally grew, was a tripartite anthropology of "the spiritual man" (*shuling ren*). This anthropology is still today at the centre of the church's teachings. It is often demonstrated with a simple diagram of three concentric circles. The diagram is in each of the gospel booklets which church members hand out to potential converts[152], it is on the wall of the church's largest hall in Taipei (hall 19), and it is present in the understandings of the vast majority of church members. The outer circle represents "the body" (*ti*), the middle circle is "the soul" (*hun*) and the innermost circle is labelled "the spirit" (*ling)*. The problem with the soul is not its existence but the fact that it, instead of the spirit, becomes the source of our actions. With the spirit as the source of action, "oneness" is

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(Latour 1988: 164 cited in Miller 2013: 31) as he concludes? "[N]o preestablished harmony" for whom I am led to ask? This is where a useful descriptive theory (ANT) starts to overdetermine ethnographic realities. There is indeed a preestablished harmony for those who enter a church meeting already well underway, or who encounter the church fifty years into its history. That is precisely what attracts many of them. The fact that the church and the meeting have arisen through processes of "tinkering" is irrelevant to those encounters. For me, although, "God" is a phenomenon at times distinct from "the church" in the church in Taiwan, the church is in fact "God" as wonderfully defined by Habermas, in his discussion of "the linguisification of the sacred", where,

"[t]he idea of God is transformed into a concept of Logos that determines the community of believers and the real life-context of a self-emancipating society", here "'God' becomes the name for a communicative structure that forces men, on pain of a loss of humanity, to go beyond their accidental, empirical nature to encounter one another indirectly, that is across an objective something that they themselves are not" (Mendieta 2000:129).

[152] These booklets are entitled "The mystery of human life" (*rensheng de aomi,* 人生的奧秘*).*

spontaneously "expressed", and the soul becomes a medium of this expression rather than an obstacle to it. But what indeed does it mean to be "in spirit", as the church phrase goes? Is there an actual real-world correlate to this state which we as anthropologists can include in our descriptions and analysis of the church life in Taiwan? I hold that there is. Still in the UK but sometime after deciding to spend my fieldwork period in Taiwan studying the church there, I took a walk with brother Chen, a church member who would become the gateway to my accommodation and contacts in Taipei. I told him of my plans and the basic contents of my research proposal. He listened attentively, without comment before exclaiming, "but what about the spirit?! How do you explain the spirit?!'. It is this third and most important foundation to the theory which provides answers to his question.

Returning to Weller and Seligman, it is in their first book together, this one co-written with Michael Puett and Bennett Simon, that they lay out their approach most clearly in relation to other theories of ritual, which, for them, constitute "the dominant current in both anthropology and religious studies" (Seligman et al. 2008:4). Three key streams of this current are represented by Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown and Geertz. They establish that for Durkheim, "ritual" was "an arena of collective effervescence that establishes the collective conscience", this arena is "a place where individual entities dissolve into a collective oneness" (26). For Radcliffe-Brown, ritual is a function of "social cohesion" (19). Geertz's interpretations of ritual on the basis of assumed, "coherent worldview[s]" by contrast evidences a "post-Protestant emphasis on the coherence of belief"[153]. In order to establish the position of my own approach clearly, it is worth quoting at length the way in which the authors differentiate *their* approach, which, I hold, in fact is quite *representative* of most influential approaches to ritual today, which emphasise action over social unity (e.g. Bloch 1974; Humphrey & Laidlaw 1994; Bell 1992; 1997; cf. Handelman 1998; Handelman & Lindquist 2005), from the three outlined beforehand:

> Since the practice of ritual creates its own illusory world, ritual must be understood as inherently nondiscursive- semantic content is far secondary to subjective creation...it is nondiscursive in the sense that it cannot be analysed as a coherent system of beliefs. The meaning of ritual is the meaning produced through the ritual action itself...Moreover, the meaning produced through ritual action always exists in problematic tension with the nonritual world. This is why seeking to analyse ritual in terms of a larger vision of unity- whether found in the functioning of society or a meaningful system of signs- is so

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[153] This criticism draws upon Asad's (1993) famous genealogy of Geertz's definition of "religion".

problematic, and so often misconstrues the actual workings of ritual. This has often been the case within the Durkheimian tradition, broadly conceived (2008:26).

I stand by the authors' critiques of Geertz, Radcliffe-Brown and Durkheim. Following the latter (Durkheim 2008[1912]), social unity has indeed been, and still is, understood either in terms of shared representations (as exemplified by Geertz) or in terms of shared bodily realities (a perspective pioneered by Radcliffe-Brown (2013[1933]; 2018[1952]; see Evans-Pritchard 1928). However, unlike Seligman and Weller I do not see the solution to the inadequacy of these two theoretical routes, in the social constructivist idea of ritual creations of illusory worlds of sameness. The tripartite anthropology of the church in Taiwan offers us a more ethnographically productive way out. Let us understand the anthropological focus on either representations/worldviews/conceptual systems (e.g. "Geertz") or bodily realities/practice/social formations (e.g. "Radcliffe-Brown") as manifestations of what those in the church in Taiwan see as the body-soul dualism of Western Christianity. We might rethink the central Durkheimian thought as lying in-between these two understandings, as, less an effervescent dissolution into oneness, than an attunement to one form of unity among many. Attending to what, following Nagatomo's (1992) exposition of the ideas of the thirteenth century Japanese, Buddhist philosopher Dogen Zenji (道元禅師), I term "attunement", gets us out of the body-mind bind, in which unity arises from shared representations or shared bodily affects (or a dialectical entwinement of the two)[154].

As noted in chapter two, the anthropologist Thomas Csordas (1990; 1993; 1997a; 1997b; 2004) pioneered a phenomenological approach which understood "religion" as a set of concepts and practices through which human beings attend to the fact of their "embodiment". Embodiment for Csordas can broadly be equated with the paradoxical condition of us simultaneously both "being" and "having" a body. The significance of Csordas' perspective here is that, with the notion of "somatic modes of attention" (1993) especially, it offers us a way out of reducing oneness to representation or to effervescence. Here both concepts (Geertz) and practices (Radcliffe-Brown) are answerable to, what we can call, the transcendental fact of human embodiment. Here, metaphors, for example, are linguistic modes of attention to this fact (see Csordas 1987; 1997b). The limitation

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[154] Though I use the term "attunement" rather than "ritual" it carries on the "conversation on ritual" opened by Seligman et al "as a particular way of human engagement with the world" (2008:xi). At many points ahead my own descriptions draw upon their analyses and suggestions.

of this approach is that practices and concepts are modes of attention to only one form of strange unity, that of the human body.

Japanese-Buddhist philosophical explorations of "attunement" in contrast, conceive of the body as an instrument of "felt inter-resonance" (Nagatomo 1992:xxiii) between "the person and his/her living ambiance" (ibid:180), where the person is "an entity of psychophysical integration" and living ambiance is "the totality of shaped things, either animate or inanimate, including a person with a body" (ibid:179). The body here is a medium through which a "lived unity or oneness between the subject and object, between the interior and exterior" (ibid:xviii) is achieved. Csordas' approach might be defined as "attunement *to* the body", Nagatomo's and Dogen's as "attunement *through* the body", and the approach of this thesis as "attunement *through* the (human) body to "the (divine) Body'", that is, "the church". We will explore this concept more precisely below but already we can perhaps make more sense of what the church in Taiwan is about. Within Western Christian history, generally, Christ's body has either been localised in the object of the eucharist bread or used as a metaphor to describe the spiritual reality of the church. Reminiscing at a 1993 church conference in Anaheim, California, for example an 87-year old, Witness Lee rejected both of these traditions. "When I was young," he said,

> I was instructed that the term the Body of Christ was merely a metaphor signifying what the church is to Christ. I accepted this teaching at that time, but gradually, after many years, I found out that the Body of Christ is not a metaphor; it is a great reality in the universe. Rather, our physical body is a metaphor portraying the Body of Christ.[155]

In the autumn 2012 edition of the church's theological English-language magazine *Affirmation & Critique*, a leading church brother even cites Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) famous book *Metaphors We Live By* in explaining this relationship between the individual human body and the "corporate Body" of Christ. He writes,

> ...when Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to talk about the church as the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-26, cf. v. 27), we should not lose sight that the Body of Christ is itself a reality; our human body is a metaphor to help our understanding and experience of the Body of Christ. We should not dismiss the term Body of Christ as merely a metaphor, depriving it of its divine and mystical reality. The church is

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[155] *The Move of God in Man*, Chapter 10, Section 2, accessed on 22/09/2019, via
https://www.ministrybooks.org/SearchMinBooksDsp.cfm?id=14FB0DD2DA

the Body of Christ (Col. 1:24), which indicates that the church is the means for Christ to have a "corporeal presence" on the earth today...

We are at a position in which we can understand these statements as pertaining to the actual oneness of the church as one unity among myriad in the lives of church members. This would not have been possible using the analytical approaches to "ritual", "religion" and "sameness" reviewed above, which the church in Taiwan help us to see beyond. 'The Body' here, though a "social construction", is no less a "natural phenomenon". Like the human body, it is both an object of church members' awareness and the medium through which they become aware. In this, church members lives are comparable to lives deeply entwined with objects of the natural world as much as they are to the lives of members of other "religious groups".

There is precedent to this view in the concept of "analogism", which Descola (2013) uses to characterise the "ontological regime" of ancient China, among other places. The analogist inhabits a reality divided up among innumerable discontinuities, cross-cutting the (dis)continuities of Western naturalism. We may rethink this reality as being composed of innumerable "units" each irreducibly distinct, at some level, from the other. The task of the analogist pursuing "oneness" then is always to bring these units into alignment. A key mode of this alignment is mutual attunement to the most encompassing of units. We may think of "the church" as one such unit, in and amongst, composed by and overlapping with myriad other units. There are already other, disparate anthropological approaches which may enrich this potentially uncharted descriptive-analytical domain.

Timothy Choy (2018) in putting forward a method for the anthropological study of "diffuse objects", writes of the "experimental apparatuses of atmospheric attunement" employed by chemists and mycologists seeking to transform the highly-prized scent of the matsutake mushrooms into products for Chinese, Japanese and Korean markets (see also Tsing 2015). Even more relevantly, Nicholas Shapiro after spending time with rural Oklahomans living in homes emitting unusually high levels of formaldehyde[156], adapts the notion of the "nuclear sublime", coined by Masco (2004)

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[156] He writes that "[a]t room temperature, the formaldehyde-based adhesives that hold together the plywood walls, particle board subfloors, hardboard cabinetry, and carpet backings of the average American home slowly exhale chemical vapors into interior breathing space. Without a cracked window, an opened door, or other forms of air exchange, these silent and invisible microemissions accrue within the envelope of the home" (2015:369).

to encapsulate the life-changing experiences undergone by scientists who "witnessed the first nuclear detonations in the deserts of New Mexico" (Shapiro 2015: 378), to write of the "chemical sublime". Shapiro's article, entitled "attuning to the chemosphere", documents how "indistinct and distributed harms are sublimated into an embodied apprehension of human vulnerability to and entanglements with ordinary toxicity, provoking reflection, disquiet, and contestation" (2015:369). Out of the co-present effects of formaldehyde on their sick bodies, sleepless nights and dead pets, these Oklahomans developed a collective conscience which otherwise would not be there.

Timothy Morton (2013) argues for our thinking of global warming as a "hyperobject" which, like "the Body" for those in Taiwan, is inside us as we are inside it. Global warming appears on clammy skin, as heavy rain and in the wrecked homes of those feeling and living its effects. Morton's poetic, evocative, racy depictions of it as such suggest an emerging form of embodied attunement, leading to a kind of "global climatic sublime". "[G]lobal warming is real", he writes, "but it involves a massive, counterintuitive perspective shift to see it" (2013:49). This too is how those in the church in Taiwan "see" the Body of Christ. Not only church members from Taiwan, but also from Romania, America and the UK, have conveyed to me the tangibility of "the Body" as experienced in mid- to large-scale gatherings. In these meetings, "the Body is right there in front of you", as elder Li whispered to me once as we ate dinner together outside a restaurant one evening. Robert Weller (2006) writes of a sudden rise from the late 1970s onward across social spheres in Taiwan of an attunement, influenced by the importation of the concept of "nature" (*da ziran*) and growing environmental catastrophe, to "the environment" as a distinct entity to be enjoyed, legislated and protected. One can see the establishment of national parks, nature reserves, nature-themed literature and environmental bureaucracies, alongside such practices as environmental protest and bird-watching in Taiwan, as so many responses to this attunement (see also Kant 2000[1790]; Gallese 2007; Oosterbaan 2008; Johnson 2011; Stewart 2011; Railton 2014; Brigstocke & Noorani 2016; Jackson 2016).

If units like matsutake mushrooms, formaldehyde, nuclear explosions, global warning, and "the church in Taiwan" form the matrices of my ethnographic theory, then attunement is the fragile glue by which units agglomerate and fracture into other units, by which they decompose and cohere. Like the unit-based analytical frame which I tied to analogism, the concept of attunement also has a potential siniological precedent in the notions of *li* (禮, rites, ritual, propriety) and *li* (理, order, coherence, truth). Here is the idea that there has been a longstanding Chinese understanding that

forms of social interaction and the cosmic order ought, at many scales, to align. This is to say that "attunement", like the history of relating the two concepts of li, points to a mode of inhabiting the world which attends always, in each situation and from every position, to a level and texture of cosmological, political, social reality in which those doing the attending are, in a core sense, one.

Regardless of the Sino-Taiwanese and analytical precedents for the approach being sketched out here, we may remain resistant to the notion of attributing equal "reality" (of different forms) to gods, bodies, global warming and mushrooms. In his best-selling account of the history of the human species, *Sapiens*, Yuval Noah Harari characterises the "cognitive revolution", which precipitated large-scale cooperation among humans, as the human acquirement of an ability to imagine 'entities that they have never seen, touched or smelled' (2014:27). "Just try to imagine how difficult it would have been" he writes, "to create states, or churches, or legal systems if we could only speak about things that really exist, such as rivers, trees and lions" (2014:35). "Ever since the cognitive revolution", he concludes,

> Sapiens have thus been living in a dual reality. On the one hand, the objective reality of rivers, trees and lions; and on the other hand, the imagined reality of gods, nations and corporations. As time went by, the imagined reality became ever more powerful, so that today the very survival of trees, rivers and lions depends on the grace of imagined entities such as the United States and Google" (2014:36).

From a cognitive, palaeographic perspective making a hard and fast distinction between fictive and real entities helps us understand what differentiates history from prehistory. But from an ethnographic perspective, at any period but especially during the so-called "Anthropocene" (Moore 2016; Morton 2019), when ecological forces are so influenced by human thought-cum-action, this distinction makes less sense. We can learn more from the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty's (1996[1945]) insight that, with perception, there is most often no time lapse between encountering an entity and interpreting what it is. Just as we encounter a chair as 'chair' and not as a four-legged object which might be construed as a seat, we encounter a building with a big yellow "M" attached to it as one part of a larger entity or more of less relevance to us (Watson 2006; D.Y.Wu 2006). Those familiar with Christian culture(s) do not step into a church service and piece together its various sections in our mind to arrive at the conclusion that it is a church service, we encounter it in its immediacy as a particular kind of thing. If we reconceive "*thinking* as stuff in the world" (Alaimo

2014, my emphasis), then the question is not *whether* imagined objects like churches, gods and corporations exist, but how.

Although these things assume initial existence on the basis of imagination, then, at both a metaphysical level of their effects upon other things and a phenomenological level of how they appear to human (and other) beings, they maintain an existence which cannot be reduced to human minds. One cannot understand human action by looking solely at the cognitive quality (imagined, perceived, rational, emotional) of the objects of human intention. The philosopher of ethics Peter Railton demonstrates the advantages of realising this in his critique (2014) of dominant approaches in the psychology of morality. This burgeoning field, Railton argues, is formed around a model of the human mind which assumes it to be divided into two. There is an emotional, reactive, older part and a reflexive, more rational, newer part. In most moral decision-making, psychologists of morality find, it is the former part which takes the lead, with the latter being used for post facto rationalisations. Certain thought experiments are used to test and demonstrate this finding, most famously the "trolley problem". Suffice it to say that each thought experiment presents a moral decision in which one option makes supposed rational sense but is emotionally repulsive or difficult in some way, the other is less rational but more emotionally appealing. The majority of test subjects choose the latter option over the former, justifying it with 'rational' excuses but in fact demonstrating that it is the emotive, impulsive aspect of their brain with which they are making the decision.

The most influential paper epitomising this approach is entitled 'The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail' by Jonathan Haidt (1995). Railton's (2014) paper in turn is entitled 'The Affective Dog and Its Rational Tale: Intuition and Attunement'. Railton modifies classic thought experiments employed by psychologists of morality so that they are more vivid, more realistic. In doing so he shows how what seems to be an impulsive, non-rational, brain reflex in the more abstract experiments, is in fact a form of sub-rational awareness of the dangers of choosing the supposedly rational option in the original thought experiments if they were translated into actual, real-life, vividly imaginable situations. Railton illustrates his approach with a hypothetical description of a lawyer making a strong, lucid, technically flawless case in defence of her client in a public courtroom over a period of days. In the final moments, she becomes aware that despite this, she is losing the confidence of the jury. After an encounter with her client, who she has hardly paid attention to, it dawns on her that her professionalism is in fact alienating for those who she is supposed to appeal

to. Attuning to the mood, the atmosphere, the emotional configuration of the courtroom, she puts aside her notes, forgets her training and makes an impassioned, teary-eyed plea to the room, finally winning them over. Once we pay more realistic attention to the object of focus in question, seemingly non-rational decisions turn out to make much more sense in life.

By recognizing the existence of "the Body of Christ" in Taiwan as an entity with as much reality as global warming, matsutake scents, "the environment", and the emotional atmosphere of a courtroom, we can begin to think "religious experience" beyond the enclaves of "religious worlds people make and the scholars who study them" (Orsi 2007). We might consider the object of religious focus to be among, within and encompassing of copious other things. The task, of the religionist, in this case, would not be one of learning a set of religious teachings and putting them into practice. Nor for the scholar would the problem be one of understanding these processes of teaching, learning and practicing per se. Rather, in both cases, the duty would be one of equipping oneself with the capacity to attune and reattune to the central, complexly-distributed object of the religionist's focus, as it shifts, grows and changes in a growing, shifting, changing world. Having outlined the ethnographic realities of sameness ("oneness", unity, harmony), divinity ("the Body") and attunement ("the spirit") as the three foundations of the theory of this thesis, I now turn finally to its contents.

A theory of being one

The most basic components of the theoretical model derived from the previous chapters, are divisible into two conceptual categories: "units" and "attunements". Two categories of unit are used- "unity" and "unicity", and two forms of attunement- "harmony" and "oneness". Units are the "ten thousand things" of the passage of the *Zhuangzi* quoted above. "Unities" are the significant units which overlap with and partly compose "the church", as an actually-existing entity, but which also compose other, non-church, parts of members' lives, minds and bodies. Examples are "families", "households", "nations" (i.e. Taiwan), "bodies", "minds", "friendships", "business partnerships" but also fleeting emotional surges, a conversation with a new-comer, the whirring sound of an air-conditioner, the taste of a wafer, the cold water of baptism. The point here is that life is full of attachments, onenesses. Those whose ultimate concern is the church, as a oneness unto itself, pay much attention to these passing and more substantial unities and their status as either a part of the church (desired) or wholes unto themselves, which thus constitute the church as a part (undesired).

They attend to the role of these unities as either a thing-in-themselves or a medium of the church-world.

Units

The word "unit" is intended to be un-evocative, free from the semantic baggage of potential synonyms- "object" or "thing" for example- but it also conveys the conviction introduced above that unity is not a human invention, but a feature of the world humans co-inhabit. "Unit" is a heuristic term to be filled in with ethnographic data. Nonetheless, it conveys also the theoretical method underlying this conclusion: that fieldsites and ethnographic data are decomposable to so many significant components, which can then be related to one another in precise ways[157]. These components are "wholes" as much as they are "parts", because none are reducible to the parts they play in the "life-world" ethnographically described- the church is composed of many families, texts, bodies and lives but each has a polyvalent existence of their own. To various degrees, each has their own autonomous existence. Nonetheless, they are also the building blocks from which other unities are formed. As Bialecki, conceptualising the Christian denomination as a kind of "unit", writes,

> just because we have differently scaled items (such as Christian adherents) that in part constitute larger-scale items, we should not take a reductionist turn and "undermine" (Harman 2011) the denominational form. Just because we can identify units that might be subsidiary to and yet partially independent of larger units, that does not mean that larger units can be thought of as merely aggregations of the smaller units; this kind of nominalist thought only erases the additional ideational, material, and praxeological aspects of the denomination that may in combination have emergent properties (2014b:S196, fn3).

Beginning from this unit-based frame, we can then begin to describe what the unities which compose the church are, what they do and how they relate to one another.

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[157] Tim Ingold and many others would likely be horrified at this method. Ingold rejects the concepts of "materiality" and "agency" precisely because in his words they are solutions to a problem "born of the attempt to re-animate a world of things already deadened or rendered inert by arresting the flows of substance that give them life" (2010:7). Reducing life to "objects" anthropological analysis sets up predicaments which do not arise in the flowing lifeworlds of humans and other organisms. For Ingold, discussions of "agency" and "materiality" are inherently misrepresentative of both the animists he is inspired by and of life itself (see 2000; 2011b). I disagree with Ingold on two fronts. First, I do not think it is the job of anthropology to represent life as it is but to represent it in ways that make it easier to understand. Second, life is much more stagnant, static and repetitive for all organisms than Ingold's poetics suggest, which makes those depictions more phantasmagorical than they are representative of actually-existing life-predicaments.

This method of description and analysis allows me more than any other, to descriptively and analytically root what those in the church in Taiwan were doing, feeling and saying in a world-model which I, as a non-Christian anthropologist, can understand and precisely convey. It helps me picture more precisely many of the terms which anthropologists of Taiwan and anthropologists of Christianity use, not least the concepts of "Taiwan" and "Christianity" themselves. Finally, the method of description (that is the theory) outlined here, helps me to rethink much of the knowledge I possessed, about Taiwan, Christianity and the church, but which was getting in the way of a clear understanding (which is the job of analysis as I understand it (Holbraad et al. 2018)). As has been forcefully reiterated over the years (Schneider 1968; Wagner 1975; Strathern 1988; Viveiros de Castro 2004; Mimica 2009; Holbraad et al. 2018), it is imperative upon ethnographers to accurately describe their terms in relation to the community at hand. "Brother", "woman", "family", "nation", "God", "me", "nature", "death" and myriad other terms may well not have the same meanings for those being ethnographically described as for those reading or listening to the ethnography. What a "family" or a "brother" or a "client" is, depends on the life-configurations of those being described. Anthropology prides itself on its capacity to produce "ethnographic texture" and yet very often a fieldsite is described by reconfiguring familiar terms into unfamiliar patterns (see below). By focusing upon a particular unit at a specific time and place, in contrast, we are forced to describe wholly 'new' things. Here, I am totally in agreement with the ontological turn.

If, as two proponents of the "ontological turn" write, "typically" anthropology is concerned with the "epistemological problem of how one sees things", like them I am more concerned with "the ontological question of what there is to be seen in the first place" (Holbraad & Pedersen 2017:5). They propose "a basic reversal from striving to grasp 'the native's point of view', to finding ways to overcome what one already grasps in order to be better grasped by it" (2017:7). For Holbraad and Pedersen, in order to "'see' things in one's ethnographic material that one would not otherwise have been able to see" (2017:4), I must,

> "neutralize or otherwise hold at abeyance or in continuous suspension my assumptions about what the world is, and what could be in it, in order to allow for what is in my ethnography to present itself as what it is, and thus allow for the possibility that what is there may be different from what I have imagined…" (2017:5-6).

They take up Mauss's (2002) notion, that in Maori, and other cultures, gifts are thought to carry something of the giver within them, as an illustrative example:

> "...what happens if one takes a step further the suggestion that Maori gifts cut against the common-sense distinction between people and things? Might one not try to be more precise than just pointing out that the distinction between people and things 'does not apply' in this case, or saying that here 'people and things are continuous with each other' (what is it, after all, for a person and a thing to be 'continuous' or 'part of each other')? Rather, is what is needed here not a wholesale re-conceptualization of the very notions of 'people', 'things' and their 'relationships'?" (2017:2-3)

Unlike the ontological turn, my approach does not take the purpose of anthropological analysis to be conceptualisation, reflexivity and experimentation for their own sakes (Holbraad & Pedersen 2017: 9-24). For me these are methodological means for a greater understanding of my fieldsite in relation to the existing literature. Ontological turners would, it seems, dismiss my approach as "doggedly metaphysical" in its assumption "that there is a 'really real' reality 'out there'" (2017:34) to be described and analysed. Nonetheless, the questions Holbraad and Pedersen raise in relation to Mauss' ethnography, serve the same function as the question that runs through this thesis- 'what is oneness?'- does in relation to my fieldwork with the church in Taiwan: it allows me to re-conceptualise the very constituents of life in the church in Taiwan rather only reconfigure familiar terms- "Taiwan", "Christianity", "Jesus", "eating"- into unfamiliar arrangements (e.g. "in the church in Taiwan, 'Christianity' is rejected and Jesus is someone to be eaten rather than worshipped": what is it that is "eaten" in this case, and how might the answer to this shift our understandings of what it means to "eat"?). All that the term "unit" conveys is that there is something *there* which, no matter how entangled it is with other units, is not entirely reducible to those other units. It is my job to describe, rather than assume, what a unit is and how it relates to other units[158].

I have taken the word "unit" from Ian Bogost (2008; 2012), a philosopher and designer of video games. He writes of "unit operations", a term which in turn is borrowed from chemical engineering.

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[158] The term unit is also intended to get away from the intuitive and analytical dominance of the notion of the "relation". The term unit is meant to unsettle the anthropological intuition that relations somehow precede the existence of the things they relate (Barad 2007; Scott 2012), and that stability and sameness are only ever rhetorical constructions of those who cannot handle life's uncertainties. Despite this, the term "unit" does not refer to a solid, stable thing, it only leaves open the possibility that the thing in question is solid and/or stable. A unit can have a momentary, fragile, fleeting existence- a passing conversation is a potential unit, as is a brief romantic affair- or it can persist for millennia, like the Acropolis or a Galapagos island. Units can be more or less tangible and more or less effective in relation to other units- "Taiwan", "China", the gravestone of Mr Chen, a tornado and a raindrop are all units.

Bogost is an adherent of an informal philosophical school, "object-oriented ontology" (OOO), which is part of a wider philosophical development, which calls itself "speculative realism" (Bryant et al. 2011; Shaviro 2014). Speculative realism, now an established philosophical branch, is traceable to a single book: Quentin Meillassoux's *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency (2008)*. There, Meillassoux diagnoses contemporary philosophy as being caught up in "correlationism", "according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other" (5). Employing a now-famous phrase, the book argues that, "contemporary philosophers have lost the *great outdoors*, the absolute outside of pre-critical thinkers: the outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself whether we are thinking of it or not" (2008:7). "It is therefore incumbent upon us", writes Meillassoux, "to break with the ontological correlate of the moderns, according to which *to be is to be a correlate*" (28). The theory developed in this conclusion is under the influence of speculative realism to the extent that it posits the existence of myriad units which populate and compose church members lives (realism) but recognises that these units can never be completely exhaustively described (so it is speculative) not least because we can never fully describe a unit from its own perspective, be it a person (ourselves or others), a nation or a wafer.

A key mode of breakage from "the moderns", for Meillassoux, is for philosophers to take science seriously again. That is, science as science, not as just another mode of (human) action (*ala* Latour 1987). For Meillassoux, mathematics in particular is our best language for describing the "great outdoors", but this is where all the different speculative realist schools start to disagree. Perhaps the most productive line of thinking to emerge from the critiques laid out in *After Finitude*, has been OOO[159]. The latter posits the non-reducible existence of objects at all scales, from the microscopic to the hand-held to the institutional. OOO, where it has been mentioned at all by anthropologists (e.g. Pedersen 2013), tends to get collapsed into the "ontological turn" (OT), but they could not be more different. Where OT tends to reify the non/modern divide (Bessire & Bond 2014), OOO makes such a divide unthinkable: in a world composed of only an infinity of objects, dividing the world in

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[159] Holbraad and Pedersen dismiss OOO as a "peculiar but sophisticated theory of objects" (35), "doggedly metaphysical" in its assumption "that there is a 'really real' reality 'out there'" (34). A 'reality' which, as Holbraad and Pedersen concede, will nonetheless never be fully uncovered either by humans or anything else, hence why OOO is "speculatively" realist, rather than "naive realist". In fact, the 'really real' reality of OOO, as psychoanalytic applications of OOO have shown (e.g. Bryant 2011), it is no more 'out there' than it is 'in here'. If it is "dogmatic" and "un-anthropological", as Holbraad and Pedersen have it (p.35, fn2), to assume that there is a really real reality we can speculate about with the aid of empirical investigation, then I, for one am lost. It seems less dogmatic to assume that, than to assume with the authors, that for an approach to be 'anthropological' it must be infinitely reflexive, experimental and conceptual (51), it must maintain "a position of apositionality, a motile analytical transit that, because it is *potentially* every theoretical position, everywhere and every-when, is simultaneously no theoretical position, nowhere and no-when" (Scott 2016:37 quoted in Holbraad & Pedersen 2017:59), or it is nothing.

two makes no sense, difference lies everywhere[160]. Where the OT tends to be idealist, aiming primarily at conceptual innovation (Graeber 2015), OOO is radically realist, opening a conceptual framework which begs to be filled in with accurate ethnographic information. Where the OT relies on an implicit flat ontology in which the world is composed only of fields of relations, planes of immanence to be "translated" by the anthropologist (Holbraad & Pedersen 2009; Hanks & Severi 2014), rendering all previous ethnography oblivious to this method rather irrelevant, OOO posits new contours, dimensions and kinds of causality which have lain un-investigated but which potentially lie behind, alongside or in dynamic interaction with the many layers and aspects of the world already uncovered by ethnographers.

"Unicity" refers to the sum of all those actions, affects, aesthetics, words, notions, buildings and bodies which make up 'the church' as a dynamic social, affective and conceptual entity in the world. It refers to the "flavour", the non-local quality, the sameness of the church in Taiwan, that I attempted to articulate in the previous chapters. It is composed as much of words, feelings and actions as it is of stable entities like books, websites and church meetings. It is conceivable as mass entanglement of myriad, habitual "interaction ritual chains" (Collins 2004; Robbins 2010a) and is comparable to the concepts of an "assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari 1988; Ong & Collier 2005; Marcus & Saka 2006; Delanda 2016; Puar 2012; 2018; Sassen 2008; Hayles 2017; Bialecki 2012; 2017), a "global culture" (Hexham & Poewe 1997), a "creole culture", a "global ecumene" (Hannerz 1996:7, 65-77 in Weller 2006:168-9) a "sacroscape" (Tweed 2009), a "sacred canopy" (Berger 1967), a "transnational frame" (Zhan 2009) and "an actor-network" (Latour 2007; Tsing 2010), except that none of these concepts put the same emphasis on unity and uniqueness as does the concept of a "unicity".

Although they may be "wobbly" in places, after a while, most people who encounter the church can quite easily discern its distinct "outlines". This is especially true of the church in Taiwan because of its unique history of growing conformity, but it is also true in a banal sense: most people know when they are in a church in Taiwan meeting or not, whether they are talking to is a "brother" or "sister" of the church, whether the book they are reading is a church book or Bible version. The distinct ways of greeting, praying and "testifying" are also clues, as well as the buildings, websites and events run by the church. Depending on one's position of relative exteriority or interiority in relation to

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[160] Though not in the generic, *apriori* differe/ance sense of post-structuralism, but in specific differences between specific entities.

the church, it's unicity may be thought as an ecology, that is an enveloping environment ("the churchlife" and "the Bodylife" are terms frequently used by members) or as an object extending into one's life (the equivalent native terms here are "the church" and "the Body"). In both cases, the church is a unified entity, in part composed through multiple subjectivities and intersubjective engagements (see Biehl et al. 2007).

Cross-cutting the *unicity* of the church are the myriad other *unities* which form and are formed by church participants' lives. These unities may be more or less dense, coherent and/or material. Like the unicity of the church these are actually-existing entities, composed both of material and immaterial facts and of imagined images. The lines between the church unicity- that is the collective product of church members- and the other unities which compose people and their lives is sometimes blurred at other times clearer. My notion of unities is my way of conceiving of the perennial but elusive anthropological problem of "context" (Strathern 1987; 1995; Duranti & Goodwin 1992; Coleman & Collins 2006; Cook et al. 2009; Shih 2009). In the various stories and accounts I encountered in Taiwan, these unities are at times in the background and at times in the foreground. The church itself is of course just another unity alongside these other unities. The reason I term it a "unicity", is because it is the central focus which ties this ethnography, and, to a large extent, church members' lives, together.

Attunements

"Harmony" designates attunement to one or many "unities", "oneness" designates attunement to the "unicity" of the church. A delicate idea, "attunement" is not reducible to the "affect" of communication inferred by the classic Durkheimian model of the dialectics of effervescence and representation (Collins 2004). In the short run, it is more like a way of attending to things, a "soft focus" (Peacock 2001) somewhere between passivity and action, the dash of awareness between "participant-observation". In the long run, it is a kind of "orientation" (Ahmed 2006; Grosz 2017), it is a kind orientation to what is, even while the "what is" is also a part of the thing orientating. The concept of attunement shares close affinity with the Chinese "conceptual metaphor", *wuwei*, the importance of which in Chinese intellectual and ethic history has been vigorously demonstrated by the sinologist Edward Slingerland (2003; 2018). He translates the term as "effortless action", which suggest that it denotes the action itself, but we may also think of it as the state of being within which

effortless action is felt to be enacted, better conveyed by Chang's translation "lack of intentionality" (2017:8; cf. Duranti 2015). Attunement might be thought of as a kind of "being while doing".

We can become attuned, for example, to the presence of "the middle class" as a unity in the UK when someone says or does something which distinctly instantiates that unity for us. In such a moment of attunement to "the middle class" (as an actual entity in the world), our interlocutor shifts from being "a person" to "a middle class person", almost as if they were a hologram we were turning in our hand (here the approach shares obvious affinities with Goffman's (1974) "frame-analysis" approach). Many people "religiously" participate in the church in the Durkheimian, Radcliffe-Brownian, and/or Geertzian sense, while not being attuned to it as specific unity in world. At times and for some members, church contexts are sites for their attunement to other fragile unities, such as friendships, families and selves. "I only come for the food" (*wo zhi lai wei chifan*) one church member used to say to me, though I expected that he in fact came for his wife's sake. The existence of the church as a transnational manifestation of "the Body of Christ" is not their object of focus. Others are more attuned to the church as its own kind of unity. Others work hard to shift their "harmony"-attunement to "unities"- into "oneness"-attunement to 2unicity"-, and to make the "unities" of their lives serve the "unicity" of the church. Within church contexts, unities and harmonies may sometimes happen to contribute to its overall unicity, at other times these unities and harmonies may rub up against one another and "sow division", as the church phrase goes. The art of "discerning" harmony from oneness and unity from unicity is learned but often spontaneous, some can tell from the first few words a person utters whether they are a church member and what kind of attunement they are manifesting. Aside from conceptual understanding of the church project, we saw in the previous chapters that social aesthetics, atmospheres and rhythm are key mediums through which this attunement is attained.

To illustrate the concept of "attunement", in a non-church context, I take a surprisingly relevant example from the popular ecologist and philosopher David Abrams. It is a section of his acclaimed book *The Spell of the Sensuous.* Abrams is in Bali walking through "a lush, emerald valley, lined by cliffs on either side, awash with the speech of the river and the sigh of the wind through high, unharvested grasses" (1996:16). There are tourists and tourist sites around so he presses on, down river to a "series of caves…more isolated and remote, unattended by any footpath I could discern" (1996:17), eventually scrambling up a cliffside and into a small cave. Sitting there humming, cross-legged, a monsoon storm breaks and soon the mouth of the cave is blocked by "a solid curtain of

water". "My senses were all but overcome by the wild beauty of the cascade and by the roar of sound," Abrams writes, "my body trembling inwardly at the weird sense of being sealed into my cave". However, Abrams' focus shifts, from his own body to the cave he's cocooned in. "And then", he continues,

…in the midst of all this tumult, I noticed a small, delicate activity. Just in front of me, and only an inch or two to my side of the torrent, a spider was climbing a thin thread stretched across the mouth of the cave. As I watched, it anchored another thread to the top of the opening, then slipped back along the first thread and joined the two at about midway between the roof and the floor. I lost sight of the spider then, and for a while it seemed that it had vanished, thread and all until my focus rediscovered it. Two more threads now radiated from the center to the floor, and then another; soon the spider began to swing between these as on a circular trellis, trailing an ever-lengthening thread which it affixed to each radiating rung as it moved from one to the next, spiralling outward. The spider seemed wholly undaunted by the tumult of the waters spilling past it, although every now and then it broke off its spiral dance and climbed to the roof or the floor to tug on the radii there, assuring the tautness of the threads, then crawled back to where it left off. Whenever I lost the correct focus, I waited to catch sight of the spinning arachnid, and then let its dancing form gradually draw the lineaments of the web back into visibility, tying my focus into each new knot of silk as it moved, weaving my gaze into the ever-deepening pattern (1996:18).

When other spiders join in, weaving webs at different depths and angles between Abrams and the cave mouth, his description reaches its crescendo. "I sat stunned" he writes,

and mesmerized before this ever-complexifying expanse of living patterns upon patterns, my gaze drawn like a breath into one converging group of lines, then breathed out into open space, then drawn down into another convergence. The curtain of water had become utterly silent- I tried at one point to hear it, but could not. My senses were entranced…I had the distinct impression that I was watching the universe being born, galaxy upon galaxy… (1996:19)[161].

Using this illustration, I hope, helps point the reader in the direction I am thinking. Very often, anthropological analyses interpret ethnographic descriptions in terms of the effects that the things

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[161] Following this experience, Abrams writes, "I began to see and hear in a manner I never had before…[m]y ears began to attend, in a new way" (20). The subtle wonder of following the spider's web going in and out of focus is quite different from the collective emotivity, togetherness and presence of Durkheimian religion. The problem for Abrams, is that his new-found way of attending to things is completely entwined with his experience of the Nepalese Himalayas and the Indonesian islands (this is what Siegler and Palmer (2017) call "the predicament of modern spirituality": it tries to be detached from specific places, objects and bodies). When Abrams returns to America, he is unable to maintain his sense of communion with the animals there. Soon he experienced, what the journalist George Monbiot might call, "ecological boredom" (Monbiot 2014:7).

described have on the humans that are doing, wearing, saying, building, experiencing those things, whether it is in terms of "identity", "meaning", "socialisation", oppression, mystification, or psychological change. I would call this an "internalising" analytical orientation and is the anthropological version of Meillassoux's "correlationism". We might however, try to re-describe things from the perspective we have learned by being in the place(s) and spending time with the people of our descriptions. We might ask, with Eduardo Kohn, "What kinds of insights about the nature of the world become apparent when we attend to certain engagements with parts of that world that reveal some of its different entities, dynamics, and properties?" (2013:10). Abrams' experience may seem a far cry from the social realities of the church in Taiwan, but in fact it provides key imagery for us to think about "filling in" the picture of the world I learned to (re-)see in Taiwan.

Famously, Fei Xiaotong (1992 [1947]), in his attempts to differentiate Western and Chinese "modes of association", depicted the former as "organizational", using the imagery of haystacks, and the latter as "differential", using the image of the ripples a stone makes when dropped into water. Westerners, being "individualistic" Fei held, were like discrete entities piled up into groups and institutions like haystacks. The Chinese, by contrast, are "egoistic", families, friends and associates forming around the ego like the concentric circles of the ripples of the dropped stone. While Western life consisted of organizations, in which roles and rights were predefined, Chinese social life was composed of extensive "networks" not thought to pre-exist the relations they were composed of. Neither holistic nor individualistic, the Chinese person sought to extend their influence through particularistic ties, captured most clearly in the concept of "guanxi". Fei crystallised this picture of the Chinese conception of self and others using the image of a spider's web, expanding outwards from the spider in the middle. The larger one's web, in the "Chinese" conception, the more successful one is as a social person.

This imagery only takes us so far. Nevertheless, it helps us understand what attunements to different kinds of oneness might entail. Kerry Brown (2018) notes that within the Chinese Communist party Fei's image of the spider's web was used directly as an image of the "selfish", particularistic mode of association the party wanted, and wants, to co-opt into a nation-focused model of personhood. Stafford (1992) writes of the Taiwanese state co-opting familiar terms into its nationalist rhetoric to shift citizen's focus away from particularistic devotion to mothers to nationalistic sacrifice for Taiwan. Something structurally similar if phenomenologically very different is going on with the church in Taiwan. There too, one is expected to reconceive of oneself

as a component of a larger entity, this time not the state or the nation but God Himself. The church in Taiwan is conceived as something in between Fei's two modes of association. On the one hand 'denial of the self', or 'the ego' (in Fei's terms), is imperative in some church circles, on the other "organization" is about the worst word you could utter in others.

We can perhaps adapt Fei's image, to imagine the church as a large web in which the self is decentred and which extends beyond the bounds of Taiwan into other nations. It is, in Gaston Bachelard's term, an "intimate immensity" (1964), running through oneself and through familiar and unmet others. We have arrived at something very like Clifford Geertz's even more famous image of "culture" as "the webs of significance that ["man"] himself has spun" (1973). Combining Geertz's conception with Fei's depiction of the Chinese person, and Abrams' experience in the cave, however gives an all-important twist to this picture. Like so many anthropological analyses of "social structures", neither Fei's nor Geertz's "webs" are available to their weavers as "webs", as distinct units in and of themselves, in the way that the multitudinous objects and concepts he or she encounters on a daily basis are. Geertz's weaver, and to an extent Fei's Chinese ego, like the subjects of so many anthropological analyses, are not aware of the structures that move him *as* structures, the patterns s/he "weaves" *as* patterns. These patterns and structures are the secret insights of the anthropologist.

In contrast, like the webs in Abrams' cave, the web of the church-life is one amongst many webs, woven at different "depths" that the weaver, now also a watcher, can attune to. The highly explicit discourse within the church constantly reminds church members of the strange thingliness of the church-world they belong to. It also makes them see everything else as either in collaboration or in competition with this life-defining entity. In the terms discussed, "the self" is a web, "the church" is a web, "Taiwan" is a web, one's family is a web, friendships and associations are webs, one's relationship with one's mobile phone, home and vehicle are also webs. Ideas and body parts- for hypochondriacs for example- can form webs. Some webs are more "sticky", "dense" or "fragile" than others. The problem is, and here is where our analogy starts to run into difficulties, that these webs overlap and interact, they rely upon one another and they are formed in places out of the same web-matter. The webs change, they are not static, and one is always caught in and/or weaving more than one web at a time. There are webs within webs, but a web is never fully encompassed by the web(s) it forms a part of. This is the all-important point: that, to return to the language of "units" which this conclusion employs, each web, despite its entanglement, is a unique unit which can be

attuned to as such. If, as Sangren (1984) and Stafford (2000b) write, traditional Chinese life is not as oriented around the patriline as has been assumed but is more often characterised by situated negations between the various groups ("corporations" in Sangren's terminology), each person participates in (the patriline, the homestead, god-worshipping societies), then we can understand attunement as not dissimilar to the mechanisms by which these groups are "nested" in relation to one another, which is Duran Bell's (2000) definition of guanxi.

At a child's birthday party, we are attuned to the child and our relationship with it, as mother, uncle or sibling. At a wedding we are attuned to the formation of a new unit and we act and think accordingly, or at least we should do. The web-units which form the ethnographic constituents of this thesis are not reducible to the flat, generic planes of "culture" or "relationality" or "difference", in which everything is bathed in the homogenising clichés of "process", "practice" and "social relations". As mentioned above, the world of too much difference and too much relationality for those who desire sameness and entativity, which many anthropologists assume exists (see Hegel 1979:82 for a similar depiction of human beings), might just as easily, and, I hold in this instance, much more productively, be seen a world of too many samenesses, too many unities, too much oneness. In this world, practice, process and social relations exist always in relation to some particular entity/unit/web or set of them: they may extend, form, destroy or escape from particular entities but they are never just practices, process or relations, or differences, in and of themselves.

From this perspective, the differences between Nee's "genuine oneness" and a "facade of oneness", "Christian oneness" and non-Christian oneness, or being the "same" and being "harmonious", for Confucius, are more than rhetorical differences, they relate to the actual constituents of the world. The Chinese Christian concern with unity becomes more than a cultural trope, and we might begin to ask what precipitates seeing the body as a vast universe of difference or "the ten thousand things" as "one", as in Zhuangzi's image. As well as attuning to the problems of oneness, one can attune to its parallaxes. In the terminology of this conclusion every "unit" is also the "site" of other units. Oscillating between these two incommensurable perspectives may be a source of wonder in itself. Most importantly, seeing the world like this, we can begin to rethink the role of social entities in anthropological theory without fear of reification: each unit participates, composes and is composed by myriad others, and depends upon them as much as they on it for its distinct flavour, feel and form. To end on a dissenting note, however: if there are parallaxes to be found within the

"unit-ology" perspective this chapter has concluded the thesis with, what, we should ask, might be on the other side of the potential parallax of which this perspective is just one part?

Appendix A

Questions from the Questionnaire Distributed among the Taipei Trainees

您怎麼成為基督徒了?

(是什麼時候發生了?)
When and how did you become a Christian?

成為基督徒對您的生活有什麼影?
What impact has becoming a Christian had on your life?

認識主耶穌什麼時候在哪裡影響您每天的生活?
How is Christ involved in your daily life?

您成為基督徒怎麼影響您的家庭?
How has becoming a Christian impacted your family life?

您有什麼樣的家庭背景?
What is your family background?

成為基督徒對您的工作有什麼影?
How has becoming a Christian impacted your life at work?

認識主耶穌弟兄姊妹對您的想法有什麼影響?
How has getting to know Christ and the saints impacted your ways of thinking?

您對現在台灣的情形有什麼樣的想法?
What are your thoughts on the state of Taiwan today?

您對現在世界的情形有什麼樣的想法?
What are your thoughts on the world situation today?

您有什麼台灣宗教的經驗?
Do you have any experience of Taiwanese religion?

您有什麼基督教的經驗?
Do you have any experience of Christianity?

您恢復教會的經驗跟這樣的經驗哪裡不一樣?
How does your experience of the Local Church differ from these experiences?

Appendix B

The Chinese term for "church"

Organisation, in classic Local Church formulation, means to act "for" God, rather than "from" God. It means using the "mind, emotions and will" to act, rather than acting from the "spirit". The former is associated with both Confucian and Christian moralism[162], which are not understood to be "bad"[163] per se, but are considered "dead", not organic and so not divine ('don't be good, be God' is a common church phrase). This ethic is evident in the ways in which the church refers to itself. The term used for 'church' on the sign described in the introduction, saying "the church in Jingmei", for example, is a neologism, *zhaohui*, 召會. *Zhaohui* literally means 'to call to assembly', 'to call a gathering or a meeting'. The usual Chinese term for 'church', *jiaohui*, 教會, is composed of two characters, the first means to teach, the second denotes a meeting, an assembly[164]. However, this term when it is used to mean 'church' refers specifically to a, or the, Christian church. The first character *jiao,* as well as meaning to teach or tell, is also used to denote "religion". The Chinese term for the imported concept of 'religion' is *zongjiao*, 宗教, literally 'the teachings of the ancestors'. Terms for Confucianism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Judaism, Islam, all contain the suffix *jiao*, 教. The meaning of *jiaohui*, 教會, then, when used to refer to a Christian church is 'a place or meeting for Christian teaching'. Why does the sign say Jingmei *zhaohui*, 景美召會 and not Jingmei *jiaohui*，景美教會?

The difference between *zhaohui* and *jiaohui* point to divergent understandings of what a, or the, church is. The latter term denotes the church as a meeting place attended for other purposes, for Christian teaching and learning, for practicing religion, for meeting God even. (Witness Lee often disparaged "teaching" as the wrong way to go about church training and meeting, teaching infers that the ministry is a "theology" or a "doctrine", loathed terms in many church circles). The former term, *zhaohui*, in contrast puts the emphasis on the assembly itself. The point here is the gathering, the gathering is not the context for something else. *Zhaohui*, to call to assembly, is a verb as much

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[162] In fact, Lee certainly valued Confucian morality in practice over Christian morality, he spoke of the shame at seeing Christian missionaries acting much less ethically than traditional Confucianists. Both Nee and he spoke of Confucius being the most ethical person that ever lived, but the problem was that unlike Jesus you couldn't eat Confucius, his personhood was substantially irrelevant to one's own, one could only ever emulate him, never internalise him.

[163] The church ministry is "beyond good and evil" in Nietzsche's phrase: the knowledge of good and evil arise from the same tree in the garden of Eden it is held, they are related to the "soul", "knowledge" and "opinion". The spirit by contrast descends from the tree of life, which just needs to be eaten and enjoyed, without thinking, feeling or willpower taking the lead. This is one reason given for church members lack of involvement with either politics or charity.

[164] *Jiaohui* also means simply 'to teach' or 'to show'.

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as it is a noun, 'to church', to keep the social body alive. The *hui*, 會, in *jiaohui*, especially considering the latter's association with religion(s) and Christianity, denotes the context in which religious and Christian teachings occur, are 'shown', practiced even. The *hui*, 會, in *zhaohui* is not a place of teaching, but that which is called into being, not a con-text but the text itself. While *jiaohui* connotes a passive participation in a premade system, *zhaohui* connotes active participation in the coming-to-be of something larger than oneself. This, Lee held when he was first forced to register a name for the group with Chiang Kai-Shek's (Jiang Jieshi's) government on Taiwan, was the original Biblical meaning of 'church' (Lin & Zhou 2011)[165].

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[165] In a recent edited volume, *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, Jiayin Hu asks whether or not "the Local Church" are Pentecostal or not, concluding that "[a]lthough their joyful and spontaneous worship services may bear some resemblance to Pentecostalism, the practices of "calling on the Lord" and "pray-reading" [perhaps the most distinctive practices to the group, both of which we encounter in the chapters ahead] were actually adopted in Christianity long before Pentecostalism developed" (2017:177). She points to a deeper problem in terms of contextualising the group with Christian history,

> Members of the LC do not identify themselves as Pentecostal, nor do they adopt other labels, such as Evangelical, Fundamental, Liberal, or even "the Local Church." Individually they simply identify themselves as Christians; corporately they see themselves as a local expression of the universal church" (2017: 177).

Importantly, Hu also notes that "Sunday prophesying meetings in Shanghai, Los Angeles, or West Lafayette are similar in pattern, though varied in language, number of participants, and content" (2017:177).

Appendix C

Nee's ministry dis-embedded from the church in Taiwan

There is good evidence to show that the distinctive social and aesthetic forms of the church serve to guide members' interpretation of the ministry of Nee and Lee in a particular direction. The roots of every one of the "more radical sectarian" Christian groups which Daniel Bays describes, in his authoritative history of Christianity in China, as having arisen in China since the 1980s, can be traced back to the so-called "Shouters". The latter is derogatory term the Chinese government uses for the Little Flock, which is also the first group on the government's so-called "evil cults" (*xiejiao*) list (Bays 2012:191). (See also Rubinstein (1994) for an account of "The New Testament Church" in Taiwan. This group was founded in 1963 by film star and pop singer Mui Yi, whose real name was K'ang Tuan-yi (Rubinstein 1994:446) but led by former Little Flock leader Elijah Hong from 1976 onwards.)

Each of these groups take Nee's and Lee's central teaching of corporate deification in a different direction. The most infamous of them is called "Lightning out of the East", or "Eastern Lightning" (*dongfang shandian,* see Dunn 2007; 2009; 2015; also known as "The Church of the Almighty God" (see Introvigne 2017; 2018; Folk 2018). Their "female Christ", according to Bays (2012:196), "made startling prophecies, creatively using the mystical lexicon of the "Little Flock" and the Shouters to press the idea of the urgently immanent millenarian end of time". In Taipei there was a worry that congregations had been secretly penetrated by Eastern lightning, who were sneakily befriending and leading church members into their own group. The fact that they were deemed undetectable in normal circumstances perhaps supports the idea that seemingly identical beliefs unhinged from the infrastructure of their usual enactment can germinate into many different social forms, ethical values and supplementary sets of understandings.

In fact, one of the things that makes 'the church' as an international group of people relatively distinctive for me, is neither their unusual Christian cosmology nor their practices but the seeming 'gap' between them. Church members' vocabulary of eating, drinking and becoming God, shocked the Evangelical establishment of North America when the group first arrived there from the 1960s on. The language of Lee and his followers associated them at first, in the North American mind,

with "Eastern", ecstatic experience. Lee's talk of being "god-men" led "counter-cult researchers" to assume the group was heretical and warn other Christians to keep their children away (Sparks 1977; Martin 1980; Duddy 1981; LSM 1995; Hanegraaf et al. 2009).

It was not until the 1980s when church leaders began legally prosecuting its detractors that "expert witnesses" were required to actually spend time with group members to confirm or deny whether the claims were libellous that the Evangelical establishment began to come around to the idea that this was "just another Christian group". What convinced them of this in the round was not a closer look at the un/orthodoxy of the church's claims but a sense that its members were very "ordinary", posing no threat at all. It was less a textual analysis of Witness Lee's oeuvre that changed some of their minds than the fact that members themselves were so "square", as one "expert witness" described them (Goetchius in LSM 1995).

In presenting thesis drafts to supervisors, friends and colleagues many suggested resonances between other religious groups- Christian mystics, Buddhist monks, Eastern Orthodox Christians. Certainly, there are many exciting resonances at the level of the content of the church's ministry, but I could not shake the feeling that there was something in the experience of a church meeting that made it quite different from any of these religious forms. In fact, I often thought that the atmosphere of a church meeting was often much closer in quality to that of the seminar rooms in which these comments were being made than to that of a Greek or Ethiopian Orthodox Christian ritual, a mystic's solitary encounters or a that of a Buddhist hall filled with echoing chants (chapter three).

Appendix D

Cemeteries and the Dead

The following small essay can be found on the website of the 'church in Pingtung', which derives a moral lesson from a day at the cemetery:

Different values - taking ants as a teacher

On the Lord's day, in the afternoon, some brothers and sisters gave up their free time to plant trees in "Changxing Paradise" to plant trees. They expected "the future generations to enjoy the cool". Because of this value, they sweated, bled and were bitten by ants. The number of tombs has expanded and management has become more orderly. On the Lord's day, some brothers came from Malaysia to Taiwan. They did not come for sightseeing. They came to fellowship with us. They planned to receive us warmly. The values of these brothers and sisters are a glorious hope, and should become our model.

In a small corner of the cemetery, I also welcomed a group of mothers who gave up their rest time. They are learning from each other and silently planting: "How to rear one's own and others descendents?" I was deeply touched. The descendants of these model brothers and sisters are silently following the lead of the example. They are not hearing: "What do parents say?" They are watching "What are parents doing?" Their values are different from others.

Look at the ants in those paradise. They "have no marshals, no officials, no rules, but they prepare food in the summer and gather food during harvesting." Their values are feeding and building. "Lazy people, you go to see ants. You can gain wisdom by your actions" (Proverbs 6). God wants us to look at wisdom.

The children are the hope of the future of the church. Their values will also be the future values of the church. Their elders are the navigators of this value. May the Lord bless these examples and their generations [my translation].

In the year that Witness Lee died, 1997, 'leading brothers' in the church started making plans for "a solemn cemetery for Christians, in order to develop saints' eternal knowledge of the biblical truths". The result lies in the hills of South California. The landscape is described on the cemetery website in the following terms,

A stream, uttering sweet sound, goes through the center of this simple cemetery, flanked by natural rocks and flourishing trees. Two semi-circular memorial walls, made of dark red granites, solemnly stand on the two sides of the entrance. The rock walls are craved [sic] with eight precious hymns in both Chinese and English. On the round ground for gathering there is a fountain, clear as crystal; natural rocks are placed outside the ground, where relatives and friends can hold the memorial meeting…

…The stream winds down, and there is a lotus pond halfway. At one end is a quiet and elegant waterfall; water overflows down on a stone wall carved with scriptures full of inspiration. The lotus pond opens a clear view of the boulevard; on the both sides of the boulevard there are memorial walls made of dark red granites, which are designed as magnificent mausoleums.

In the middle of the boulevard, the stream whispers, soothing man's heart, and flows down, converging into a pool reflecting the sunlight; this signifies the ultimate uniting and mingling of God and man…

…around the rock wall is carved with scriptures full of revelation. In addition, there are independent family cemeteries designed for different families, and each family can be buried together in an elegant garden according to their need. A special video kiosk will be installed in the garden, presenting the lifetime information

of the buried ones in a visual way. Besides the preservation of the rich data, these abundant historical images and text can be used for the saints to remember their beloved relatives.

The cemetery, at the head of which Lee's remains lie re-interred, is a symbolic depiction of the New Jerusalem in the book of Revelation. This is a secret project, as most members would be outraged at its apparent fetishism. But the promotional video for the cemetery, where interested members can claim a place, argues that it is undignified for church brothers and sisters to be buried in common cemeteries when all sorts of "idols" adorn the other graves, using a close-up shot of a plastic Santa Claus resting against a grave.

The project is said to have been initiated by Lee himself and is justified with elegant appeal to the living's responsibility towards the dead. Nonetheless, these words compared to other church literature are uncertain, grappling with issues not yet explored. The cemetery is described as a "cloud of witnesses". Following Nee's and Lee's death the legacy of God on earth has expanded to all descendants and ancestors of the church. With this democratisation comes certain risks less evident with a one-man leadership:

> History is the accumulation of persons, events, and matters throughout the ages...throughout the past twenty centuries, thousands of precious lives, heart treasures, high positions, and golden futures (their "time") have been "wasted" upon the Lord Jesus. What they have poured upon Him is not a waste but a fragrant testimony of His sweetness. Do you feel that when you walk on the grassland of Grace Terrace, there is no time wasted but the realization that we all have received great mercy from God to become the witnesses in the trail of the history of the Lord's recovery until that day?...

> Inheritance is the continuation of person. Time follows people and those who have time are many. Yet are they willing to be put in the Lord's recovery? Are they willing to "waste" themselves on the Lord? This is a crucial matter. We praise the Lord for Brother Watchman Nee, the seer of the divine revelation, and Brother Witness Lee who took the lead to be an inheritor of the divine revelation. We need to know that many saints who are laid here were the inheritors in the trail of the history of the Lord's recovery…

> ...Look at these words of testimonies on the tombstones. The inscription of testimony looks like cloud surrounding us, and this causes us to be reverential. May we also be able to say: They are not alone; may the Lord also grant us such resolution to be faithful unto death...

> ...Every saint is different in nationality—Chinese, American, Japanese, Korean, and Hispanic, etc.—and varied in age—from under ten years old to as old as one hundred years. But they all have one thing in common, that is, a touching God-man story. Their God-man living stories indirectly governed the direction of my heart and strengthened my desire to serve the Lord, so I often come here by myself and walk around. People often criticize us that we could only preach high-peak truths, but I would clarify: These testimonies of "God-man stories" are the reality of the "high peak truths." In fact, the "God-man stories" of the saints who are resting here are the spiritual materials for our proclamation in truth education...

A further factor contributing to the uncertain role of the cemetery in the life of the church is its strong resonance with Chinese notions of the significance of ancestors. The following post on the cemetery website is entitled 'Inheriting the Admirable Family Legacy in the Lord's Recovery and Reminiscing Ancestors' Pioneering Tracks with Blood and Tears':

Although our parents have passed away, their voice and face remains in our memories. However, as time goes by, their testimonies and stories gradually faded, blurred, vanished, and have been forgotten. Even our children and descendants no longer remember their ancestors.

The Lord's recovery has such a situation that it has spread to the five continents in the world. It is all attributed to our ancestors' pioneering tracks in overcoming all obstacles, and to their good testimonies of life with blood and tears. There are so many touching testimonies, stories of loving the Lord, laboring service, patterns in coordination, flourishing life, perseverance, prayer and propagation, etc. The cloud of witnesses have written down the history of the Lord's recovery page after page.

Brother Watchman Nee said in the preface of The Normal Christian Church Life: "At times, examples have greater value than precepts, because precepts are abstract, while examples are precepts carried into effect. By looking at them, we not only know what God's precepts are, but we have a tangible demonstration of their outworking." Let us serve together in coordination to reserve the spiritual inheritance of our parents and ancestors, so that their touching testimonies, living patterns, and living treasures in the Body of Christ, could be the fragrant offerings to Christ, not only as the blessing for the descendants, but also moves people's heart and becomes the cloud surrounding them livingly.

Material inheritance is dispensable; however, spiritual inheritance is indispensable. Even it is not easy to write it out, but if we would not write any longer, it would be shrouded and buried, and only a cup of loess would be left. Thus, we would feel guilty not only for our ancestors but even more for our future generations.

We hope that we can inherit the admirable family legacy in the Lord's recovery and reminisce ancestors' pioneering tracks with blood and tears. The testimonies in which God is manifested in the flesh will encourage the future generations to advance with boldness and to follow the ancestors' footsteps. Moreover, each generation will be better than the previous generation, being strong, glorious, and victorious.

Divinity in China has classically been a possession of the dead. Especially important in this regard is the reverence paid to ancestors. These divine dead are so central to patrilineal notions of the self Sangren (2000) argues that every generation experiences them as an alienating force. This alienating force paradoxically produces the desire which keeps ancestor worship going, generation after generation. By demanding that sons recognise that they owe their existence to their parents (i.e. "filial piety"), socialisation within (rural) Chinese and Taiwanese society produces subjects desirous of "author[ship] of one's own being" (Sangren 2009:256). Thus, while officially sons are obliged to feed their ancestors given that they gave them life, it is also true that the continued existence of these ancestors is dependent upon the son's offerings. From the former the perspective the son acts out his recognition that he is the product of his lineage, which gives rise to the latter perspective, the son enacting his fantasy of self-authorship through feeding the loins that birthed him so giving life to himself, thus becoming author of himself and resisting the alienating feeling of being entirely produced by society (Sangren 2013:183). This is another instance of what I call a "parallax" in the thesis.

These understandings make the following oft-recounted church origin story especially significant. We may think of those involved as short-circuiting the "cycle of yang" (Stafford 2000) in which each generation is indebted to the previous one by directly appropriating the divinatory power of the ancestors. It is re-told here in 1963 by Witness Lee:

After we crossed nearly everything off our list and gave up Christianity entirely as a religious system, we did not know what to do, so we simply came together. In my home province a group of saints composed primarily of medical students began to meet together...Since they did not have any place in which to meet, they went to a cemetery. Most cemeteries in China are located outside of town at the base or top of a mountain, so these young believers went to the outskirts of town to meet together in a simple way in a cemetery. In many cemeteries in China, each gravesite has a small pyramid next to it along with a stone table that people use for offering sacrifices to their ancestors… The young brothers used the stone table as the table for the breaking of bread. They placed the bread and the cup on the stone table; then they all sat on the ground around the table and sang hymns and gave praises to the Lord. In this way they broke the bread. Someone told me that in their meeting they truly touched the presence of the Lord; they truly touched heaven. This was the beginning of the church in Tsinan.

If the traditional Chinese practice is to offer food to the ancestors, only indirectly accessing their divine power via the blessings that come from this (Sangren 2013), here church members feed one another, and without any mediation from either missionaries or ancestors, they "truly touch heaven". In Taiwan this account is far from exotic, as many family members of church adherents take care of the ancestors in the traditional ways. The language of eating the Christian God, it seems to me, contains for church members this originally radical experience of eating what was previously reserved for the dead divine. This language denies the earthly authority of both Western Christian powers and traditional Sino-Taiwanese ritual while crafting both traditional and foreign forms of divinity into a new relationship of deificatory empowerment. Here the practice of feeding the divine has become fused with the teaching of Christian theosis to produce an embodied sense that church members, by feeding one another, are growing together as the Body of Christ.

Appendix E

Cultural Nationalism and the Church in China and Taiwan

The church was born at roughly the same moment that nationalism in China was born, and its intensified infrastructural and ideational development in Taiwan occurred during a time of intense state-induced nationalism there (Chun 1994; 1995; Hsiau 2003)[166]. Nee's mother, who we will see was a great influence upon him, was a fervent Chinese nationalist, who entertained Sun Yat-Sen. As we saw in chapter three, indigenous Chinese Protestantism arose in response to the experience of the collapse of the Imperial world order (Lian 2010). Anthropologists of Chinese popular religion have long noted its symbolic and practical inseparability from the Chinese and Taiwanese states, both modern (Stafford 1992; Weller 1999; Sangren 2003; Chau 2008; Kuo 2008) and traditional (Sangren 1987; Weller & Shah 1996; Feuchtwang 2001). Both Nee and the modern Chinese government recognised that nationalism and adhesion to the church were in a very important sense occupying the same existential ground. While the "Local Church" is still today "number one" on the Chinese government's list of "evil cults" (*xiejiao*), Nee had the following to say about what he called "the sin of nationalism":

> "Some people are so strong in their nationalistic feelings that they cannot be Christians in a proper way. Though we are Chinese and under the jurisdiction of our country, this relationship ceases when we are in Christ. Whenever we come before the Lord, we do not come as a Chinese person. Such a consciousness should be kept outside the door...I have received the life of Christ, and a brother in England or a brother in India or Japan has also received the same life of Christ. We are united according to the life of Christ, not according to our nationalities. We must have a very clear vision about this. In the Body, in Christ, and in the new man, nationality does not exist. That distinction has been totally abolished" (Nee 1997[1950]:65).

Like Chinese cultural nationalism, Taiwanese cultural nationalism and the church are dangerously resonant. Taiwanese cultural nationalism revolves around "a concern, if not an obsession, with the

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[166] According to some, Taiwanese nationalism arose with the combination of common enemies (e.g. Japanese, ROC) and the gradual interconnections between previously self-defined ethnic groups that came with modernisation, "[t]hus local and ethnic communities were integrated into an island-wide "imagined political community" in embryo" (Hsiau 2003:10).An alternative model emphasises that it was specifically the oppressed Taiwanese who developed Taiwanese cultural nationalism in response to the government's "chauvinistic Chinese consciousness" (ibid: 11). Either way, the result was a gradual blurring of ethnic lines in service of nationalism. The development of this trend post-1949 parallel Witness Lee's (1987) description of an intense period of "blending" in which those from northern and southern mainland provinces were getting married for instance. Particularly interesting in Hsiao's history of Taiwanese cultural nationalism is the mention of the role of pilgrimage, drawing upon Anderson, in the solidification of Taiwan as a nation: "...both the Japanese colonial rule and the ROC-PRC antagonism contributed to the creation of an island-wide pilgrimage sphere, a matrix in which Taiwanese nationalism could form" (Hsiau 2003:10).

uniqueness of "Taiwanese culture" set against "Chinese culture" (Hsiau 2003: 2). Likewise, in the church there is a concern, if not an obsession, with the uniqueness of "church culture" set against "the culture of Christianity". As is clear from chapter two however, the ultimate contrast is between church culture and the Culture of anthropological parlance. Thus, while siding with the KMT purely for purposes of maintaining global connection, church members tend to reject "politics" altogether. China, Taiwan and the church are to an extent three constructed social entities jostling for power within my informants' lives. All this is to say that when Lee and the church congregations came to Taiwan alongside the KMT and its army, they were in a sticky position. Neither able to identify explicitly or primarily with "China" nor with Taiwan as such, the ancestral became a diminishing means of transcendental identification. The production of a global "church culture" is a spatialised compensation for the loss of temporal, ancestral depth. As noted in chapter two, despite (or because of?) the fact that church and Chinese culture resonate so strongly with each other, there is an explicit discourse within the church on "eradicating culture". It was a conscious aim of Witness Lee, to create a "church culture" (*zhaohui wenhua*) which, as with many global forms of Christianity today, is partly a culture of anti-"culture" (Coleman 2000). This notion is in service to the principle of "Oneness", both within small church localities and between them.

Appendix F

Christianity and Food

Confucius was sitting next in attendance to Duke Ai 哀 of Lu 魯 (r. 494 - 477 BCE). The duke offered him a peach with some millet and said, "Please help yourself." Confucius first ate the millet and afterwards took a bite from the peach. Those who witnessed the scene broke out in laughter, their hands covering their mouth. Duke Ai spoke: "The millet is not for eating but should be used to clean the (skin of the) peach!" Confucius replied: "Of course, I know that much. But millet is the most noble among the five grains and in sacrifices to the ancestors it is an offering of supreme standing. Among the six kinds of fruits however, the peach is the lowest sacrificial offering. During ancestral sacrifices it is not even good enough to gain access to the temple. I have heard that a gentleman uses what is base to clean what is noble but I have not heard of using what is noble to clean what is base. So to use that most valuable among the five grains to clean the lowest of fruits would amount to availing oneself of what is superior to clean what is inferior. I take this to be a case of obstructing righteousness and therefore dare not allow the peach to be ranked in preference over the most precious offering in the ancestral temple."
The Han Feizi, 3rd century BCE, 12.689-690 in Sterckx 2015: 11-12.

In parallel to many Christian understandings of the eucharist as a symbolic or actual materialisation of an otherwise immaterial God, it is often held by anthropologists of eating, that the significance of food, especially sacred food, lies in it being both culturally coded and an instance of the literal embodiment of culture (Douglas 1984; Appadurai 1988; Feely-Harnik 1992; Boylston 2013). In either case, food is where the immaterial- code, or God- and the material- body, or world- come into contact, it is how the concretely individual and the abstractly meta-individual interact. While not neglecting this kind of interpretation, my time in the church in Taiwan forced me to think of things from a slightly different angle. Eating, and drinking, there seemed not primarily like the imbibement of a cultural code, nor like a transubstantial or commemorative meeting between communicants and God. This would suggest that God and communicant, body and code begin separately. To eat there, whether eucharistically or at one of the many "love feasts" (*aiyan*) which accompanied church meetings, was to be "the Body", one specific social entity among the many that populated people's lives with more or less alienating effect. That is, eating, as for Confucius in the quote above, was a way of arranging oneself and others to assume an instance of a hyper-relevant social form. It was, for those involved, an instance, not of becoming, or uniting with, or eating, or thinking about God but, of being God, corporately and corporeally. This was not a meeting of self and "Other", but an encompassment of otherness under the enlargement of self. Eating, like dancing, playing, or architecture for others, was, for church members, a cosmic but situated, "intimately immense" (Bachelard 1964) form of bodily arrangement.

Christians, and their analysts and ethnographers, have emphasised the mediatory capacity of food. Following Judaic traditions (Feely-Harnik 1994; Bolyston 2013), ritualised Christian food has been understood through the lens of the immaterial becoming material, the other becoming self, even the divine becoming human. Analysts have understood, at least in recent decades, eating to be an embodied, dialectical process of internalised, literally and cognitively, and expressed social meanings (Douglass 1984; Stoller 1989; Tomlinson 2014). I found eating in the church in Taiwan much more than in the church elsewhere, to be a distinctive mode of aesthetic expression, a way of attuning to the complicated reality of a highly valued social entity. As for Confucius in the opening dialogue, eating was a form of arrangement, and rather than being a way of *resolving* the "paradox" of the individual difference and the collective unity, *celebrated* it as a defining aspect of the Body of Christ. Before elucidating this perspective let us consider how the eucharist has been theorised by other anthropologists.

In his analyses of Fijian Methodism, Matt Tomlinson uses the eucharist to demonstrate the concept of a "chiasmus", 'an X-shaped pattern of "criss-cross reciprocation" (Silverstein 2004: 626)' (2014:50). "The example of holy communion" Tomlinson writes,

> shows how chiasmus involves two simultaneous movements that are figuratively X-shaped in relation to each other. In eating consecrated bread and drinking consecrated wine, Methodists (and all Protestants) symbolically take Christ into themselves and put themselves into Christ, a metaphor for the Christian church. In short communicants incorporate Christ's body into theirs while incorporating themselves into the body of Christ. In this compact way, Christ the person is brought into conjunction with Christ the institution (the church and its members), and the resonant themes of past and present, humanity and divinity, and immanence and transcendence are all united through "crossing" each other in ritual (2014:50-51).

Tomlinson cites the linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein at length in his demarcation of the analytical frame through which he understands what Christian communicants are doing. "Ritual" Silverstein writes,

> can be verbal or nonverbal or, as is usually the case, a combination of multiple modalities of figuration played out in an orderly- the technical term, as in poetry, in "metricalized"- space-time envelope of participation. The very hypertrophic orderliness of multiple metricalizations thus bounds the performed text of ritual, giving it a semblance of formal plenitude-in-itself. In and by this property of seeming to self-entextualize, to stand as [a] formally autonomous totality, a ritual text as a whole traced over space-time projects as its contextualization that which it dynamically figurates along a "cosmic axis," an axis of knowledge or belief. Such dynamic, directional spatiotemporal movements in ritual entail in this fashion the causal (re)ordering of cosmic conceptualizations as figually indexed, such as aspects of sacred or foundational knowledge, feeling, and belief, made figurally "real" in the here-and-now of experienceable semiosis" (Silverstein 2004: 626 in Tomlinson 2014: 51).

After citing Silverstein to establish his theoretical starting point, Tomlinson returns to the eucharist, affirming that '[c]hiasmus "seem[s] to self-entextualize," as Silverstein puts it, by the logic of conjunction":

> It unites counterposed elements in an X-shaped pattern whose formal effect is to both enact and transcend metaphor. The reciprocation involves a modal shift that is crucial to fostering people's senses of ritual effectiveness. The first action is a physical one: a congregation eats a wafer and drinks wine. The second action is an act of imaginative participation: one affirms one's membership in the church, or, to switch the roles of agent and patient, the church incorporates the congregant. The accomplishment of the first is manifest in the moment of action itself (consumption); the accomplishment of the second is manifest later, in the discourse that takes the action (participation) as presupposed. The first action prefigures the success of the second one, and the second fulfils the first. Neither part works without the other, but the two "lines" in the X-shaped relationship are distinct (2014:52).

Here it is clear that for Tomlinson, as for Silverstein, the successful performance of the eucharist ritual involves a neat "conjunction" of two conceptual "lines": the act of eating of the body and the act of participation in/incorporation into the Body[167]. These lines are distinct in time. First, comes prior knowledge or belief, then, comes a "figuration" of this knowledge/belief through ritual acts- eating the eucharist- from this arises a "causal (re)ordering", such as imaginative participation in the institution of the church. "Ritual effectiveness" is defined by the incorporation of the conjunction of these moments into a "hypertrophic orderliness of multiple metricalizations" which precipitates making "cosmic conceptualizations...figurally "real"". For Tomlinson, the eucharist is a way of translating core Christian ideas into actual experience, and of converting that experience into renewed imaginative participations. This is a version of dialectical reasoning in which we begin with a representation (a), this is supplemented by the ritual act which it prefigures (b), the act leads to a modification, reordering or reaffirmation of the starting representation (a.1).

What Tomlinson and Silverstein understand as a well-timed conjunction, communicants themselves have understood as a form of "contact" between themselves and the divine. "One of the greatest sources of violence in Western history", Orsi notes, "has been the question of what Jesus meant when he told his apostles to eat his body and drink his blood and to do so in remembrance of him" (2016:16). Taking an external view, Christianity, at its inception, was largely defined by "people of other religions" as "a community that ate the flesh and blood of its god" (2016:20). Internally, we might view the institutionalisation of the Christian church as, at least in part, occurring in relation to the potential power within the object of the consecrated Host. "The fear of Church officials that lay people would somehow appropriate the consecrated wine and bread for their own purposes" for instance, "led first in the ninth century to the reservation of the cup at Mass to the Priest and then

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[167] Moreover, each line seems to be composed of its own "conjunction", that of the immaterial Christ and the material act of eating and that of the immanent individual and the transcendent church.

in the sixteenth century to the practice of placing the Host on communicants' tongues rather than in their hands, as has been the custom for centuries" (Orsi 2016:29).

The power of the bread and wine to presence the Catholic God is especially evident in Caroline Walker-Bynum's discussions of thirteenth century female mystics, for whom to receive the eucharist "was to become Christ- by eating, by devouring and by being devoured" (2007: 203). Ecstatic experiences were so common for these communicants, she writes, that "[b]y the early fourteenth century", one "Agnes Blannbekin thought everyone would experience the taste of the honeycomb upon receiving the host, and Christiana Ebner was puzzled by the presence at Engelthal of a nun who did not have visions and ecstasies" (1984:204). Walker-Bynum attributes the intense experiences these women had of the eucharist to the fact that it pushed the "supremely vulnerable and fleshly" aspect of God, characteristics that is that were most associated with women at the time, to the forefront of the human-divine interface (1984:210). "That the Host is Jesus' actual flesh, his muscles, organs, sinews, and blood, consumed at Communion," at that time, we may be reminded, "was central to the Catholic imaginary" (Orsi 2016:20). Thus, the ecstasy of communion for these women can be found in its affirmation of the spiritual significance of their bodies and the special form of union with Christ, in his fleshly aspect, this enabled. In their devotion to the eucharist, Walker-Bynum writes, "[w]omen mystics seem to have felt that they *qua* women were not only *also* but even *especially* saved in the Incarnation" (1984:212). Eating god here, moreover, is one instance of Catholics experiencing the presence of God explicitly through the particular physicalities the Christian representational economy as their disposal (Walker-Bynum 1985; 1986; Latour 2004; Orsi 2007; 2016; Csordas 1997a; 1997b).

If the physicalities of receiving communion have been all important for many Catholics, at least for many Protestants they have been emphatically downplayed. While "Luther held that, for the believer, in the context of the rite itself, Christ was really present in the wafer and the wine", Calvin, "[b]y contrast...maintained that the Eucharist was "symbolic," and described Luther's view as "a carnal and crass conception of God"..." (Keane 2007: 61). In stark contrast to the medieval mystics,

Calvin asserted that the material embodiment of the Eucharist, like all divine expressions, exists only because of the incapacities of humans...Ultimately the efficacy of the rite derives from divine agency. But Calvin concludes that this efficacy is not mediated by any material practice in itself but by the faith of the communicants, in conjunction with God's actions (Keane 2007: 61-62).

This "strenuous denial of material mediations" between God and humanity makes making God present a more "dangerous" affair still. The eucharist in itself should not be the ground of meeting the divine but ought to be a kind of feeble correlate to this connection occurring at an immaterial level.

 Harry Walker (2018) writes of "logophagy" in the context of Peruvian-Amazonian Urarina ritual modes of group formation. For the Urarina he writes, "much like sharing food, sharing words allows people to mutually inhabit one another, to belong to each other". He cites Biblical precedents for understanding eating words as a form of receiving God, such as Ezekiel 3:4: "So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.' Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth". And Ezekiel 2:8: "Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you." Then He said to me, 'Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them". If these verses demonstrate a Judeo-Christian precedent for eating God's words, 'the church in Taiwan' completes the logical circle by their understanding that if we can eat God's word and God is His word, then by eating that word we eat Him and so become Him. If language for the Urarina is "an index of common being" it is for my informants an actualisation of their shared divinity.

As reiterated throughout the thesis, church members are less interested in contacting God as a separate entity than with experiencing the world *as* that divine entity. One song titled *To the Lord we're as a Garden*, sings in the voice of God "I am eating Honeycomb with honey pure." Songs like this one point to the other side of the deificatory coin: if humans are becoming God, then God is becoming human. But the latter perspective is rarer than the former. Expositing on Matthew Chapter 15 in Taipei, January 1972, Witness Lee said to those gathered, "consider this: who is greater, you or the Lord Jesus? You have to boldly say, "I am greater because I am a child and He is the bread". He concluded the point by declaring "[w]ith all sincerity of heart, you can say, "Lord, I thank You and praise You! Today You have become my food. The eater is always greater than the food. Lord, You have become the small food for me to eat". Prayers are said to "feed" God but devotees seem to want to feed and be fed simultaneously, to be fed by their own collective feeding. Turning desire into experience is more easily done than said in this case however. Nonetheless, it is clear that for church members what from a human perspective is the utterance of words, is from the divine perspective the eating of substance. Words-as-food is less a metaphor here, than it is a way of using language to speak something, a linguistically incarnate solution to the paradox of divinity being both beyond one's disempowered life and accessible by it. The desire to experience

language as food, as "God" does, is especially evident in certain church practices which aim to distil experientially the physicality- hence edibility- of church language. "Morning revival", for instance, a key part of which is referred to as "morning nourishment". This, I argue is a process of making church language- that is, the Bible and "the Ministry" (originally written and spoken forth by church leaders Watchman Nee and Witness Lee)-, more tangible and substance like. Thus enacting experientially the desired state of being God, in which capacity words are edible substance.

Appendix G

Marriage and the Church

I encountered several instances of ongoing marital problems in the church in Taiwan, especially if one spouse was a member and the other not. It was even more tricky however both spouses were members, but one was mistreating the other. Yiqi, elder Li's right-hand man, our locality's "responsible brother" [*fuze dixiong*]- again, not a title bestowed but something assumed- also had marital problems. Some evenings he would come over to the Yang-Xie's or the Li-Chun's and confess his conjugal misdeeds to sister Xie or Chun. They'd scold him and advise him on how to treat his wife better. These middle-aged, married sisters- sister Chun, sister Xie, also sister Chen, and sister Jin- would often listen to the problems, gossip and confessions of younger church members while their husbands sat back and pretended not to listen. It was from them too that I experienced the most tender care, they would ask me with worried faces how I was doing, making sure my bowl was never empty and my cup always filled.

They were also instrumental in bringing households into being. Matches and marriages between those already in the church were arranged by these older, married church sisters. This was as much about bringing people together in appropriate ways as about making sure there was as little anti-social awkwardness as possible. If a sister was approaching marriageable age, these older sisters would begin to make suggestions to her, in private, about potential spousal candidates. The candidate would then be approached. Sometimes these mediating sisters would be actively sought out, but mostly it seemed to happen on their initiative. Once a match was agreed, a date would be arranged, after which the daters would be quizzed as to whether they wanted to go on another date together.

Brother Qi told me of his life before coming into the church. He worked as a financier during the day and played computer games at night. Like his cousin Yiqi, who found his work as a software engineer comically boring, mocking his own repetitive daily movements with howls of laughter, brother Qi found his work unsatisfying. Though fun, the life of a gamer is lonely, he said. Computer games are extremely popular in Taiwan. My host brother's face was constantly glued to his screen, and Taipei is covered in advertisements for them. While computer-game-playing comes with its

own kinds of sociality, it is far from the kind of face-to-face interaction typical of the church. As we sat in the Yang's living room one evening, Brother Qi, now an important member of the church, described how radically his life had changed since joining the church, his arms spread out, taking in the scene of church brothers and sisters bustling about. His description crescendoed with wonder and disbelief as he pointed out his wife as she folded a chair and his daughter milling about her and said he'd never have believed, before becoming part of the church, that he'd be married with a child.

Brother Chen told me in tears of gratitude one night about how he came to be married. After the first date she, a Malaysian trainee doctor, was not too keen, but he was besotted. Only after the strong encouragement of mediating sisters did she agree to go further. After the wedding they moved to the UK, where I first met them, and she, like her brother in the same town, began working in a hospital while brother Chen washed pots in a Chinese restaurant for two years until he finally landed a job in Deutsche Bank. Now they have two children together and live comfortably. On the same night he told me a story from his national service days. Elder Wang, who I mentioned in chapter three, is a high-ranking officer with a painful limp. Despite this, on brother Chen's first day he personally drove him toward his barracks and walked with him all the way to the barracks despite the effort this took and the face he would lose. Brother Chen found this deeply touching. Similar acts of humility are reported of Witness Lee, such as him refusing to sit amongst the clergy when speaking at other Taiwanese churches.

Appendix H

Gender and the beginnings of the church in China

Nee's Christian life as it is transmitted by his followers was shaped by five key women. The first was his mother, Lin Heping. Bought at a young age from her impoverished parents by a wealthy merchant, who converted to Christianity after being healed of an illness by the prayers of a Episcopalian Methodist congregation (J.Lin 2017:82), her hopes were dashed when she was pulled out of medical school to be married to a stranger in Fuzhou. Nevertheless, it was this marriage which would provide the Fujianese, Protestant, middle-class network, enabling Nee, two decades later, access to the print culture necessary for propagating his ministry (Dunch 2001). Following the Revolution, a decade after her marriage (1911), Lin found inspiration in Sun Yat Sen's nationalist party to which she donated her jewellery. She became chairwoman of the Women's Patriotic Society and "[w]hen Sun Yat Sen visited Fujian in 1912, Lin was given an official role as a special guide for the Father of the Republic" (Lian 2010:157). By the time the party had been "relegated to Guangdong province on the periphery of warlord-dominated politics" a few years later however, Lin's patriotism had subsided, and she became, by her own written account (1943), addicted to Mahjong-playing (Lin 2006[1943]).

It was only out of obligation to her old classmate, Yu Cidu ("Dora Yu", 1873-1931), that she came to watch the now famous female evangelist preacher when she came to town. Chang's description of Lin's conversion experience suggests that it stemmed from her own sense of guilt that she had turned her back on her country and on her perceived responsibility to her family. "As Heping listened to a description of how Jesus bore the "highest pain, the shame that was most fearful, because of his love for people,"" writes Chang, "her "stubborn, hard heart was unconsciously melted by this lovable Lord who had given up his life for me." She "wept bitterly" and offered herself to God, "even being willing to be a martyr to pay him back" (2017:25). Yu's sermons inspired Nee's mother to apologise to her son for a prior unjustified punishment for a broken vase.

From this, an act of affection and humility completely contrary to the strict Confucian upbringing he was accustomed to (Lin 2017:82), Nee himself was in turn moved to attend these meetings and on the night of April 28th, 1920, "light seemed to flood the room" as he wept over "the grace of God's loving forgiveness" (Kinnear 1973). Yu soon became Nee's "spiritual mother" as he left Fujian

to join her (otherwise all-girls') Bible Institute in Shanghai. After just a few weeks however, he was dismissed from the institute for having "lazy habits", such as getting out of bed too late. It was then that Nee, as a member of the so-called "Fuzhou six", came under the guidance and care of the aging rebel British missionary, Margaret E. Barber (1869-1930), "who turned out to exert the single most important personal influence on the development of Nee's theology" (Lian 2010:157; Chang 2017:35). She baptised Nee, his mother and his brother in the Min river flowing past her home. When Barber passed away at the "Pagoda Anchorage" (*Mawei*) she left the few belongings she had to Nee.

Appendix I

The Rear Admiral's Theodicy in Response to my Question

[This is my typed-up copy of the Rear Admiral's written response to our dialogue, my edits and suggestions are in square brackets, the rear Admiral's edits (of the quotes he uses) are in double square brackets. Any uncapitalised pronouns for God are carried over from the original]

How does God justify creating the world for his own pleasure when it has cost the eternal suffering of millions upon millions of human beings who never asked to exist in the first place?

Answer:

Deeper into the statement, there is a hidden premise which contains three logical parts:

1. The world we live in is full of the presence of evil and suffering.

2. He (who wrote the statement) refuses to trust of believe that God allows history and life to proceed in that way.

3. God gets Himself "off the hook" for the world's evil and suffering! He ignores human beings' misery for His own pleasure.

We derive a simple conclusion from the assertions above: "If God is God, He's not good. If God is good, He's not God." Utilize philosophizing effort to demonstrate the evil disproves the existence of God.

I am trying to echo the question in 3 portions, because [a] simple answer can't suffice [a] complicated mindset in response.

A.   Philosopher J. L. Mackie, in his book, The Miracle of Theism states: If a good and powerful God exists. He could not allow pointless evil, but because there is much unjustifiable, pointless evil in the world, the traditional good and powerful God could not exist. Some other god or no god may exist, but not the traditional God." But somehow, we can identify a major flaw in these words.

Tacked away within this reasoning that the world is filled with pointless evil is [a] lurking precondition-----that if evil appears pointless to "ME", then it must be pointless.

Just because you can't see or imagine a good reason why God might allow something to happen doesn't mean there can't be one. We see within hard-nosed skepticism an enormous faith in his own cognitive faculties. If our minds can't probe the depths of the universe for good answers to suffering, then, there can't be any? This is blind faith of [a] higher order. Many assume that if there were good reasons for the existence of evil, they would be accessible to our mind.

This reasoning is, of course, fallacious, and trying to [argue?] against God doesn't hold up, not only to logic but also to experience. Many people admit that most of what they really needed for success in life came to them through their most difficult and pointful (meaningful) experiences. Some look back on sufferings and recognize that they were irreplaceable of [perhaps 'for' is intended here] personal and spiritual growth for them. As a rear Admiral, I could attest to this on my own. Though none of these people are grateful for these tragedies, they would never trade the insight, character, and strength they had gotten from them for anything. With time and perspective most of us can see good reasons for at least some of the tragedy and pain that occurs in life. Why couldn't it be possible that, from God's vantage point, there are good reasons for all of them?

The story of Joseph in Genesis (Bible), though he experienced years of bondage and misery, Joseph's character was refined and strengthened by his trials. Eventually he rose up to become a prime minister of Egypt who saved thousands of lives and even his own family from starvation (suffering). If God had not allowed Joseph's years of injustice, he would never have been such a powerful agent for social justice and spiritual healing (for whom had really did something bad evil upon Joseph- his brothers [this is clearly a reference to the fact that Joseph suffered greatly under the hands of his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, which led to his eventual political ascendency in Egypt]).

If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because He hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, I think, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know. Indeed, you can't have it both ways. Evil and suffering isn't Evidence against God almighty.

B. Inexplicable suffering cannot disprove God is still a problem for the believer in the Bible nonetheless. However, it is perhaps an even greater problem for nonbelievers. C. S. Lewis described how he had originally rejected the idea of God because of the cruelty of life. Then he realized that evil was more problematic for atheism. In the end, he came to understand that suffering provided a better argument for God's existence than one against it. Cited "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of "just" and "unjust"? What

was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?..... Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too---for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies…. Consequently atheism turns out to be too simple."

Lewis recognized that modern objections to God are based on a sense of fair play and justice. We believe [we] ought not to suffer, be excluded, and die of hunger or oppression. But the evolutionary mechanism of natural selection depends on death, destruction, and violence of the strong against the weak----these things are all perfectly natural. On what basis does the atheist judge the natural world to be horribly wrong, unfair, and unjust? The nonbeliever in God doesn't have a good basis for being outraged at injustice.

If you are sure that their ['the'] natural world is unjust and filled with evil, you are assuming the reality of some extra-natural (or supernatural) standard by which to make your judgement. Philosopher Alvin Plantinga [writes] "Could there really be any such thing as horrifying wickedness [[if there were no God and we just evolved]]?" I don't see how. There can such a thing only if there is a way that rational creatures are supposed to live, obliged to live …A (secular) way of looking at the world has no place for genuine moral obligation of any sort …and thus no way to say there is such a thing as genuine and appalling wickedness (…and not just an illusion of some sort), then you have a powerful argument for the reality of God.

In short, the problem of tragedy, suffering and injustice is a problem for everyone. It is at least as big as [makes more sense without this 'as'] a problem for [the] nonbeliever as for belief [possibly intended to be 'as for the believer']. It is therefore a mistake, though an understandable one, to think that if you abandon belief in God is ['it'] somehow makes the problem of evil easier to handle.

C. Much of the discussion so far may sound cold and irrelevant to a real-life sufferer. One may say "So what if suffering and evil doesn't logically disprove God?" "I am still angry. All this philosophizing does not get God "off the hook" for the evil and suffering of the world!"

In response I would like to point out that the Christian God came to earth to deliberately put himself "on the hook" of human suffering. In Jesus Christ, God experienced the greatest depths of pain. He experienced [an] unjust trial and [was] betrayed by [those] whom He loved and [was] cut off from His heavenly Father. The death of Jesus was qualitatively different from any other death. The physical pain was nothing compared to the spiritual experience of cosmic abandonment. Christianity alone among the world religious ['religions'] claims that God became uniquely and fully human in Jesus Christ and therefore knows firsthand, despair, rejection, loneliness, poverty, bereavement,

torture, and imprisonment. In His death, God suffers in love, identifying with the abandoned and god-forsaken. Why did He do it? The Bible says that Jesus came on a rescue mission for 'creation'. He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us.

Let's see where this has brought us. If we again ask the question: "Why does God allow evil and suffering to continue?" and we look at the cross of Jesus, we still do not know what the answer is. However, we know what the answer isn't. It can't be that He doesn't love us. It can't be that He is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that He was willing to take it on Himself.

So, if we embrace the Christian teaching that Jesus is God and that He went to the cross, then we have deep consolation and strength to face the brutal realities of life on earth. Therefore, though Christianity does not provide the reason for each experience of pain, it provides deep resources of actually facing suffering with hope (resurrection) of and courage rather than bitterness and despair.

Conclusion:

Evil and suffering isn't evidence against God, but may be (if anything) evidence for God. Nevertheless, I agree partial of ['partially with'] the statement "millions of human beings who never asked to exist in the first place." We are all reluctant to live in the world as it is, filled with tears, suffering and evil, even though we've long forgotten, the hard evidence of the reluctance is that no one coming ['comes'] to the world with laugh[ter] and joy but instead of ['they come'] crying. We cried for our birth within the first life-taking breath. We have no right to choose between to be ['being'] born or not, our parents did ['chose'] for us. It seems that our parents ignore the free will of ourselves, and we never blame [them for] this, on the contrary we assume that's our heavenly Father's fault, after all, we can spontaneously attribute what we hate to God.

According to the Bible, God (The Father, The Son, The Holly ['Holy'] spirit) promises to end evil and suffering, bringing Heaven into the world where there are no tears and sorrows but filled with joy, peace, satisfaction, wonder, love and intimacy with all human being, enjoy the eternal life and the presence of God. Amazingly, no matter how we try with all strength to disprove the existence of God, He still loves us forgives us, and pleads us to receive His grace.

Now God has let you know and invite[s] you in the first place, are you willing to exist in the world He exclusively prepares for you?

Appendix J

Ideal Types of Protestantism and the Church in Taiwan

The categorical distinction between "church", "sect" and "mysticism" is a typology which has deeply informed sociological (Weber 2013 [1930]; Weber 1992 [1922]; Tonnies et al. 1973) and anthropology accounts of the history of Western Christianity (Robbins 2004a). In a seminal study of Christian history conducted by the Protestant theologian Ernst Troeltsch, he delineated three different kinds of social doctrine characterising Christian history, from the middle ages on. The first is that of,

> ...the Church, which is regarded as a universal institution, endowed with absolute authoritative truth and the sacramental miraculous power of grace and redemption, takes up into its own life the secular institutions, groups, and values which have arisen out of the relative Natural law, and are adapted to the conditions of the fallen state; the whole of secular life, therefore, is summed up under the conception of a natural stage in human life, which prepares the way for the higher supernatural stage, for the ethic of grace and miracle, for the spiritual and hierarchical world-organization (1992[1912]: 461).

Troeltsch's second type of Christianity, he terms "the sect", emerged in reaction to "the Church". Here,

> ...the religious community has evolved its social ideal purely from the Gospel and the Law of Christ; according to this type of thought the Christian character and holiness of this ideal should be proved by the unity reigning within the group and by the practical behaviour of the individual members, and not by objective institutional guarantees. Therefore, either it does not recognise the institutions, groups, and values which exist outside Christianity at all, or it a quietly tolerant spirit of detachment from the world it avoids them, or under the influence of an "enthusiastic" eschatology it attacks these institutions and replaces them with a purely Christian order of society (1992[1912]: 461).

Troeltsch's account, being confined to Europe and being written before Protestantism really took hold in China as an indigenized religion, concludes that these first and second kinds of Christianity have really culminated in the subsidence of the impulse "to attempt a direct transformation of world conditions by means of an organized society inspired by a common aim, and strengthened by united worship" (725-6). "To-day men know or feel instinctively far too clearly" he concludes, "how complicated are the problems of our common life and our common civilization involved in these great questions, to attempt anything of this kind. With the rise of the great sovereign States which dominate the life of the citizens down to the smallest detail, and with the revelation of the nature of

the Capitalist system, the ideal has naturally changed…" (726). This certainly was not the case however, in early twentieth century China (Bianco 1971; Dikotter 2008) when Watchman Nee first came under the tutelage of a British Brethren-inspired missionary, who had resigned from the Anglican mission after coming to see denominationalism as evil in the eyes of God (Lee 1991:17).

The condition of acceptance of the world situation, according to Troeltsch leads to the third type of Christianity, mysticism, which we might think of as a prototype of the dominant form of Christianity today, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity (Coleman 2000; Martin 2002; Robbins 2004a; 2007; Jenkins 2012; Yang et al. 2017):

> Mysticism shows a strong impulse towards the directness, presence, and inwardness of the religious experience, towards a direct contact with the divine, a contact which transcends or supplements traditions, cults and institutions…In reality it is radical individualism, without any community…The social relationships consist in the natural connection between individual but similar souls, which are connected through the similarity of the inward processes and the common ground of understanding (1911:172-174 cited in Daiber 2002:332).

Nevertheless, as we turn finally to those Western Christians who had direct contact with Nee the point is that, unlike in Chinese language and tradition, no cosmological and terminological repertoire had been built up to in which oneness with God and the oneness of the community could be combined into a single conception. For most Christians this has and is not a priority (though there are exceptions, e.g. Barker 1991; 2014; Handman 2014). They were always separate kinds of endeavour. We heard from brother Zhu in chapter one, that in some cases the very structure of the Chinese language enables an easier articulation of this ideal oneness. We cannot understand the genius of Nee as coming only from his ability to combine, what the Primitivists could not, into a fluid, holistic vision. As many Western commentators have complained, when translated into English his writings and recorded speeches connote so many reiterations of the Primitivist writers whose ideas he was building upon. Rather he drew, we must surmise unconsciously, upon a bed of assumptions which had long formed Chinese attitudes to social order, divinity and their intrinsic connections.

We can already see that if the aim of the Christians Nee interacted with was to live a Christianity in which union with God and social union were equal and simultaneous values, with their perceived "degradation" of "the Church" neither sectarianism nor mysticism offered approaches which were compatible with this aim. Why was the kind of vision of Penn-Lewis and the Brethren, of a sacred, deificatory community so difficult to live out in Western countries but not in China and Taiwan? Additional to the direct circumstances in which Watchman Nee and other indigenous Christian

leaders laid out their Christian visions, to understand the church in Taiwan we must understand both the structures of the world-civilization whose collapse it was a response to, and the form of Western Christianity from which its formative concepts were taken.

Stark and Finke (2000) redefine Troeltsch's (1912) concepts of a "sect" and "church" along an "axis of tension between the group and its sociocultural environment". "Tension refers to the degree of distinctiveness, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the "outside" world". Along this axis, "[c]hurches are religious bodies in relatively lower tension with their surroundings" while "[s]ects are religious bodies in relatively higher tension with their surroundings" (2000:143-4, boldface removed). (My experience of the church in various places only partly confirms Stark and Finke's conclusion that the "higher the level of tension with its surroundings, the more exclusive, extensive, and expensive is the level of commitment required by a religious group" but does not confirm the rational-choice model that their propositions and conclusions are situated within (2000:145).) In my experience, and church members themselves have agreed, in these terms, the church in Taiwan is more "church"-like while the church in Europe and North America is more "sect"-like. In my experience in Taiwan for instance, unlike in Europe and America, the church's emphasis on "becoming God" (*chengwei shen*) and on the sacrality of the group as the Body of God is not lived in tension with the rest of Taiwanese society. (It does create division in families, but this is due more to the fact of dedicating oneself to an obscure version of a still-perceived-as "foreign religion", rather than due to its doctrines and practices per se.) Up until the Communist take-over period, this seems also to have been the case in post-Imperial China. While the church life is less in tension with surrounding society but that produces a greater need within the church to emphasise the discontinuity between the church and the surrounding environment.

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