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„Long for One's Ancestors, Miss One's Home: An Ethnographic Study of Everyday Lived Chinese Popular Religion"

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Deutschsprachiges Abstract:

Diese Arbeit untersucht die volksreligiösen Überzeugungen und Praktiken Chinas im In- und Ausland (insbesondere im Einwanderungskontext). Der Fokus dieser Arbeit liegt auf religiösem Glauben und religiösen Praktiken im Alltag, sowohl persönlich als auch in der Familie. Durch die Verwendung eines ethnografischen Ansatzes, der auf „*guesthood*“ basiert, werden die gelebten religiösen Überzeugungen und Erfahrungen des „gewöhnlichen“ chinesischen Volkes untersucht.

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I consider myself to be an extremely lucky person. I have deeply enjoyed compiling this labour of love and I am acutely aware that the entirety of this project would have been impossible without the support, love, and patience of numerous individuals.

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I also cannot begin to express the extent of my gratitude to my partner Simone Peschek. Her support, love, and unwavering ability to make me smile regardless of circumstance means more to me than anything. She has remained my other half (the half that possesses common sense) throughout the entire project. She knows exactly how I feel about her.

Finally, I wish to thank the many participants who took part in this project. Being welcomed into your lives, invited to your homes, and being privy to your thoughts, dreams, and fears, has been nothing short of an honour. It is your story that I wish to tell and I feel incredibly lucky to have had the pleasure of meeting you all.

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Introduction

The very first time I visited the village discussed in the first chapter of this thesis was during *chūnjié* 春节 (Spring Festival).[1] On the third day of the festival, I was invited to take part in a ritual. The purpose of this ritual was to prevent unwanted ghosts (*guǐ* 鬼) from entering the local houses of the village. I was taken to the village temple before sunrise, presented with an auspicious red band that was tied around my right arm, and then shown to an old pickup truck. I was told that I was to be the flag bearer: he who ushers in the coming of the village deity. I was shown to my seat in the back of the truck and was then joined by a group of men bearing drums and cymbals. As the sun finally began to rise, the local deity (which was said to reside within a small box no larger than a shoebox) was taken to the truck. Thus began a procession that took the best part of seven hours. Heralded by a cacophony of drumming and cymbal clashing, the deity was taken to every single house in the village: the box being physically taken into every household where a brief ritual would take place in which the deity would bestow its protection. Aside from sparking a fascination with Chinese popular religion that shows no signs of abating, this experience was significant to me for two reasons:

1) This was an example of lived religious beliefs and practices in China that existed outside of organised religion. Even though the epicentre of the ritual took place in the local village temple, the head of the temple had absolutely no religious training: he was a local farmer who had privately raised money for a temple to be built.
2) Nobody who took part in the village-wide ritual self-identified as religious. Indeed, the entire event was adamantly perceived as an irreligious occasion.

Herein lies the heart of this thesis. This entire project seeks to examine Chinese popular religious beliefs and practices at home and abroad (namely within an immigration context). More specifically, this project seeks to examine religious belief and practice within everyday life: personal, household, and family based religion. To this end, what sets this project aside from previous ethnographic studies of Chinese popular religion is the particular focus on children. The thesis is holistic in nature in that it involves children and teens alongside adults, granting equal voice to each age group examined.

[1] Also commonly referred to as Chinese New Year and Lunar New Year. It is an annual celebration to mark the beginning of a new year in the Chinese lunisolar calendar. It is debatably the single most important festival in China.

It should be noted that this is a cumulative thesis comprising of seven papers published in peer reviewed journals and edited volumes – in *Religions; Vienna Journal of East Asian Studies; Religion in Austria, Volume 6; Religion in Austria, Volume 7; Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* – and one currently undergoing peer review. Each chapter therefore appears as it does in publication. Moreover, it is important to note that this project was not initially conceived as a cumulative thesis. Indeed, the onset of Covid-19 fundamentally changed the nature of the entire thesis. Not only did the pandemic prevent my carrying out fieldwork in the People's Republic of China (PRC), it also meant that I had to adapt the nature of my research to ensure that I was not putting any of my interviewees at risk. This meant that some of my interviews took place outside while also observing social distancing.

1 Theoretical Framework

Unsurprisingly, given the everyday realm of Chinese popular religion at home and abroad is a very broad subject, several themes are central to this thesis. This section will briefly touch upon these themes.

1.1 Everyday Religion

Although a couple of chapters touch upon lay interaction with specific religious institutions, for the most part, the primary focus of this thesis is on the lay people themselves. This field is often referred to as "everyday" religion: Hall (1997: vii), Ammerman (2007: 5), McGuire (2008: 12), for example, all draw attention to the "everyday" lived religious experience of "nonexperts." The crux of this scholarship is built on the premise that the conventional approach to the study of religions that is, more often than not, informed by the "World Religions" narrative, wholly neglect less formal manifestations of religiosity and subsequently constitutes a "mere empirical description of religious and quasi-religious culture (Brandom 2000: 81). The aim of this scholarship, however, is not to necessarily diminish the importance of traditional organised religion, but instead to acknowledge a manifestation of religion that has comparatively received limited scholarly attention. To this end, building upon the work of de Certeau on *la religion vécue* (lived religion), Dessing et al. (2013: 2) seek to acknowledge

the importance of what they deem "prescribed religion" while crucially "shift[ing] the gaze from 'hypervisible' forms of institutional religion which currently dominate social and discursive space to the less visible forms of religion."

On the level of everyday religion, some scholars (Marti 2015) hold that modernity has seen the rise of new religiosities, new imperatives for proper or desired religiosity, and new ways of legitimising religious thoughts, practices, and even larger orientations. Indeed, there has been a recent particular emphasis on a wider-European trend away from organised religion and towards a more informal "postconfessional" religion (Dessing et al. 2013: 3; Woodhead and Catto 2021).

It should be acknowledged from the outset that the field of everyday religion is extremely vast in both scope and the sheer number of studies. This thesis intends to use the field as a broad foundation to investigate a far smaller field: Chinese popular religion. Indeed I believe that if one were to move away from examining the World Religions narrative that focusses on specific religious doctrines and instead focus upon everyday beliefs and practices that very much occur on an everyday basis in Chinese homes, one is met with a manifestation of religiosity that not only falls outside of the World Religions narrative but problematises it.

1.2 Chinese Irreligiosity

A discussion of Chinese religiosity, especially on the level of the household, is impossible without acknowledging an assumption that is held by many: Chinese people in and outside of China are held to be predominantly "irreligious." There are a plethora of studies that claim to confirm this irreligiosity: as part of the Chinese General Social Survey, four surveys conducted in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2011 respectably found that, an average of 87 per cent of Chinese mainland adults considered themselves to be irreligious (Luo and Chen 2021: 856). Similarly, the *Washington Post* writes that "China tops the list of the world's least religious nations by far [… as] decades of Communist rule have installed a widespread atheistic materialism" (Noack 2015). These studies highlight this widespread assumption that China is irreligious. Indeed, the majority of recent surveys suggest that the religious population of the PRC is a mere fourteen per cent of the population (Yang and Huang 2018: 2). This irreligious assumption is also made by scholars in the PRC. Palmer and Winiger write that "the classical

secularization theory [is] often assumed by Chinese scholars." Similarly, Zhāng (2015: 51) writes that China is representatively permeated by Confucian culture that is wholly irreligious.[2] This academic assumption also applies to Chinese immigrants living abroad. This exists as part of a much broader major issue in the scholarly study of immigration religion, namely, whether or not the process of immigration leads to a rise or decrease in the religious practices and beliefs of those immigrating. For the most part, the former theory is favoured. Foley and Hoge (2007: 15), for example, refer to the process of immigration as a "theologizing experience" and Hirschman (2004: 1212) argues that "most immigrants seek to maintain, or renew, their religious faith after arrival." This popular theory (see, for example, Handlin 1973; Herberg 1983; Shen 2020) essentially holds that the process of immigration leads to a rise (or indeed a new discovery) of religiosity. However, there also exists a smaller body of scholarship that hold that immigration decreases religiosity. Conor (2008: 254), for example, found that the process of resettlement majorly disrupts religious participation.

Chinese immigrants are likewise predominantly regarded as irreligious. The Pew Research Center, for example, found that China is "the primary country of origin for migrants who are religiously unaffiliated" (Pew Research Center).

There have been several theories regarding this identified irreligiosity. Liú (2013: 391) argues that in marked contrast to moral construction in the West, "in the thousands of years of Chinese society, moral construction and governance did not rely on religion, but had a very reasonable secular moral system, such as filial piety with family as the core."[3] Similarly, Liáng (1987: 307) simply states that today "China has replaced religion with morality."[4] Finally, Yang (2008: 2) argues that Chinese deny the existence of Chinese religion in China for three reasons:

1) A history of Western missionary contempt for Chinese superstition and idol worship.

2) A sense of superiority of science and modern rationality.

3) Social evolutionist doctrines that place Western secular civilisation as the teleological end point.

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[2] *Qiě yǐngxiǎng zhōngguó rén de rújiā wénhuà bìng bùshì zōngjiào, gèng duō de shì yǐ yī zhǒng sīxiǎng* 且影响中国人的儒家文化并不是宗教，更多地是以一种思想.

[3] *Guānjiàn zàiyú, zhōngguó jǐ qiān nián de shèhuì, dàodé jiànshè hé zhìlǐ bù yīkào zōngjiào, ér shì yǒu fēicháng hélǐ de shìsú dàodé tǐxì, lìrú yǐ jiātíng wèi héxīn de xiàodào.* 关键在于，中国几千年的社会，道德建设和治理不依靠宗教，而是有非常合理的世俗道德体系，例如以家庭为核心的孝道。

[4] *Zhōngguó wénhuà shì 'xiào' de wénhuà*. 中国文化是'孝'的文化。

1.3 Defining Religion

Although this thesis seeks to move away from inferring or assuming religious definitions in favour of granting the Chinese interviewees a voice, a working definition of religion is nevertheless required. The term for religion in Mandarin is *zōngjiào* 宗教. The character 宗 depicts a building (*mián* 宀) and an ancestral table (*shì* 示) that is used for commemorating the dead. The original meaning of the character was therefore a generic term for ancestral shrines and temples. The character 教 is comprised of *xiào* 孝 and *pū* 攵. However, the *xiào* component is modern and the radical component used to be 子 (*zǐ*: a child) paired with 爻 (*yáo*: two fives): namely a child being instructed in numbers. The *pū* radical is a form component: it is a hand holding an implement to hit someone with. Taken as a whole, 教 denotes the passing down of cultural values and tradition from elders to children. Although the term *zōngjiào* is significant and its relationship to *xiào* shall especially be elaborated upon, it should be acknowledged that the term is modern – namely a neologism adopted from the Japanese *shūkyō* 宗教 at the dawn of the twentieth century – and is typically associated with specific organised religious traditions. The term is not particularly helpful when exploring the Chinese popular religious context.

This thesis draws upon two separate definitions of religion and applies them in various cases to Chinese popular religious beliefs and practices. Pokorny defines religion thus:

"[Religion is] an individually—and by extension conjointly—negotiated programme of self-positioning, bridging the ordinary lived worldliness with the transcendental, which is prompted by a tension of self- and world-experience. This tension can take different forms depending on time, space, and the individual. In order to cope with this tension, the transcendental—be it a divine being or superhuman power, a cosmic principle, the unfathomable universe, etc.—is symbolically referenced in a way from which meaning is drawn in the context of one's conduct of life" (Pokorny and Winter: forthcoming).

This definition of religion is particularly useful in encapsulating the transcendental component of religion.

This definition shall be complemented with Yang (2018: 1) who argues that religion includes four elements

1 A belief in the supernatural.
2 A set of beliefs regarding life and the world.
3 A set of ritual practices.
4 A distinct social organisation or moral community.

This is by no means a comprehensive definition of religion. It does, however, offer a multidimensional categorisation that serves the requirements of this thesis. Herein, the status of Yang himself is crucial: Yang is one of the most prolific leaders of the field of Chinese ethnographies (both within and beyond the PRC) pertaining to religion.

1.4 Chinese Popular Religion

The scholarly field of Chinese popular religion is rife with misunderstandings. Woo (2010: 152), for example, criticising the 2001 Statistics Canada census that found that the Chinese population was predominantly irreligious, rightly notes that the inaccuracy of the data "comes from an understanding and definition of religion that begins with and rests on western notions of doctrinal primacy and communal and institutional affiliations […] [and] much of Chinese religiosity is non-textual, individual, familial, communal, broadly non-institutional, synthetic and syncretic." It is for this reason that Chinese populations within and beyond China are so often deemed irreligious. However, Berger (1980), Beck (2010), and Archer (2012) have all argued that segmented and pluralistic societies contain new sources for self-formation, self-promotion, and legitimisation for new forms of self-construction. Herein, one enters the scholarly realm of popular religion. Yang (2001: 71) has noted that many Chinese individuals follow an assortment of personalised eclectic practices without identifying themselves with any particular religion. These (usually undefined) beliefs and practices are regularly referred to as "Chinese popular religion" (Johnson 1996: 123). The category has no universal name,[5] no centralised monks or priesthood, no uniform beliefs, no "orthodox" knowledge pertaining to belief or practice, no identified origin, and vast regional differences. The entire religion is therefore embedded in the lives of "ordinary" people. Overmyer describes this religion as a "complex aggregate" (Overmyer 1981: 164), while Johnson aptly writes that it is "so widespread, so accepted, and so integrated into social life that it does not need a name; one

[5] This is not a category that even has an agreed upon term in Mandarin. Indeed, it is not a category that is widely discussed in the first place.

could say that its existence is assumed" (Johnson 1996: 124). It is diffuse, flexible, eclectic, and exceedingly open, intricately echoing the Three Teachings (*sānjiào* 三教)[6] as well as local traditions.

One of the most prolific and well known scholars on Chinese popular religion is Chau. He has argued that at the heart of popular belief in China is "magical efficacy […] [which is] conceived of as a particular deity's miraculous response […] to the worshiper's request for divine assistance" (Chau 2006: 2). 5 He states that these miraculous responses "are socially constructed: it is people and their actions that enable the establishment of human-deity relations and interactions" (ibid.). Regarding the practical component of popular religion, Chau (ibid.) asserts that:

"[P]eople 'do' popular religion not only by praying and presenting offerings to the deities but by building temples, organizing and participating in temple festivals, sponsoring and watching local operas, making and buying incense and spirit paper money, bribing local state officials, networking with other temples and other institutions, fighting over temple leadership positions, and even planting trees and building schools."

He has more recently asserted that Chinese popular religion is one of the most crucial arenas in which *guānxi*[7] is enacted "not just between people in socio-political life […] but also between people and spirits, between people and sites of worship and spiritual empowerment, among religious co-practitioners […] [and] between deities" (Chau 2019: 4). It is therefore already apparent in the works of Chau, Overmyer, Yang, and Johnson that broad thematic flexibility is central to scholarly discourse pertaining to Chinese popular religion. Following on from this, Goossaert and Palmer regard "religious practices, networks, and institutions as part of a broader, open "social ecology" in which […] religious elements are in perpetual relation with other elements, and in which the components and boundaries of the religious field are constantly contested" (Goossaert and Palmer 2001: 13). They define Chinese popular religion as "a coherent system (but a system with several hierarchies) […] [in which] all communities and religious specialists […] share common cosmological notions, even though these notions are interpreted in many different ways" (ibid.: 20).

[6] Namely Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

[7] This term has a somewhat large semantic variety but is usually taken to mean connections; relations; relationships. Subsequent chapters will elaborate on this in greater detail.

Given that this thesis will be grounded in ethnography focussing on "ordinary" people, there will be little to no postulation on the relationship between politics and Chinese popular religion. However, in this respect, it is important to note that much of the scholarship pertaining to Chinese popular religion indeed relates to the relationship between the government and religion. Wang (2018: 164), for example, draws attention to how popular religion is often overtly distinguished from institutionalised religion, writing that the government "insists on the difference between 'religion' and 'folk belief' and has not removed the discourse of 'superstition' from official proclamations, indicating the lingering influence of twentieth-century secular nationalism." Similarly, Nedostup (2009: 3), focussing particularly on the Nánjīng Decade (1927–1937), examines "the modern recategorization of religious practices and people according to the assumptions of secular nationalism." Herein, Nedostup seeks to offer an alternative to the narrative of "antisuperstition repression and resistance" (ibid.: 111) and thus asserts, similar to Wang, that despite the secularising initiative of the government, the masses were able to essentially rally under community religious practice which remained embedded in daily life. Laliberté (2021: 4) also follows this narrative, noting how although state religion fell apart in the Republican period, "the imagery, the concepts, and many of the beliefs inherent in the ancient forms of religiosity remain a central feature of popular and communal religions to this day."

Grounded in in these studies, this thesis seeks to advance the field by offering a more intimate investigation of Chinese popular religion. Although there will be no statements that can be applied to the whole of China or the Chinese, by offering an in-depth examination of religion at the ground level, this thesis will explore and note various patterns of beliefs and practices that exist within Chinese popular religion.

1.5 Childhood Religion

One could argue that the acknowledgement of and emphasis afforded to childhood religiosity is a major factor that separates this study from previous studies of Chinese religiosity. Although the field of childhood religion as experienced by Chinese children and teenagers is an incredibly small field, it does exist within the far broader field of childhood religion. Although much of the work of this thesis is to move against preconceived notions of childhood religiosity, I believe that it is necessary to give a small overview of the general field. Before doing so, however, I would like to note that one of the main hopes I have for this thesis is that it will grant something of a voice to those whose voices often go unheard. The children of this study

are the most obvious example of this. On a purely scholarly level, I believe that the voices of Chinese children both in and beyond the PRC are too often ignored. An illustrative example was during a conference I took part in this year. After giving a presentation pertaining to Chinese childhood religiosity in Vienna, a theologian asked me why I was specifically focussing on children by stating "Children don't know anything about religion and they definitely don't care about it." It is exactly this dismissal that I seek to offer an alternative to: the children interviewed as part of this thesis very much knew about their own unique conception of religion and they certainly cared about it.

Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011: 258) lament the fact that, to date, there have been very few dedicated studies on childhood religiosity, noting how the majority of scholarship has "nearly entirely focused on the adult perspective and on the particular role of religious social organizations rather than on the individual experience." Similarly, Ridgely (2012: 240) writes that "rarely […] have adults—be they parents, priests, or researchers—acknowledged the contributions of children in the creation of religious, social, or political worlds." Indeed, some scholars such as Orsi (2005) question whether one can ever truly hope to access or comprehend children's thoughts about religion due to the intricate ways in which their voices are influenced by those around them.

In terms of the religious beliefs of Chinese children, the majority of scholarship holds that they are irreligious. Fāng (2013: 69) argues that while young people in China are perfectly capable of possessing religious belief and experiencing religious experiences, the number of occurrences is extremely small. There have also been a number of comparative studies between child religiosity in China and in various Western countries. Gé (2015), for example, contrasts what constitutes the core of children's moral education in the USA and the PRC: the former is religion (*zōngjiào*) whereas the latter is built upon the non-religious "moral ethics" (*lúnlǐ dàodé* 伦理道德) of filiality. Yáng (2014: 38) even goes as far as to argue that because the vast majority of Western homes possess a Bible, Western children, in contrast to the irreligious children in the PRC, are dependent on religion for the cultivation of moral values. Finally, Zhèng (2013: 23) argues that in contrast to irreligious Chinese children, children in the West are far more likely to abide by rules and obey regulations due to fear of punishment from God.

Regarding the international context, studies of Chinese immigrant children are placed in stark contrast to the wider scholarly notion that immigration is a theologising experience. Thompson and Gurney (2003: 87), for example, write that immigrant children "report multiple ways in which religion or religious belief serves to protect them from the stressors of adolescence and

immigration." Suárez-Orozco et al.'s (2011: 263), however, write that "not surprisingly, the only group that reported a different kind of pattern of attendance was the Chinese, because they have a very low religious affiliation; they reported low attendance at church or temple." Similarly, Thompson and Gurney (2003, 87) found that Chinese immigrant children were deeply irreligious:

"Interestingly, religion appears to play a less significant role in the lives of Chinese immigrant youth. This perhaps is a reflection of the secular nature of Chinese society under communist rule."

Lǐ (2018: 15) takes this to another level by asserting that:

"[m]ost [Chinese] immigrants do not know about religion, so they cannot understand the special meaning of religious festivals. They usually do not express their rejection of formal religious festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, but keep a certain distance."

2 Research Questions

This thesis is centred upon four interconnected research questions:

1 How are seemingly religious practices reconciled with self-identified irreligiosity?

It should be made clear from the outset that it is not my intention to assume religious beliefs on the part on my interviewees. If I perceive or hear about an interviewee possessing religious beliefs or enacting religious practices, while at the same time claiming irreligiosity, it is not my intention to claim that they are wrong. What I seek to explore is the nature of the category "religion." When questionnaires ask Chinese people "are you religious?" and the "no" box is selected, this is far too often where the conversation ends. This leads to what I believe is inaccurate data. Although I do not seek to claim that the Chinese person ticking no is in any way lying, the very fact that this irreligious person might pray to a plethora of gods and ancestors and possess deep (religious) beliefs that permeate their day to day life means that there is an inherent problem with the term "religion" that requires investigation.

2 What is the nature of Chinese popular religion?

Similar to the previous research question, this research question requires something of a disclaimer. I am acutely aware that Chinese popular religion is immeasurably broad. I do not seek to offer a definite definition. What I do seek, however, is to note, where possible, beliefs and practices that permeate Chinese popular religious belief.

3 How do different stages of life impact Chinese popular religion?

As this thesis seeks to examine Chinese popular religion on the ground level, I believe it is important to give a voice to children and teenagers as well as adults. I seek to explore whether or not there is a noticeable difference between how popular religious beliefs and practices manifest at these different life stages in comparison to how it manifests for adults. By exploring various age groups, from young children to teenagers, I seek to explore whether or not there is an identifiable manifestation of childhood religiosity that differs from the popular religion of their adult counterparts.

4 What is the international dimension of Chinese popular religion?

This thesis offers only a small window into Chinese popular religion in Europe. I therefore do not seek to make any sweeping claims. However, by offering an in-depth investigation of immigrant religion at the ground level, I hope that this thesis will provide a unique window into how the immigration context can impact religious belief and practice. This research question is deeply tied to the previous: I seek to explore the immigration context of both parents and children.

3 Outline of Chapters

The first chapter, "Speaking to My Ancestors: An Ethnographic Study of Lived Childhood Religion in Rural Gansu,"[8] begins by offering an overview of the major scholarly themes pertaining to childhood religion in the PRC. It then provides an in-depth case-study of lived childhood religion in a rural village in Gānsù province. Most importantly, after exploring the notion of popular religion and how children engage with it, this chapter argues against the common notion that children in the PRC do not regard religious belief as important and simply mirror the religious practices of their guardians. The main conclusion herein is that the data

[8] Published in *Vienna Journal of East Asian Studies*, 12: 177–206.

presented suggests that the children of the village have constructed their own unique form of lived religion that is informed by, but crucially distinct from, the religious beliefs and practices of adults. Thus one finds the first instance of a generational divide between how Chinese popular religion is conceived and practised.

The second chapter, ""Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion": An Ethnographic Study of the Lived Religious Experience of Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna,"[9] is similar to the first insofar as it is an ethnographic examination of lived childhood religiosity. However, unlike the first chapter that was based in rural China, this chapter explores the international dimension by examining the lived religious beliefs and practices of Chinese children living in Vienna. This chapter problematises the widespread belief that the vast majority of Chinese immigrants (both adults and children) are irreligious. This chapter therefore asserts that the first-generation Hàn Chinese children community of Vienna is, in contrast to what one might assume based on prior research, a religious one. As with the first chapter, this chapter also demonstrates religious beliefs and practices possessed by the interviewed children that, in many cases, differed from their parents, but where ultimately no less important to the practitioners. Finally, this chapter briefly touches upon the phenomenon of Chinese immigrant parents sending their children to formally learn about Catholicism as a means of assimilating into Austrian culture.

The third chapter, "Parental Popular Religion and Filiality: An Ethnographic Study of the Religiosity of Chinese Parents in Vienna,"[10] follows on from the previous chapter and investigates the lived religious beliefs and practices of immigrant parents living in Vienna. After providing a thorough overview of the scholarship pertaining to Chinese parent religiosity, this chapter provides a case study that demonstrates that the various parenting beliefs and practices of the interviewees were intrinsically seeped in religion. This chapter therefore constitutes an alternative to the popularised notion (both within academia as well as popular culture) that Chinese parenting practice places the utmost importance on secular concepts, such as education and authoritarianism.

The fourth chapter, "Contemporary Filiality and Popular Religion: An Ethnographic Study of Filiality Among Chinese University Students and their Parents,"[11] like the first, is an examination of popular religion in the People's Republic of China (PRC). However, unlike the

[9] Published in Hans Gerald Hödl, Astrid Mattes, and Lukas Pokorny, eds. *Religion in Austria*, Volume 6. Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 1–31.
[10] Published in Hans Gerald Hödl, Astrid Mattes, and Lukas Pokorny, eds. *Religion in Austria*, Volume 6. Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 67–112.
[11] Pending publication.

first chapter, this chapter moves away from childhood religiosity and instead focusses on the religious beliefs and practices of university students in Beijing in comparison with their parents. More specifically, this chapter constitutes an in-depth investigation into the concept of *xiào* 孝.[12] After giving an overview of the major scholarly themes pertaining to filiality, this chapter builds upon the previous chapter by asserting that in contrast to the large body of scholarship that paints filiality as an irreligious concept, filiality is not only very much intrinsically religious in nature, but also the very concept of *xiào* cannot be removed from the realm of Chinese popular religion. This chapter also demonstrates another generational divide with the students and their parents conceiving of filiality in very different ways.

The fifth chapter, "Chinese Families and Their Encounter with the Secular: An Ethnographic Study of Chinese Parents and Their Children in Edinburgh,"[13] specifically explores the concept of secularisation within the realm of Chinese popular religion. Where previous chapters have all acknowledged that the overwhelming majority of Chinese interviewees self-identified as irreligious, this chapter specifically explores the paradox that these same people possess what can very much be deemed as religious beliefs. This chapter therefore demonstrates that although self-identifying as secular, these families in Edinburgh engage in religious activity and possess religious beliefs with a view to the definition of religions applied. After providing an overview of scholarship pertaining to Chinese popular religion and the secular, this chapter gives an intimate insight into how Chinese parents and their children in Edinburgh conceive of the secular and reconcile it with their own beliefs and practices. Herein, a very marked generational divide is noted. Moreover, the international dimension is of particular note: the international context had no impact on religiosity insofar as both the parents and their children perceived themselves to exist in the same moral cosmos populated with gods and ancestors, however whereas the parents fully perceived themselves to be irreligious and secular, their children, for the most part, saw the issue with a far greater degree of nuance. This generational divide was very much informed by the international context: after assimilating to Scottish culture to a far greater degree than their parents, the children's perception of religion and the secular was complicated and a stark contrast to the secular certainty of their parents. The majority of the children were able to compare themselves to their Scottish peers and draw the conclusion that their own Chinese popular religious beliefs and practices could in fact be

[12] A term that I opt to translate as "filiality" but is more commonly known as "filial piety."
[13] Published in *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society*, 9 (1), 186–212.

regarded as religious, whereas their parents, in turn, firmly held that what they believe and practice are fully secular.

The sixth chapter, "An Ethnographic Study of How Chinese University Students in Vienna Observed Spring Festival during Covid-19,"[14] remains in the international context but offers instead a case study of a specific Chinese holiday: Spring Festival (*chūnjié* 春节). This chapter specifically seeks to problematise the multiple studies that suggest that Chinese students studying outside of the PRC are irreligious. The chapter itself provides a case study of how Chinese students studying in Vienna observed a highly unorthodox Spring Festival (namely one impacted by Covid-19). What is especially important in this chapter is the international context of the students: it was precisely because of this context that students engaged with Spring Festival in a manner in which they had never done so before.

The seventh chapter, "Religiously Apathetic, Hybrid Christians, and Traditional Converts: An Ethnographic Study of How Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna Engage with Christianity"[15], is a follow-up study to the case study presented in chapter two. This chapter specifically explores how Chinese children in the international context of Vienna engage with Christianity. After providing an overview of the scholarship pertaining to the subject, this chapter offers new insight into the role of Christianity among Chinese immigrant children: unlike previous studies that explore formal Christianity (i.e., the specific congregations of established churches), this chapter explores how Chinese children reconcile new religious beliefs and practices by themselves. This chapter also problematises the concept of "conversion" within the context of Chinese children: many of the children interviewed expressed belief in the Christian God without self-defining as Christian. Moreover, this chapter offers a unique window into how Chinese popular religion can essentially assimilate new beliefs and practices: many children would believe in God and even pray to Him while still maintaining their various popular religious beliefs.

The eighth and final chapter, "Overt and Covert Buddhism: The Two Faces of University-Based Buddhism in Beijing,"[16] specifically looks at how students in Beijing who attend student-run Buddhist societies engage with Buddhism. More specifically, this chapter explores how these university students encounter Buddhism, how they practise it, and how these beliefs manifest. By offering two very contrasting case studies, this chapter demonstrates the

[14] Published in ans Gerald Hödl, Astrid Mattes, and Lukas Pokorny, eds. *Religion in Austria*, Volume 6. Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 33–66.
[15] Published in Hans Gerald Hödl, and Lukas K. Pokorny, eds., *Religion in Austria Volume 7*. Vienna: Praesens Verlag, 139–178.
[16] Published in *Religions* 11 (3), 1–18.

contrasting ways in which young people in Beijing grapple with religious identity and practice. What is more, this chapter pertains to how a defined religion that falls within the World Religions narrative (namely Buddhism) is engaged with from the ground up: particular attention is given to why these different groups of students opt to practise Buddhism and how the beliefs themselves manifest. Wider popular religious themes such as face (*miànzi* 面子) and why the popular religious beliefs of parents might lead students to hide their new-found religious identity.

4 Research Trajectory

This entire thesis is rooted in ethnography. It particularly draws upon Harvey's concept of "guesthood" (Harvey 2005: 227–228; 2013: 94) whereby meetings are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed" (Arthur 2019: 16). I believe that this method perfectly matches research into Chinese popular religion which focusses on more intimate manifestations of religiosity. Moreover, when working with children, I opted to follow in the wake of Ridgely (2011: 82) who argues that by cultivating a relationship with children that is not built on the foundation of their need for protection or instruction from the researcher, it is possible to achieve untainted results. Thus, this entire project is built with the intention of providing a genuine voice to my interviewees.

The main thread that runs throughout each chapter is Chinese religion as experienced on the ground level. This "ground level" manifests in various forms, from traditional Chinese homes in China to university students living away from home, but each constitutes religious belief and practice that exist outside of institutional religion. Indeed, even the chapters that specifically focus on Christianity and Buddhism respectively are crucially not examinations of organised religion but instead the unique way in which religion is navigated outside of the traditional norm.

4.1 Chinese-Centred Research

There have been a plethora of studies pertaining to Chinese religiosity (or, as is most often the case, irreligiosity) in and beyond the PRC. However, much of the data presented in these studies came from questionnaires. This thesis seeks to not only move away from this method

of data acquisition, but also problematise it. Zhāng and Lú (2018: 153) rightly point out that questionnaires not only play into the problematic World Religions narrative, but they also fail to capture the intricate and unique ways in which Chinese popular religion functions. This thesis seeks to demonstrate the importance of ethnography in good data acquisition pertaining to popular religion. The core word here is "good": the following chapters demonstrate a wide pool of interviewees who were willing to impart fascinating insight into their own beliefs and practices. However, this was only made possible by good ethnography. Questionnaires would have corrupted the data and formal structured interviews would have prevented me from placing the power in the hands of the interviewees. Indeed, many of the most interesting insights were obtained by complete accident from a child telling me about the importance of their ancestors during a game of hide-and-seek, to an elderly couple laughing about an ancestor giving one of them a bad back after a bad offering. Thus, one thing that unites each chapter is this notion of finding out about Chinese popular religion through the use of good ethnography. Not only was manner crucial to achieving this, but also language. Each chapter deconstructs and problematises the term "religion" and finds it at best limited in scope and at worst harmful within the context of Chinese popular religion. I have found terms such as *jiàzhí tǐ* 价值体 (system of values), *chuántǒng* 传统 (tradition), and *lúnlǐ dàodé* 伦理道德 (moral ethics) to be far more fruitful when attempting to ascertain religious beliefs. Similarly, regarding religious practice, *fèng* 奉 (commonly used in the context of "giving offerings") and *jìbài* 祭拜 (to offer to one's ancestors), for example, were vastly superior to "religious practices": *zōngjiào yíshì* 宗教仪式 or *zōngjiào xísú* 宗教习俗).

Finally, each chapter readily makes use of Chinese scholarship (namely scholarship that is written in Mandarin or Taiwanese). I believe that this is crucially important in not only providing as full a picture as possible but also because I assert that to neglect this scholarship is to do the subject a disservice. Neglecting this scholarship is surprisingly common. Newendorp (2016), for example, conducted an otherwise excellent investigation into family values of Chinese-born migrants that is severely weakened by the fact that not a single Chinese scholarly source is utilised.

It is my hope that this thesis will not only generate an increased awareness of the implications of the term "religion" when conducting research into Chinese religion, but also provide a sense for the importance of ethnography.

4.2 Categorising Chinese Popular Religion

By this point it should be abundantly clear that the entirety of this thesis very much holds that Chinese religiosity exists in a state of flourishment. In contrast to the wealth of scholarship that argues to the contrary, each chapter in this thesis demonstrates religiosity that exists outside of the World Religions narrative, that is nonetheless deep and complex in terms of both belief and practice. More specifically, each chapter explores the very concept of Chinese popular religion in various ground-level manifestations. Taken as a whole, very general patters emerge. Although not a working definition *per se* (Chinese popular religion is too broad for this), the data acquired has led to an identification of three interconnected categories present in all iterations of Chinese popular religion:

1. Gods (*tiānshén* 天神), Ancestors (*zǔxiān* 祖先), and Ghosts (*guǐ* 鬼). The former two are beings subject to commemoration. There are innumerable gods that range from deities known nationwide to those known only to a specific locality. When one dies and is succeeded by a child (particularly a son) who can take care of them in death, they become an ancestor. These beings can, in return for continued care, bestow boons upon the living. Má (2000: 129) aptly writes that "a person's existence is due to his ancestors, and in turn, the ancestor's existence is also due to his descendants."[17] Thus, ancestor commemoration usually plays a decisive role in cultivating family values. Finally, ghosts are beings that can cause problems for the living. One can become a ghost for numerous reasons but the most well-known is dying with offspring.
2. *Bài* 拜 and *lǐ* 理. Both terms have a large semantic variety. The former can mean "to pray," "to pay respect," "to worship," "to visit," and "to salute." The latter can mean "inner essence," "intrinsic order," "reason," "logic," "truth," "to pay attention to," and "put in order." Within the specific context of popular religion, *bài* and *lǐ* denote the essential embodiment of religious belief through a bodily action: "doing religion that might be filtered out by etic concepts and categories" (Peng 2020: xxii). The most obvious manifestation of this are offerings to gods and ancestors.
3. *Bào* 报 and *yīng* 应. As with the former terms, these two terms large degree of semantic variety. *Bào* can mean: "to report," "to announce," "to inform," "to respond," "to repay," "to retaliate," and "to retribute." *Yīng* can mean "to answer," "to respond," "to comply

[17] Yīgè rén de cúnzài shì yóuyú tā de zǔxiān, fǎn guòlái zǔxiān de cúnzài yěshì yóuyú tā de zǐsūn. 一个人的存在是由于他的祖先,反过来祖先的存在也是由于他的子孙。

with," and "to deal or cope with." Within the realm of popular religion, these terms denote the concept of reciprocity, or rather more specifically, the necessary reciprocal obligations that exist within a universe that is inherently hierarchical. It is herein that one finds the concept of filiality. Although the conception of filiality is seen to change across generations, the concept at its core is a pure manifestation of reciprocity.

4.3 Generational Variations of Religious Belief and Practice

Finally, I believe that the most significant finding of this thesis as a whole is the extent to which Chinese popular religion depends on age. Children were found to be as engaged as their adult counterparts, but with key differences in beliefs and practices. This was the case both within the context of the PRC and the international context of migration. Scholarship pertaining to childhood lived religion is extremely limited and, at its worst highly problematic. It focuses upon the Western context and the religious views of children are commonly gathered by relying upon the highly problematic medium of adult memory (see, for example, Cram 2001; Greven 1978; Wuthnow 1999). This latter problem therefore focusses on what religious belief used to be rather than what religion is. By actually granting a voice to children and contrasting this voice with that of teenagers, young adults, and older adults, whole new dimensions of Chinese popular religion have opened up. Moreover, combined with Chinese-centred research methodologies, it is my hope that this thesis will constitute a move in the right direction towards treating Chinese popular religion with the respect that it very much deserves. It is unlikely that previous studies that assume irreligiosity on the part of Chinese people without accounting for the nuances of Chinese popular religion, neglect to acknowledge Chinese scholarship, or fail to give Chinese children a voice, meant any disrespect. Nevertheless, by neglecting these aspects, Chinese irreligiosity has become something of an assumed scholarly norm (with the exception of those who acknowledge popular religion). Utilising sound ethnography that acknowledges *all* the previous research, accounts for the complexities of popular religion, and grants children a genuine voice, will give one a view of Chinese popular religion that is (as I hope these chapters will show) both fascinating and accurate. Although much more research is warranted, I find this to be a very exciting discovery.

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Speaking to My Ancestors: An Ethnographic Study of Lived Childhood Religion in Rural Gansu

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the major existing scholarship pertaining to childhood religion in the People's Republic of China (PRC). More specifically, it examines lived childhood religion in a rural village in Gānsù province. This article challenges the commonly preconceived notion that children in the PRC do not regard religious belief as important and simply mirror the religious practices of their guardians. By utilising ethnographic data, I argue that children in the PRC are capable of constructing their own unique form of lived religion that is informed by, but crucially distinct from, the religious beliefs and practices of adults. The practices and beliefs of this lived religion can be extremely important to children and the evidence from fieldwork suggests that they tend to take both their practice and belief very seriously.

Keywords: childhood, children, China, lived religion, belief

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Introduction

Given the importance of children in the realm of lived religion, it is somewhat surprising to find that little consideration has, until relatively recently, been paid to how children (which this article shall define as those under the age of eighteen) understand and practice religion. Lately, a wave of academic research has studied the place of children in various faith traditions and the lives of the children raised in these traditions. It is now somewhat common knowledge that children are perfectly capable of negotiating their own religious beliefs; indeed, concluding his decade long *Children in Crisis* series in 1990, Coles argued that children think deeply about religion and very much deserve to be taken as seriously as their adult counterparts (Coles 1990). Rarely, however, do scholars acknowledge the contributions of children in the creation of religious worlds (Ridgely 2012). At best, the existing scholarship on childhood lived religion is extremely limited and at worst highly problematic: the overwhelming majority of scholarship focuses upon the Western context, and the religious views of children are commonly gathered by relying upon the highly problematic medium of adult memory. Although an interesting line of inquiry in its own right, it ultimately remains an adult's view of what they think childhood religion *was* as opposed to what a present day child thinks religion *is* (Cram 2001; Greven 1978; Wuthnow 1999).

This article intends to add to the ever growing corpus of academic studies dedicated to examining lived childhood religion. More specifically, I intend to shine light upon the severely under-examined field of lived childhood religion in China. Wàn and Yán (2008: 69) highlight a common problem with academic studies of childhood religion: existing studies often rely predominantly on quantitative research. This is particularly the case with childhood religion in China as many studies seek to examine the number of children who possess religious views. This study is thus purely ethnographic and builds its conclusions upon Miào's (2016) excellent ethnographic study of childhood ritual. While focussed upon patriotic rituals that take place in Chinese kindergartens rather than lived religion, Miào (2016: 163) argues that children often possess a deep understanding of ritual built upon intuitive perception. While Miào seeks to disprove the preconceived notion that children in the People's Republic of China (PRC) have a limited understanding of ritual, I will argue that contrary to previous research, children in the PRC are capable of deeply engaging with and practicing religion. More specifically, I will seek to offer an alternative to the preconceived notion that children in the PRC are mere observers of lived religion by arguing that they are, in fact, perfectly capable of understanding and practicing their own unique form of lived religion. In order to discuss these conclusions, this article will initially provide an overview of the major existing scholarship pertaining to childhood religion in the PRC. The conclusion itself is drawn from ethnographic data obtained from a selection of the childhood population in a small village in Northwest China's Gānsù 甘肃 province.

Chinese Popular Religion

Before delving into the field of lived childhood religion in China, a brief discussion of Chinese popular religion is necessary. China is often identified as the world's most irreligious population; indeed, many recent surveys suggest that the religious population is a mere fourteen per cent of the population (Yang and Huang 2018: 2). Some, however, have argued that the link between ethnic and religious identification is less evident among cultural groups with less dominant formal religious traditions or faiths (Lopez, Huynh, and Fuligni 2018). The ethnic Hàn (*hànrén* 汉人) possess something of a religious dimension to family life. Rituals conducted at weddings, funerals, and festivals give meaning to family members' connections with one another and their ancestors. Its theology, cult, and personnel are so intimately diffused into one or more secular social institutions that they essentially become part of the concept, rituals, and structure of the latter, thus having no significant independent existence (Yang 1961). This religious practice is often referred to by scholars as "Chinese popular religion" (Johnson 1996: 123). Overmyer describes this religion as a "complex aggregate" (Overmyer 1981: 164), while Johnson aptly writes that it is "so widespread, so accepted, and so integrated into social life that it does not need a name; one could say that its existence is assumed" (Johnson 1996: 124). It is diffuse, flexible, eclectic, and exceedingly open, drawing on elements of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism as well as local traditions.

I believe that this religion is also built upon a number of universal ethical principles and goals which I shall go on to outline. It should be acknowledged that to reduce Chinese popular religion to a short section is somewhat problematic. Nevertheless, I believe that the core elements of the religion can be tentatively categorised into three main components.

Gods, Ancestors, and Ghosts

Máo Zédōng 毛泽东 (1893–1976) observed that both ancestral lineage and the worship of gods were two basic constituents of traditional Chinese society (Máo 1968). Although official statistics suggest otherwise, the practice of ancestor and god commemoration is still a crucial feature of Chinese popular religion today. More specifically, this constitutes a need to fulfil regular obligations to both ancestors and gods in the hope of bringing about a reciprocal response. There are a plethora of gods in Chinese popular religion; indeed, t is not uncommon for a village to house multiple unique gods. They are typically believed to occupy vital points in villages, usually within a shrine or temple that might house a single more widely known high-ranking deity and multiple lesser-known local divine beings. In most temples, gods are represented by images, but they can also be represented by a written tablet, or sometimes by a piece of red paper containing a list of the gods' names (Tam 2011).

Ancestors, in contrast, are not regarded as deities, but are equally worthy of religious obligation. Hsu, who believed that lineages constitute the essential social fabric of China, aptly described religious Chinese life as lived "under the ancestors' shadow" (Hsu 1948). When one dies, it is expected that one will be taken care of by surviving relatives (particularly any surviving son). In return, this ancestor can bestow various boons from the afterlife.

Ghosts constitute the essential opposite of ancestors. They are believed to be the spirits of those who died but are not venerated as ancestors—those who either died without offspring to venerate them or, in exceptional cases, those who died violently. Although not necessarily malicious, if left unchecked, ghosts can cause great trouble for villages. There are therefore various ways of dissuading ghosts from visiting, persuading them to leave, and subduing them.

Bài

The term *bài* 拜 has a large degree of semantic variety: "to pray," "to pay respect," "to worship," "to visit," and "to salute." In Chinese popular religion, it is the very embodiment of religious belief through a bodily action. Encapsulating how Chinese popular religion is actually practiced, Peng defines it as "doing religion that might be filtered out by etic concepts and categories" (Peng 2020: xxii), namely an action that simultaneously engages mind and body as a whole. In literal terms, it can take many forms: giving various forms of offerings, ritual cleaning, evocation, and showing reverence (to name a few). More often than not, *bài* pertaining to ancestors and gods is obligatory and the notion of whether one actually believes is of comparative unimportance.

Bào

The term *bào* 報, like *bài*, also has a large degree of semantic variety: "to report," "to announce," "to inform," "to respond," "to repay," "to retaliate," and "to retribute" (Yang 1957). Most importantly, in the context of Chinese popular religion, it denotes "reciprocity." The domain of Chinese popular religion is very much hierarchical. *Bào* is the necessary reciprocal obligation within this universe. Indeed, one could argue that Chinese popular religion is essentially built upon the combination of moral modelling and reciprocal obligation within a hierarchical structure (Oxfeld 2015). One of the most obvious manifestations is the concept of filiality (*xiào* 孝): children are essentially eternally indebted to their parents for the gift of birth and being raised. The child must therefore repay this debt by caring for their parents in old age as well as in the afterlife through proper *bài*.

I believe an etymological analysis of the modern Chinese term for "religion" (*zōngjiào* 宗教) perfectly encapsulates these three components. 宗 is made up of two

elements: 宀 (*mián*) which means "roof" and 示 (*shì*) which is usually translated as "to show" or "to report." As a whole, 宀 constitutes the roof of an ancestral shrine while 示 indicates offerings presented to the ancestors while reporting (i.e. praying) to them (Welter 2017). 教 is made up of 孝 (*xiào*), the aforementioned "filiality",[1] and 文 (*wén*) which has a broad range of meanings (often "literature," "writing," and "culture"). 教, however, can further be broken down into 老 (*lǎo*) and 子 (*zǐ*). The former translates as "elder" and the latter as "son" or "child." Therefore, taken as a whole, 教 denotes the passing down of cultural values and tradition from elders to children.

Children in Chinese Popular Religion

This article now turns to an examination of the existing scholarship pertaining to lived childhood religion in China. Although this remains a relatively new and notably understudied field, it is already clear that a number of themes and assumptions have arisen within this corpus of scholarship. Aside from offering what I believe to be a valuable window into lived childhood religion in rural China, this article also intends to test and, in a number of cases, provide an alternative to these themes and assumptions. It should be acknowledged from the outset that I by no means intend to disprove any previously made statements. I am acutely aware that this study is built upon a relatively small sample of children in a very small village in a single Chinese province: to claim that such a study is representative of lived childhood religion in China as a whole would be nothing short of foolish. What this article does intend to do, however, is offer much needed data on lived childhood religion in China and, in some cases, offer alternatives to theories in the hope of igniting a discussion. With this said, this section shall briefly outline what I believe to be the most important conclusions about lived childhood religion in China granted from existing scholarship.

Children are Irreligious

Chinese scholarship frequently concludes that children are irreligious. It is rather unsurprising to find that statistically speaking, the vast majority of children in China are irreligious according to official data (Yang and Huang 2018). Fāng (2013: 69) con-

[1] It should be noted that I have purposely chosen not to employ the more common translation "filial piety." I believe the term "piety" is far too laden with Christian moral connotations. Moreover, although I believe the term "filial obedience" (Stafford 1995) is a better translation than "filial piety," I also believe that it can be somewhat misleading. To be truly filial in Chinese popular religion does not mean to blindly obey one's parents. On the contrary, one should "thoughtfully assimilate the lessons they have taught and carry on their legacy in a cosmopolitan world that they may not be able to comprehend" (Madsen 2008: 306).

cludes that while young people in China are perfectly capable of having religious experiences, the number of occurrences is extremely small. Many Chinese academics have undertaken comparative studies between child religiosity in China and in various Western countries (usually the United Kingdom or the United States). Gé (2015), for example, writes that the very core of a child's moral education in the USA is religion (*zōngjiào* 宗教) whereas in contrast, a child's moral education in China is built upon the non-religious "moral ethics" (*lúnlǐ dàodé* 伦理道德) of filiality. Yáng even makes the rather problematic assertion that, unlike the wholly irreligious children of China, children in Western countries are dependent on religion for the cultivation of moral values due to the "fact" that the vast majority of family homes possess a Bible (Yáng 2014: 38). Similarly, Zhèng (2013: 23) argues that due to the impact of Christianity on Western culture, children in the West are far more likely to abide by rules and obey regulations due to fear of punishment from God.

Filiality is Central to a Child's Morality

Both Chinese and Western scholars conclude that filiality is central to a child's morality. However, Chinese scholars tend to remove all religious connotations of filiality and, like Gé (2015), argue that the term is a non-religious value. Liáng encapsulates this view by stating that "Chinese culture is a culture of filiality"[2] (*zhōngguó wénhuà shì 'xiào' de wénhuà* 中国文化是'孝'的文化) (Liáng 1987: 307). Chén and Gān (2008) argue that filiality is the single most important thing that a child should learn. They argue that there are three manifestations of children in China today: "little slaves" (*xiǎo núlì* 小奴隶) who are blindly authoritarian and obedient in the traditional sense of filiality; "little emperors" (*xiǎo huángdì* 小皇帝) who are spoiled by their parents and are categorically unfilial; and those who embody true filiality (thoughtfully obedient but never unquestioningly so). Sòng (2017: 99) argues that modern Chinese children embody (or at least should embody) filiality in two ways: caring for one's body (both physically and morally) which is not privately owned by the child but is instead intertwined with the parents to whom the child has a moral obligation, and to be mindful of and cultivate one's reputation. To this end, Sòng asserts that children believe that filiality constitutes providing material support to their parents later in life while maintaining constant respect.

Many studies place particular emphasis on the moral debt of children, stating that this is their reason for filiality. Oxfeld (2015), for example, writes of how parents have a particular obligation to care for and teach their children who, in return, are "indebted to their parents forever" (Oxfeld 2015). Similarly, Goossaert, Kiely, and Lagerwey (2015: 24) even go as far as to state that the very "core notion governing rural family life was that of the moral debt of children—above all sons—to parents."

[2] This and all other translations from the Chinese are mine.

It should be noted that academic examinations of filiality tend to draw conclusions either from classical texts on filiality or from the opinions of adults. Indeed, there is a plethora of texts about what filiality actually is, how it should be taught to children, or how adults perceive it to be important—particularly from the academic field of education. Yàn (2006) argues that the core of traditional filiality is "love" (*ài* 爱) which in turn is defined by the act of "devotion" (*fèngxiàn* 奉献). Yàn, wishing to create a lasting culture of filiality, argues that the concept should serve as the moral core of all contemporary education. Yú (2007) examines the historic notion of filiality and argues that it should still possess contemporary value in education. Xiào (2009) writes that filiality is an integral part of the traditional culture of China. He argues that it cultivates a sense of morality and responsibility in children that enables them to "cherish life" (*zhēn ài shēngmìng* 珍爱生命). He concludes that modern Chinese education should embrace this traditional culture of filiality. Yáng (2009) laments the decline of the culture of filiality in Chinese education and urges schools to introduce activities that will restore the original culture. Zhōu, Jiǎng, and Chén (2012) argue that filiality is extremely positive for mental health and the psychological development of children. Hú Zéyǒng (2016) argues that filiality equates to "equality" (*píngděng* 平等) and should thus be liberally utilised by Chinese schools in order to cultivate socialist values in children. Sòng (2017) describes the historic background of filiality and then calls for schools and parents to instil filiality in children. Yú and Yú (2018) argue that children should be taught filiality in order to reflect and show respect to the Chinese government. Zhāng (2019) documents government calls for towns and villages to adopt a culture of filiality in local schools.

The studies summarised above provide valuable insight into what filiality is, how it should be taught to children, lamentations about how children are taught filiality poorly, and examinations of how parents implement it. That said, each examination stems from the academic field of education. Moreover, not a single one examines filiality from the point of view of children.

Children are Shown Religion Rather than Taught about It, and the Issue of Belief is Unimportant

From a very young age, adults instruct children to imitate them in *bài* to both gods and ancestors. In what remains the most thorough study of childhood religion in China to date, Stafford writes that children are never directly taught about religion but are certainly made to participate, "sometimes literally put through the motions of rituals" (Stafford 1995: 49).[3] He notes the extent to which children imitate their parents, initially not understanding the actions but imitating them nevertheless, and then slowly

[3] Much of this article draws from Stafford's (1995) study as well as Johnson's (1996) excellent study of children in China.

starting to comprehend why and how as they get older. Peng similarly argues that the instructions children receive place the emphasis on bodily action and imitation and, without spoken tuition, instil underlying beliefs into children:

> what is ingrained in body and mind from an early age can develop to no more than showing respect to one's direct forbears, required in funerals and festival sacrifices [… or] can grow into a pious veneration of deities in fully engaged body and mind (Peng 2020: xxiv).

Johnson (1996) also notes that from an early age, children take part in religious rituals and are shown how to conduct the rites properly by watching and by being helped to perform them. However, she takes the assertion somewhat further. Whereas Stafford and Peng assert that young children do not really fathom the reasoning behind rituals, Johnson, building upon the conclusion of Hsu (1948), argues that children usually do not take ritual seriously. Similarly, Stafford (1995) also notes how the teenagers he observed actively seemed unhappy about being made to perform *bài* and especially objected to the more respectful forms of commemoration such as kneeling and prostrating. Scholars tend to agree that the issue of whether or not children actually believe in what they are doing is unimportant. Peng encapsulates this view by stating that:

> *Bai* that relates to ancestors is obligatory, and there is no room left for personal free choice. The issue of whether one believes or not does not seriously concern people in their early experiences of performing *bai* (Peng 2020: xxiii).

Scholars such as Yú, Yú, and Sū (2019: 30) who examine specific religious beliefs argue that one can simply utilise parents' beliefs to accurately predict those of the child as the beliefs are mirrored. Similarly, Hú Bólín (2016: 26) neglects to examine the minutiae of the religious beliefs of children in favour of outlining how some children gain superstitious religious beliefs from their families—a trend that Hú Bólín believes is both problematic and in need of addressing.

Finally, it is a rather common observation among scholars that Chinese children are taught how to *bài* from their mothers. For example, Overmyer (1987: 293) argues that children are taught religious practices by their mothers. Similarly, Johnson (1996: 126) argues that the majority of Chinese popular religion practice takes place in the context of the family. In that setting, children learn from their mothers, the main practitioners of religious rituals at the family level, how to conduct the rituals properly.

Only Boys are Considered Full Beings

Traditionally, only sons are able to take care of their parents in the afterlife. It is thus unsurprising that scholars have often found that families in China place far more importance on their sons than daughters. Johnson (1996: 134), for example, argues that

sons (rather than daughters) are much more likely to participate in the commemoration of ancestors above and outwith the level of the household (i.e. during festivals in which ancestors require *bài*). However, while many scholars have noted that boys are very much favoured over girls, it is particularly significant that some scholars have argued that girls are not even perceived to be full people. This assertion was first noted by Watson who stated that girls "do not, indeed cannot, attain full personhood" due to the fact that only sons are given their names during the "full month" ceremony,[4] whereas daughters remain nameless (Watson 1986: 619). Ahern (1975: 210) similarly argues that due to the fact that girls are essentially born only to move into another family upon marriage, they are perpetually regarded as outsiders. Finally, Stafford (1995: 184) arrives at a similar conclusion, stating that girls are seen as lesser when compared to boys, but also acknowledges that all children are seen as "useful" regardless of gender.

Children are Unstable

In the pre-imperial period, Mencius (*Mèngzǐ* 孟子) (ca. 372–289 BCE) and Xúnzǐ 荀子 (ca. 310–230 BCE) —the two great Confucian masters—adopted different views of human nature (*xìng* 性) which had significant implications for attitudes toward children. Mencius considered the innate goodness of human beings as something to be nurtured and nourished by the environment and education, and saw in the newborn infant a symbol of moral perfection. In stark contrast, Xúnzǐ regarded human nature as innately bad and in need of constant and rigorous moulding and correction. The human infant was thus viewed as an inherently bad being (Zhou 2009). Although this debate is not perceived to be a concern for children or their parents today, scholars still very much note the ramifications. Stafford (1995: 18) notes how it is traditionally believed that the souls (*línghún* 灵魂)[5] of children are not very firmly attached to their bodies. Symonds (2004: 22) notes that it is very common for the souls of children to be frightened away by something minor; a loud noise may cause fearfulness, or it may be the result of something more extreme. When a child's soul is frightened away, ritual measures have to be taken to bring it back. Moreover, compared to adults, children are far more susceptible to the influence of ghosts. Schipper (1982: 103) explains that adults are more stable and thus far less vulnerable to such "pernicious influences."

[4] Some males go on to accumulate several names.

[5] It should be noted that the term "soul" in this context can be potentially misleading. The Chinese term *línghún* 灵魂 holds a set of meanings that overlaps with, but does not completely coincide with, the typical Western understanding of "soul": a crucial element of the concept is that it makes a person a real person which has led some to employ the term "personality" (Harrell 1979: 520-527). Although *línghún* is very much separate from the body, the active separation of the two does not mean death. A *línghún* of a person either alive or dead, gives one individuality. Therefore a body without a *línghún* is alive but lacking in humanity.

Johnson (1996: 135) notes how children frequently wear amulets, clothing that gives them supernatural protection, and protective charms to repel evil influences or to lock in their loosely attached souls. It should be noted that scholars do not regard children losing their souls or the process of retrieving them as a major problem. Schipper (1982: 103) and Stafford (1995: 19), for example, both argue that a child suffering a soul fright is a minor problem that requires only a common ritual response.

Funerals are a Point of Academic Contention

Scholars agree on the nature of children's funerals: in popular Chinese religion, it is forbidden to hold funerals for children. The death of sons is considered to be especially tragic and even unfilial on the part of the deceased since he cannot fulfil his filial obligations. Families might grieve privately for their departed children but no official funerary rites are administered. However, whether or not children are permitted to attend funerals is a point of academic contention. On one side of the argument, Watson (1982: 169) argues that children younger than fourteen are wholly excluded from funerals without exception (unless direct descendants of the deceased). In marked contrast to Watson, Peng (2020: 108) argues that child mourners and bystanders, whether immediate family or not, are very common funeral attendees. Peng asserts that children are even encouraged to attend funerals, particularly in the case of good deaths, as "they bring into play much fuller ideas of reproduction and ancestors' protection." They offer an excellent opportunity for children to learn further about the intricacies of *bài* and *bào* (Peng 2020: 109).

Methodology

Conducting ethnographic research in China, especially pertaining to fields that are deemed controversial such as religion, can be sensitive; Jones (2010: 16), for example writes how some scholars have been hindered by local police while conducting field research. Thankfully, I did not face any such obstacles. I once again found myself utterly indebted to the friends I made while I conducting research in Běijīng (北京). It was only because I happened to receive a very kind invitation from a university friend that I was able to gain access to my fieldwork site. My research, however, did change in nature; my original intent was not to study lived childhood religion specifically but instead undertake a far broader investigation into lived religion in rural family life. The nature of my research changed once I started the fieldwork itself: the data I gathered warranted, in my opinion, a change of research area.

The research took place over a period of forty days in January and February 2017. The fieldwork was based in a small rural village located north of *Lánzhōu* 兰州 in

Northwest China's *Gānsù* Province. The village has a population (at the time of research) of 3,839 with a very low under-eighteen population of approximately 200. The population is ethnic Hàn and the village predominantly relies on agriculture with rice and oranges constituting the main crops (although a few wealthier farmers also breed pigs). The village has two main religious sites: a single village temple built and maintained by the head of the wealthiest family in the village, and a large expanse of ancestral burial mounds (*fén* 坟) located in the hills on the outskirts of the village. The aforementioned temple is Daoist and an accurate reflection of the beliefs of the village according to its benefactor. The temple purportedly houses several deities and is, by my observation, a classic Chinese popular religion temple that incorporates elements of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and local beliefs.

In terms of conducing the research, I adopted Harvey's concept of "guesthood" (Harvey 2005: 227–228; 2013: 94) as an ethnographic research method, namely establishing relationships with my interviewees built upon mutual respect whereby meetings are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed" (Arthur 2019: 16). My intention therein was to undertake a far more intimate and focused study than, for example, Johnson (1996) who conducted a far wider exploration into children in popular Chinese religion across the entirety of the PRC. Although this means that I cannot, and indeed will not, offer anything other than a small window into lived childhood religion in a very small Chinese village, I believe that this in of itself will grant a far deeper insight than more wide-ranging studies that can only remain at surface level by nature of scale.

As my fieldwork involved working with children, I adopted Ridgely's method of "allowing children to shape the research" (Ridgely 2011b: 82). Orsi (2005), among others, has famously questioned whether scholars and indeed adults can ever truly hope to access or comprehend children's thoughts about religion due to the intricate ways in which their voices are influenced by those around them. Indeed, studying children and the views that they hold, rather than the idea of "the child," raises questions that researchers often unwittingly overlook (Ridgely 2011a). However, Ridgely (2011b: 82) argues that by cultivating a relationship with children that is not built on the foundation of their need for protection or instruction from the researcher, it is possible to achieve untainted results. This is only achievable if the researcher is able to establish an understanding with the children that they know more about religion than the researcher. Thus, by relinquishing control of my fieldwork to the children I worked with, I was able to establish a fruitful environment in which I could learn from them.

All of the interviews I conducted and my participant observation practices took place on the terms of my interviewees. Like Clark (2010), I endeavoured to have my interviewees explain their feelings and understandings to me in their own language. Therein, my status as a "foreigner" (*wàiguó rén* 外国人) proved to be of enormous

help; the children wanted to teach me about their views and assumed that I had absolutely no prior knowledge as a foreigner. I was, by default, seen as different to the adults of the village—an outsider who knew games that they had not played before (which helped me to establish quick rapport in many cases) and wanted to learn about local customs. Moreover, I endeavoured to analyse what the children told me using their own terms and standards, rather than measuring their perceptions against my own pre-conceived adult norms (Ridgely 2005). Thus, by combining Harvey's concept of "guesthood" and Ridgely's method of "allowing children to shape the research," I was able to develop relationships with the children and establish an environment built upon mutual respect in which they were comfortable talking with me. Over the course of forty days in the village, I conducted both semi-structured interviews (giving my interviewees a great deal of autonomy in what we spoke about), as well as participant observation.

For this research project, I adopted the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's definition of "child," namely "a human being below the age of eighteen years" (U.N. General Assembly 1989). My sample size consisted of twenty-six children, specifically thirteen males and thirteen females divided into three groups: 1) nine children aged under eight years-old; 2) nine children aged eight to thirteen; and 3) eight children aged fourteen to eighteen.

In order to ensure that the project's methodology and resultant data were "ethically acceptable" (BERA 2011: 5), my fieldwork strictly adhered to the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA). In my capacity as researcher, I did everything in my power to ensure that the participants who took part were protected from any manner of harm at every stage of planning and execution of the project. To this end, the names of all interviewees who participated in my study are anonymised. In line with BERA guidelines, pseudonyms that reflect both gender and ethnic background have be assigned to each participating interviewee. Each participant and their respective guardians were thoroughly briefed about my project and I ensured they were aware of my aims. I also provided my interviewees and their parents with the ongoing option to opt out of the study. Moreover, I ensured that each participant gave their informed consent before conducting any manner of research. It should be noted that this informed consent manifested as oral consent as it, combined with the use of pseudonyms, ensures the anonymity of each participant. Finally, given the small size of the child population in my field area, I have omitted naming the village in order to ensure the identities of my participants remain anonymous, in turn conforming to the guidelines of BERA.

Discussion of Fieldwork Findings

This section outlines the findings of my fieldwork. I have structured it thematically and sequentially based on the six aforementioned conclusions drawn from previous scholarship. When referring to an individual, I always list their age. During the fieldwork, I utilised my given Chinese name Chái Wénfū 柴文夫 and each child referred to me as "Brother Chái" (Chái gēgē 柴哥哥).

Children are Irreligious

Rather unsurprisingly, the vast majority of the twenty-six children I spoke to told me that they were completely irreligious. Wáng Fāng (aged six) explained to me in simple terms that "Nobody in China is religious."[6] Only three children did not explicitly say that they were irreligious but this was not because they told me to the contrary; instead, these three children, all aged four, were not aware of the term *zōngjiào*. In one of the cases, another child, Wáng Xiùyīng (six), intervened and told me that her "little friend" (*xiǎo péngyǒu* 小朋友) was not religious. She then explained to the boy what "religion" is by happily using me as an example: "Religion is when you believe in God. Brother Chái is from the UK so that means that he believes in God."[7] When I asked her whether everyone from the UK is religious, she replied: "Everyone in the UK is Christian. If you are a Christian that means that you are religious."[8] Another child who was unaware of the term *zōngjiào* very politely asked me to wait. I watched as he ran over to his mother and asked her whether or not he is "religious." His mother found this extremely funny and told him that he is certainly not religious. He then returned and solemnly told me: "No I am not religious."[9]

One finds that my fieldwork data is totally in line with the typical conclusion reached in Chinese scholarship: Chinese children, like adults, are predominantly irreligious. However, rather than taking this at face value, I am far more inclined to argue that it is a matter of semantics, especially given the subseqent sections of this article. I very much found that the children I spoke to perceived religion as belonging to the realm of "the other." Wáng Xiùyīng was certainly not alone in telling me that religion is what takes place in foreign countries but not China. There was therefore a disconnect between their own practices and beliefs and the seemingly different practices and beliefs that come with religion. The younger children were quite happy to regard this as a statement of fact. Indeed, when I attempted to get them to explain the difference

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[6]*Zài zhōngguó, méiyǒu rén xìnyǎng zōngjiào* 在中国，没有人信仰宗教。
[7]*Zōngjiào jiùshì xìnyǎng shàngdì. Chái gēgē láizì yīngguó, nà zhè yìwèizhe tā xìnyǎng shàngdì* 宗教就是信仰上帝。柴哥哥来自英国，那这意味着他信仰上帝。
[8]*Měi gè zài yīngguó de rén dōu shì jīdūjiào túdì, rúguǒ nǐ shì jīdūjiào, zhè yìwèizhe nǐ xìnyǎng zōngjiào* 每个在英国的人都是基督教徒弟，如果你是基督教，这意味着你信仰宗教
[9]*Bù, wǒ bù xìnyǎng zōngjiào* 不，我不信仰宗教。

between what they believed and practiced and what, for example, a Christian might believe and practice, I received very simple explanations. Lǐ Nà (seven) told me: "When we offer to our ancestors, this is not religion. It is simply an offering."[10] Zhāng Wěi (nine), on the other hand, provided me with an extremely thoughtful personal explanation: "I think the difference is because in religion you need to have faith. A Christian does not know that God is there so they need faith. When we offer to our ancestors, faith is not important."[11]

I believe a crucial difference perceived by the younger children can be identified: the term *fèng* 奉 sits at the core of their understanding of what Chinese popular religion is. This term was used liberally by children when explaining their beliefs and practices to me. *Fèng* has several meanings: "to offer," "to present," "to esteem," "to revere," "to believe," and "to accept orders." Usually, children used it in the context of "giving offerings." Similarly, *jìbài* 祭拜 was often employed. Like *fèng, jì bài* means to offer (to one's ancestors). In contrast, when talking about *zōngjiào*, the term "faith" (*xìnyǎng* 信仰) was commonly used—both "religious faith" (*zōngjiào xōnyǎng* 宗教信仰) and "faith in God" (*xìnyǎng shàngdì* 信仰上帝). I also found that the younger children had learned these views entirely from school and not from home. Liú Yáng (eight), for example, told me that her teacher had explained to her that people in the UK are Christians and believe in God. Herein, one finds a reflection of Fāng's (2016: i) assertion that in Western societies, the term "faith" is usually only employed in the context of "religious faith," whereas in Chinese society, "religious faith" is unimportant and people possess only belief in ethics and morals.

Although the older children shared the same irreligious conviction—similarly making the same distinction between *fèng* and faith—they also explained to me that in order to be religious, one has to belong to a "religious order" (*zōngjiào tuán* 宗教团). Wàng Shū (seventeen) summarised this view by explaining:

> In order to be religious, you have to dedicate yourself to a religious order. A Christian dedicates himself to a church and a Buddhist dedicates himself to a Buddhist temple. As far as I know, only one person in this whole village is religious. My aunt became a Buddhist when her son died. Everyone else does not belong to a religious order.[12]

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[10] *Jì bài zǔxiān bùshì zōngjiào xíngwéi, zhǐshì fèng éryǐ* 祭拜祖先不是宗教行为，只是奉而已。

[11] *Wǒ rènwéi qūbié zàiyú, xìnyǎng zōngjiào xūyào xìnyǎng, jīdū jiàotú bù zhīdào shàngdì shìfǒu cúnzài, suǒyǐ tāmen xūyào xìnyǎng, ér jì bài zǔxiān shi fǒu yǒu xìnyǎng bìng bù chóng yào* 我认为区别在于，信仰宗教需要信仰，基督教徒不知道上帝是否存在，所以他们需要信仰，而祭拜祖先是否有信仰并不重要。

[12] *Xìnyǎng zōngjiào, nǐ bìxū yào zūnxún yīdìng de zōngjiào jiàoguī. Jīdū jiàotú yào qù jiàotáng, fójiào tú yào qù fójiào sìmiào. Jiù wǒ suǒ zhī, zhège cūnzi zhǐyǒu yīgè rén xìnyǎng zōngjiào. Wǒ āyí zài tā érzi qùshì hòu xìnyǎngle zōngjiào, qítā rén dōu méiyǒu zūnxún mǒu gè zōngjiào jiàoguī.* 信仰宗教，你必须要遵循一定的宗教教规。基督教徒要去教堂，佛教徒要去佛教寺庙。就我所

Filiality is Central to a Child's Morality

The centrality of filiality to a child's morality was, by far, the most difficult strand to research. Regardless of age, each child I spoke to was very keen to explain what they had been taught about filiality but it took me a very long time to ascertain the actual views of children. Instead, what I initially received were textbook responses. All of the twenty-six children, even the youngest, were quick to tell me how important filiality is, how they intend to do well at school to make their guardians happy, and eventually get a good job so that they can care for their guardians in old age. However, it was rather obvious from the outset that I was simply being told what they themselves had been told to believe. I should quickly acknowledge that this does not necessarily mean that the children did not truly believe what they told me. On the contrary, I do not deny for a second that each child truly wished to be a good filial son or daughter. However, I herewith encountered a major problem that often gets overlooked when conducting ethnographic research with children: "social desirability." Children might only give responses that they think the researcher wants to hear or think they should say as opposed to what they truly think (McLeod 2008). Indeed, when I spoke to the children, I commonly received typical responses about what they believe about filiality. Fēng Mián (ten), for example, told me:

> I love my parents and I want to make them happy. Many children in China today have become 'little emperors' so I must be diligent and always strive to make my parents happy and proud.[13]

Fēng Mián's statement echoes the vast majority of responses I initially received. It is interesting in its own right that the topic of filiality, far more than any other, yielded a number of responses that almost sounded rehearsed. Needless to say, filiality, as existing academic studies would suggest, is of central importance to both children and adults; indeed, these were the only responses I ever received from younger children.

The most significant moment came when I was speaking to a group of young children (aged four to nine) about filiality. Playing ignorant, I attempted to have them explain it to me. At first, I received a flurry of instant responses to the tune of filiality is all about respecting one's guardians. However, I was very struck by Zhāng Wěi (nine), who offered me a story that he thought would explain it perfectly to me:

> There was once a blind mother and a son. They were totally dependent on one another. They were poor and forced to beg. One day, when they were both very hungry, the child stole some

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知，这个村子只有一个人信仰宗教。我阿姨在她儿子去世后信仰了宗教，其他人都没有遵循某个宗教教规。

[13] *Wǒ ài wǒ de fùmǔ, wǒ xiǎng ràng tāmen gāoxìng. Xiànzài zhōngguó hěnduō háizi dōu shì "xiǎo huángdì", suǒyǐ wǒ bìxū qínfèn nǔlì, zǒng shì ràng fùmǔ gǎndào gāoxìng hé zìháo.* 我爱我的父母，我想让他们高兴。现在中国很多孩子都是"小皇帝"，所以我必须勤奋努力，总是让父母感到高兴和自豪。

> food and gave it to his mother. His mother was so pleased but she did not ask where the food had come from. The child kept stealing to feed his mother. Every day he would bring her food and she would always be happy with him. However, one day, the son was caught by the police. He was taken before a judge. The boy asked if he could see his mother. When the mother was told what was going on, she instantly knew her own mistake and killed herself. The son was then beheaded.[14]

As Zhāng Wěi was telling this story, it quickly became apparent that the entire room had fallen silent and even the adults present were listening intently to him. There was a great commotion once he had finished—his parents were especially delighted. Apparently this was not a story that they had told him; indeed, it was not a story anyone in the village was aware of. He told me that he had read the story in a book from his school library. I believe that this instance is particularly noteworthy for two reasons. First, it is a clear example of a child demonstrating an excellent understanding of filiality—he was aware, and even told me, that filiality is not a one way relationship. Children have to show their guardians thoughtful obedience while the adults have an obligation to care for and teach the child. Therefore, one could argue that filiality is not simply something children are taught and expected to adhere to, but rather something that they truly *understand.* Second, and more interestingly, I believe that here one finds an example of a child who is actively seeking out religious understanding, personally grappling with concepts and coming to well thought out conclusions. Whereas aforementioned scholarship is quick to enumerate how children should be taught filiality, what strikes me in this instance is that Zhāng Wěi clearly had his own personal desire to understand it himself as opposed to simply being taught and shown how to practice (as previous scholarship suggests). Granted, this is only one child, and it should be acknowledged that Zhāng Wěi struck me as a particularly gifted student. I would not, therefore, draw any sweeping conclusion from this observation. However, it is certainly significant that such as example exists in the first place.

This search for understanding amongst the younger children was not limited to Zhāng Wěi. Another group of young children (aged four to eight) similarly explained to me what filiality is. During this conversation, I noticed that they accidently made a connection to filiality that had never been pointed out to them before. This happened

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[14]*Cóngqián yǒu gè mángrén mǔqīn hé tā de érzi. Tāmen xiāngyīwéimìng. Tāmen fēicháng pínqióng, zhǐ néng qǐtǎo wéi shēng. Yǒu yītiān tāmen dōu tài èle, érzi tōule yīxiē shíwù gěi mǔqīn, mǔqīn hěn gāoxìng, dàn méiyǒu wèn shíwù de lái yóu. Érzi biàn yīzhí tōu lái shíwù gěi mǔqīn chōngjī. Měitiān tā dūhuì dài lái shíwù, mǔqīn wèi cǐ hěn gāoxìng. Zhídào yǒu yītiān, érzi bèi jǐngchá zhuā zhùle, tā bèi dài dào fǎguān miànqián, tā wèn shìfǒu kěyǐ jiàn mǔqīn yīmiàn. Dāng mǔqīn zhīdào fāshēng de yīqiè hòu, tā lìmǎ yìshí dàole zìjǐ de cuòwù bìng zìshāle. Érzi yě bèi zhǎnshǒule.* 从前有个盲人母亲和她的儿子。他们相依为命。他们非常贫穷，只能乞讨维生。有一天他们都太饿了，儿子偷了一些食物给母亲，母亲很高兴，但没有问食物的来由。儿子便一直偷来食物给母亲充饥。每天他都会带来食物，母亲为此很高兴。直到有一天，儿子被警察抓住了，他被带到法官面前，他问是否可以见母亲一面。当母亲知道发生的一切后，她立马意识到了自己的错误并自杀了。儿子也被斩首了。

when they were telling me that their guardians do so much for them. Zhǐ Ruò (four) told me that her parents "look after me, buy things for me, make me food, keep me safe, teach me things, talk to me..."[15] The children then began excitedly talking about all of the things that their guardians have given them in the past. One child then told me that it was nearly Spring Festival (*chūnjié* 春节) which means that all of the children would soon receive Red Packages (*hóngbāo* 红包). When I asked them to tell me what a Red Package is, one girl solemnly told me that "our parents love us so much that they give us Red Package money every Spring Festival."[16] Although none of them spoke of the sense of thrift that Red Packages are supposed to instil (Péng 2019), I was impressed that they were able to forge a clear connection between filiality and the practice of giving and receiving Red Packages.

The older children also eventually provided some fascinating insights into filiality. Initially, like the younger children, they gave me only textbook explanations. However, I eventually had a number of very interesting conversations. Of particular note was that three individual children, one aged sixteen and two aged seventeen, drew parallels between filiality and the concept of "face" (*miànzi* 面子) on different occasions. To my knowledge, these children had not spoken to one another about this correlation, suggesting this was a thought process that all three experienced individually. The concept of "face" is a crucial component of Chinese society. It essentially constitutes the ability to "feel the hurt that comes from public humiliation, and the desire to protect oneself [and by extension one's family] from public humiliation" (Schoenhals 2015: 67). The eldest of the three told me that "face is basically the most important thing in this whole country. As sons and daughters, we need to be filial because this is the best and easiest way of keeping face."[17] Here, one finds another example of children successfully grappling with their own private beliefs: contrary to the research that holds that filiality is of utmost importance to children and they should simply be taught it, these children have gone a step further and placed the concept of filiality within their own personal belief systems. Crucially, I believe that by associating filiality with *miànzi*, one herein finds evidence of teenagers perceiving filiality in a far more nuanced manner than simply regarding it as respecting parents. Scholars have made this association before—Zhang (2016), for example, argues that filiality and *miànzi* are separate values that are intrinsically linked—but children are typically not believed to ponder such matters.

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[15]*Zhàogù wǒ, gěi wǒ mǎi dōngxī, gěi wǒ zuò fàn, bǎohù wǒ, jiàoyù wǒ, hé wǒ shuōhuà.* 照顾我，给我买东西，给我做饭，保护我，教育我，和我说话。

[16]*Wǒmen de fùmǔ tèbié ài wǒmen, tāmen měinián chūnjié dūhuì gěi wǒmen hóngbāo.* 我们的父母特别爱我们，他们每年春节都会给我们红包。

[17]*Miànzi, zài zhège guójiā shì zuì zhòngyào de shì. Suǒ wéi érnǚ, wǒmen yào xiàoshùn, yīnwèi zhè shì zuì hǎo yěshì zuì jiǎndān de wéichí miànzi de fāngshì.* 面子，在这个国家是最重要的事。所为儿女，我们要孝顺，因为这是最好也是最简单的维持面子的方式。

Children are Shown Religion Rather than Taught about It, and the Issue of Belief is Unimportant

My fieldwork findings demonstrate that children are shown religion rather than taught about it. I very much found it to be the case that children are not formally or informally taught about the beliefs and practices that they and their families engage in. Instead they are shown how to practice. I saw several occasions of parents carefully showing their children how to *bài*, sometimes even arranging the child's body in the proper positions by, for example, making him or her prostrate. I did not, however, find evidence that children do not take the practice seriously. Naturally, I did witness a number of occasions of young children getting restless during a longer *bài* session at the local temple, as well as the odd occasion of a teenager rolling his or her eyes at the prospect of prostrating again. However, for the most part, it seemed as though children take the various *bài* practices seriously.

More often than not, the younger children would explain *bài* practices to me in an extremely solemn manner. The most telling example came during Spring Festival. Despite being obviously excited, I was surprised at the extent to which children seriously engaged with their various *bài* obligations. The ritual cleaning of homes was done with surprising vigour and the money offerings to ancestors were treated with marked respect. However, the most revealing moment occurred after the ancestral offerings when everyone was enjoying food. In four separate households, I witnessed the same phenomenon: once the adults became inebriated or fell asleep, it was the children, regardless of age, who became the new hosts. Not only did their entire manner towards me change (going from very friendly to serious, constantly asking, for example, if I had enough food), but they also even made sure that the *bài* obligations were sufficiently taken care of. Children would go into the ancestor room (the main room of the household that held the main ancestor shrine, usually a photo of deceased grandparents) to make sure that their ancestors had enough food. Although the adults had made sure that the ancestors did indeed have enough food prior to the meal, what I found especially striking was that once the children felt as though they were in charge, they all felt the need to check on their ancestors. One herein finds an example of children taking their practice extremely seriously, in stark contrast to the academic assumption that they do not.

In contrast to the aforementioned conclusion from existing scholarship that belief is unimportant, my fieldwork findings suggest that belief is—certainly in some cases—very important. However, I believe that I witnessed something of a divide: belief is of enormous importance to some young children, but once a child becomes a teenager they adopt the more classical view of *bài* in which belief is unimportant. I found that belief in ancestors is of particular importance to young children. Twelve children aged four to ten had all established personal relationships with their ancestors which manifested in two very different ways. The first was completely encouraged by

their guardians. Each of the twelve children told me that they were always afraid whenever they visited the burial mounds of their ancestors or their ancestors were invited into their homes. Yǔ Yān (eight) told me:

> I am always afraid when I know that my ancestors are watching. I make sure that I am very good and do not do anything cheeky. I really do not want my ancestors to see this because they will surely punish me![18]

The belief that one has to be on one's best behaviour whenever an ancestor is present was extremely prevalent among the young children. Some, especially the very young, clearly believed that they were constantly being watched by their ancestors; boys, worried that they would unwittingly splash an unseen ancestor or god, even giving warnings before they urinated. The guardians tended to delight in this and actively encouraged this belief. Herein, the issue of belief is very important to the children: they actively believed that they needed to be on their best behaviour if they felt themselves to be under the watchful eyes of their ancestors. To them, this belief was very important and manifested in their explanations to me but also, more importantly, in the noticeable change in their manner. Moreover, this example provides a contrast to Zhèng's (2013: 23) argument that Western children are more likely to behave out of fear of punishment from God. Although children fear punishment from ancestors in this case, one still finds a clear example of children opting to be on their best behaviour because of the belief that misbehaving will result in punishment from a higher power.

To my knowledge, the second approach was not encouraged by guardians. Indeed, in most cases, the guardians were unaware that their children were acting thus. The twelve younger children all informed me that they speak to their ancestors on different occasions. This dialogue would take many forms. For instance, a child would sometimes simply tell an ancestor what they had done that day, such as what they had done in school. The children might also go to their ancestors for help. During my stay, one child aged five lost her favourite pink ribbon. She therefore secretly asked her ancestors for help. Regardless of reason, I found that these young children all actively and frequently engaged in the unique practice of talking to their ancestors. Moreover, this was something that they would occasionally discuss amongst themselves. Indeed, it was from the suggestion of another child that the girl who lost her ribbon sought out the help of her ancestors. When guardians were aware of this practice,[19] they neither encouraged nor discouraged the children. When I pressed a mother and father about this, the mother laughed and told me "I think it is cute. I doubt she will be doing it

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[18] *Měi cì wǒ xiǎngdào wǒ de zǔxiān zài kànzhe wǒ, wǒ dū hěn hàipà. Wǒ yào quèbǎo wǒ hěn yōuxiù, bùyào tiáopí. Wǒ zhēn de hěn bùxiǎng ràng wǒ zǔxiān kàn dào zhège, yīnwèi tāmen yīdìng huì chéngfá wǒ de.* 每次我想到我的祖先在看着我，我都很害怕。我要确保我很优秀，不要调皮。我真的很不想让我祖先看到这个，因为他们一定会惩罚我的。

[19] To my knowledge, four guardians were aware that their children did this.

when she is older but for now, as long as she is doing well in school, I do not see a problem with her pretending to talk to her ancestors."[20]

Any agreement amongst adults as to whether the children are actually conversing with their ancestors is, I believe, besides the point. What is significant is that here one finds an example of children creating their own lived religion—a religion that finds its origins in Chinese popular religion but takes on a new, uniquely child-oriented form. Indeed, I believe that this finding reflects that of Miáo (2016: 102) who concluded that children create their own world when conducting patriotic rituals that reflects but is separate from the world of adults and is suitable for their own growth. The most potent example is Liú Yáng (eight) who had gone as far as to create her own little ancestral shrine in her bedroom. Her father had given her a picture of her late great grandmother and great grandfather. These photos were placed in her room and she would bring them some of her food every day as well as present the photos with the work she had done at school. I noticed that a handful of school assignments were displayed beside the photos. When I asked her about this, she told me "these are the pieces of work that I have done that my ancestors are especially proud of."[21] Similarly, Fēi Hóng (9) shared a practice that he did every day in secret. A year ago, his older brother had tragically passed away. When he confided in me, he was obviously extremely distressed about the "fact" (*shísh* 实事) that his brother could never become an ancestor but had instead become a ghost (*guǐ* 鬼). He was also extremely conscious about the taboo nature of what he was telling me—he constantly implored me not to tell his parents. He would sneak some of his dinner every day and then secretly leave it outside for his brother.

Once again, one finds an example of a child taking the building blocks of popular Chinese religion and constructing his own personal belief and practice. Needless to say, belief was extremely important to these children in contrast to the assertions of previous scholarship. Moreover, these findings certainly reflect Yú, Yú, and Sū's (2019: 31) argument that a child's parents shape their perception of death and belief in an afterlife. However, I believe that the true significance lies in the difference. Yú, Yú, and Sū (2019: 31) state that children differ from adults in their understanding of the afterlife. In contrast to adults, children tend to think that emotions, desires, and cognitive functions still exist after death—a conclusion that I do not seek to dispute. I believe, however, that my findings suggest an even greater difference: children use what they have learned from adults to construct a lived religion that is wholly separate and unique.

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[20] *Wǒ juédé zhè hěn kě'ài. Wǒ bù quèdìng tā zhǎng dà hòu hái huì bù huì zhèyàng zuò, dàn zhìshǎo xiànzài, zhǐyào tā zài xuéxiào biǎoxiàn bùcuò, wǒ bù juédé tā jiǎzhuāng hé zǔxiān shuōhuà yǒu shé me wèntí.* 我觉得这很可爱。我不确定她长大后还会不会这样做，但至少现在，只要她在学校表现不错，我不觉得她假装和祖先说话有什么问题。

[21] *Zhèxiē shì wǒ ràng wǒ de zǔxiān tèbié zìháo de zuòpǐn.* 这些是我让我的祖先特别自豪的作品。

Interestingly, this child-oriented lived religion seemed to fade during the teenage years. The older children seemed to adopt the more classical view of lived Chinese popular religion. Teenagers would still very much go through the motions, conducting *bài* where necessary, but whenever I asked them about belief, they passed it off. Whereas the younger children would excitedly tell me that Jiǔtiān Shèngmǔ 九天圣母—the main goddess of the local temple—had made her vessel (*niǎn* 辇) levitate in the air for everyone to see, the older children would look at the occasion with a good degree of scepticism. That is not to say that they did not believe in Jiǔtiān Shèngmǔ—many told me that they were very happy to offer to her in the hopes of achieving success at school—but the belief was secondary and even unimportant. Like Peng (2020: xxiii) argues, the older children viewed *bài* as simply something one does.

Finally, while many of the children learned to *bài* from their mothers (fourteen out of twenty-six), the claim that all children learn solely from their mothers or even that they predominantly learn from their mothers is too great a claim. I found that children were taught to *bài* from their primary caregiver—whether the mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, aunt, uncle, or even, in one case, a sibling.

Only Boys are Considered Full Beings

I was extremely careful when researching the conclusion that only boys are considered full beings. I chose never to touch directly upon the subject (except for one occasion) as I believe that there was too much potential to cause harm to my interviewees. The data I shall now draw upon stems from observations as well as a handful of conversations where the subject happened to be brought up by my interviewees.

It was exceedingly apparent that sons were greatly favoured in the village—to the extent that a large room in the local temple was dedicated to a large statue of Guānyīn 观音 surrounded by multiple naked baby boys. Hopeful parents would frequent this room and *bài* in the hopes of conceiving a son, sometimes even in the company of their daughters. However, I saw no evidence that girls were not considered full beings. Moreover, I certainly saw no evidence of girls being treated as outsiders. As young children, both sons and daughters were equally involved in all manifestations of *bài* and neither seemed to be favoured. This changed, however, once the girls started menstruating. I learned this when a young teenager (fourteen) told me that she was not allowed to *bài* or even enter the temple or ancestral grounds due to the fact that she was menstruating at that time. While this implies an imbalance in religious freedom, it does not suggest that girls are not full beings.

Although this subject was not touched upon with the younger children, I did gain some valuable insights from some of the older children. Niàn Zhēn (sixteen), told me that “men and women have very different roles. Boys have to continue looking after

their parents and girls have to change families. Both are equally important."[22] Similarly, Yìng Yuè (seventeen), stated that "China is now a modern country. Filiality is not the same thing anymore. When I am older and I get married, I will still send money to my parents."[23] Yìng Yuè was the only child I spoke to directly about the notion of full personhood. I explained to her that some scholars have argued that girls can never become full people. Yìng Yuè found this rather amusing, telling me:

> If it were impossible for me to become a full person then why do my parents care so much about my grades in school? Boys are certainly different. I know they have a different role in life. But as people, we are all equal.[24]

While I have limited data compared to the previous conclusions, I nevertheless believe that it does not fit with the assumption that it is impossible for girls to achieve full personhood. On the contrary, what I observed was a village in which boys were favoured but both genders were regarded as equal (albeit with different roles in life).

Children are Unstable

During my time in the village, I saw plenty of evidence to support the conclusion that children are unstable. On my second day, Zhǐ Ruò (four) told me that she had experienced a really bad morning because she was scared by a dog. She then said that her mother had taken her to the temple and everything was now in order. All twenty-six children reported having their soul frightened away at some stage in their lives. However, I believe it is a slight oversimplification to state that losing and calling back one's soul are minor issues. While the overwhelming majority of occurrences were perceived as minor, one child particularly stood out. Yǔ Yān (eight) had a tendency to run off and play in the local hills which were believed to be home to several local ghosts. Her family were extremely troubled by this; every time she returned, they would take her hurriedly to the temple to call her soul back. When I spoke to her mother about this, she told me:

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[22] *Nánrén hé nǚrén yǒu bùtóng de juésè. Nánshēng yào jìxù zhàokàn tāmen de fùmǔ, nǚshēng yào zhù jìn lìng yīgè jiātíng, liǎng zhě dōu tóngyàng zhòngyào.* 男人和女人有不同的角色。男生要继续照看他们的父母，女生要住进另一个家庭，两者都同样重要。

[23] *Zhōngguó xiànzài shìgè xiàndài guójiā. Xiào de yìyì yǐjīng bùtóng yǐwǎngle. Wǒ zhǎng dà jiéhūn hòu, yījiù kuài gěi jiālǐ jì qián.* 中国现在是个现代国家。孝的意义已经不同以往了。我长大结婚后，依旧会给家里寄钱。

[24] *Rúguǒ wǒ bù kěnéng chéngwéi yīgè wánzhěng de rén, wǒ de fùmǔ wèishéme hái nàme guānxīn wǒ zài xuéxiào de chéngjī? Nánshēngmen dāngrán bù yīyàng, wǒ zhīdào tāmen zài shēnghuó zhòng yào chéngdān bù yīyàng de rènwù, dàn zuòwéi rén, wǒmen shì píngděng de.* 如果我不可能成为一个完整的人，我的父母为什么还那么关心我在学校的成绩？男生们当然不一样，我知道他们在生活中要承担不一样的任务，但作为人，我们是平等的。

> We are extremely worried by her behaviour and there does not seem to be anything we can do to stop her. I am so scared that one day she will be up in the hills and her soul will be lost forever.[25]

Although this is only one example, one herein finds an argument to suggest that losing one's soul is regarded as minor for the most part, but it becomes more serious if it develops into a recurring problem.

All of the children I spoke to, including Yǔ Yān, were extremely nonchalent about the subject. None of them regarded it as a major occurrence (even if many reported constant crying before they had their soul returned to them), and they seemed genuinely happy to trust that their guardians would be able to handle the situation if their soul became lost again.

Funerals are a Point of Academic Contention

Due to the scope of this study, I certainly cannot offer anything remotely conclusive as to whether funerals are a point of academic contention. I can, however, report that the issue of children and funerals is rather nuanced. For the most part, I am inclined to agree with Peng (2020: 108). The majority of the children I spoke to told me that they had attended the same funeral a few months ago and said that their guardians seemed to encourage their attendance. However, this was not the case with Yǔ Yān who told me that she had been told very sternly that she was not allowed to attend the particular funeral. She was unable to tell me why this had been the case. It was her father that explained the reason to me: "We are all very worried that [she] would have been in great danger if she had attended."[26] It was thus the case that Yǔ Yān was perceived to be particularly at risk since she constantly lost her soul. Her parents believed that if she had attended the funeral, an event that particularly attracts ghosts, her soul would have been in peril of being spirited away. It therefore seems to be the case that children, for the most part, are encouraged to attend funerals, but will be forbidden in exceptional circumstances.

Although it does not relate to the aforementioned academic debate about funerals, I think that a conversation I had with Rú Shì (fifteen) is worthy of mention. She told me that she had attended the funeral of her grandfather who died when she was six years old. Since she had been doing particularly well at school at the time, she was gifted her grandfather's calligraphy brush during the ceremony. She explained that this was a great honour and the brush would ensure academic success for as long as

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[25] *Wǒmen fēicháng dānxīn tā de xíngwéi, dàn sìhū wǒmen méiyǒu bànfǎ qù zǔzhǐ tā. Wǒ hěn hàipà yǒu yītiān, tā huì zài shāndǐng shàng, tā de línghún huì yǒngyuǎn diūle.* 我们非常担心她的行为，但似乎我们没有办法去阻止她。我很害怕有一天，她会在山顶上，她的灵魂会永远丢了。

[26] *Wǒmen dōu hěn dānxīn, rúguǒ tā chūxíle dehuà, [tā] huì yù dào hěn dà de wéixiǎn.* 我们都很担心，如果她出席了的话，[她]会遇到很大的危险。

she remains diligent in her studies and *bài*. This serves as an example that reflects similar observations made by both Naquin (1988) and Peng (2020) about the potential to acquire auspicious items during a funeral that would "help children to lead charmed lives" (Peng 2020: 109). Rú Shì certainly placed enormous value on her brush and proudly told me that it was the sole reason she was still at the top of her class at school.

Conclusion

As previously stated, I am acutely aware of the scale of this fieldwork project: the sample was comparatively small and my time in the village was limited. However, the intent of this article was never to offer any broad conclusions about lived childhood religion in the PRC. Instead, this article provides an outline of pertinent scholarship principally from the PRC, and grants an intimate insight into how children in rural China construct and practice their own form of lived religion by means of ethnographic fieldwork. By doing so, I have challenged some existing scholarly assumptions.

This article shows that children, contrary to the conclusions of most scholars, are more than capable of practicing and experiencing their own lived religion. Most importantly, I show that children do not simply mirror their elders; instead, they grapple with religious ideas and practices that culminate in a unique (to children) lived religion. In contrast to Stafford's (1995) assertion, they do more than simply go through the motions whenever their guardians make them *bài*. Instead, they actively carry out their own *bài*. Most strikingly, this *bài* has obviously been informed by, but is nevertheless different to, the *bài* of adults. Similarly, in contrast to Peng's (2020) argument that belief is unimportant to children in the PRC, it is extremely important to some children. This study shows that belief can deeply impact a child's behaviour and emotions. Furthermore, rather than finding evidence for Gé's (2015) argument that children in the PRC possess non-religious "moral ethics," this study demonstrates that children are capable of possessing unique lived religious beliefs that manifest in original practice. In short, this article reveals the existence of a unique form of lived childhood religion that includes an often personal relationship—one that lies in contrast to the comparatively distant relationship of adults—with ancestors and dedicated *bài*. Unlike Hsu (1948), Johnson (1996), and Stafford (1995), all of whom assert that children in the PRC do not typically take religious practice seriously, and Peng's (2020) argument that belief is unimportant, this article demonstrates that children are perfectly capable of taking their own lived religious practice and belief extremely seriously. Moreover, this lived religion seems to be unique to children and fades away during the teenage years.

At the very least, I hope that this article has made clear that childhood lived religion in China deserves a prominent place in the ethnographic study of Chinese religion. I hope that this article will, at least in some small way, add to what will perhaps become an ever growing academic field.

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GLOSSARY

ài	爱	love
bài	拜	to pray, to pay respect, to worship, to visit, to salute

bào	報	to report, to announce, to inform, to respond, to repay, to retaliate, to retribute
Běijīng	北京	the city of Běijīng
Chái gēgē	柴哥哥	Brother Chái (the name each child referred to)
Chái Wénfū	柴文夫	my given Chinese name
chūnjié	春节	Spring Festival
fén	坟	grave, tomb, burial ground
fèng	奉	to offer, to present, to esteem, to revere, to believe, to accept orders
fèngxiàn	奉献	devotion
Gānsù	甘肃	a province located in Northwest China
Guānyīn	观音	a translation from the Sanskrit Avalokiteśvara; a female bodhisattva typically associated with compassion
hànrén	汉人	Hàn people; the largest ethnic group in the People's Republic of China
hóngbāo	红包	"red package;" these small red envelopes are typically filled with money and given to children during festivals
jìbài	祭拜	to offer (to one's ancestors)
jiǔtiān shèngmǔ	九天圣母	the primary goddess of this study's village
Lánzhōu	兰州	the capital of Gānsù province
lǎo	老	elder
línghún	灵魂	soul and spirit
lúnlǐ dàodé	伦理道德	moral ethics
Mèngzǐ	孟子	a Warring States Confucian philosopher who believed in the innate goodness of humans
mián	宀	roof
miànzi	面子	face (as in "losing face"), honour, reputation, self-respect, feelings
niǎn	辇	vessel, carriage
píngděng	平等	equality
shì	示	to show, to reveal, to report
shísh	实事	fact
wàiguó rén	外国人	foreigner
wén	文	language, culture, writing, formal
xiào	孝	filiality
xiǎo huángdì	小皇帝	"little emperors"; children who are spoiled by their guardians
xiǎo núlì	小奴隶	"little slave"; a child who is blindly authoritarian.
xiǎo pingyǒu	小朋友	little friend
xìng	性	human nature
xìnyǎng	信仰	faith
xinyǎng shàngdì	信仰上帝	faith in God

Xúnzǐ	荀子	a Warring States Confucian scholar who believed that human nature is inherently bad
zhēn ài shēngmìng	珍爱生命	cherish life
zǐ	子	son, child
zōngjiào	宗教	religion
zōngjiào tuán	宗教团	religious order
zōngjiào xōnyǎng	宗教信仰	religious faith

"Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion": An Ethnographic Study of the Lived Religious Experience of Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna

Joseph Chadwin

1. Introduction

As the corpus of scholarly works pertaining to immigrant religion continues to grow, so too do scholars turn their attention to the lived religion of immigrant children (which this paper shall define as those under the age of eighteen). Confronted with an often fragmented environment, immigrant children are "often disorientated in challenging the dilemma of constructing an identity that is different from their first-generation parents while retaining their ethnic and religious identity" (Shen 2020). In the process of immigration, they are in a somewhat unique position: it has been reasoned that unlike adults, children are "more likely to assess their relative position according to host country norms" (Voas and McAndrew 2014: 103). This, very much like the general study of lived childhood religion, is a somewhat recent scholarly trend that is still oftentimes overlooked. Ridgely (2012: 240) aptly lamented that "rarely, however, have adults—be they parents, priests, or researchers—acknowledged the contributions of children in the creation of religious, social, or political worlds." Similarly, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011: 258) write that thus far scholarship has done little to shed light on the religious experiences or perspectives of immigrant children, with the majority of scholarship "nearly entirely focused on the adult perspective and on the particular role of religious social organizations rather than on the individual experience." This paper intends to add to the growing corpus of scholarship that seeks to amend this gap.

Stepick (2005: 13) wrote that if Nietzsche "were still alive and visited various immigrant communities, he would observe, that among immigrants, at least, God is very much alive." However, as this paper intends to elucidate, although it is very often the case that scholars tend to agree that the majority of migrants are religious, there is one very notable exception to this: Chinese

immigrants are often found to be predominantly irreligious. This paper examines the particularly understudied field of the lived religious experience of Chinese immigrants by focusing on the lived religious experience of Chinese immigrant children in Vienna, thus intending to shed new light upon a field that is both understudied and rife with assumptions.

Since the Opening of China (*gǎigé kāifàng*) that began in 1978 and, with it, the lifting of prior migration restrictions, millions of Chinese nationals have immigrated to countries all over the world. However, while already being an extremely neglected academic field, the vast majority of scholarship that pertains to Chinese migrant religion in Western countries has focused on Christianity (Pan 2019: 210). Thus, as Mengwei and Nehring (2020: 167) aptly note, "notable gaps remain in this literature." One such notable gap is that of religion, which, somewhat ironically, Mengwei and Nehring neglect to address despite their examination of "the moral grammar" of Chinese immigrant families. This gap becomes greater still in the case of lived religious experience of immigrant Chinese children. Although a scant number of studies do indeed exist, they are often built upon problematic assumptions as this paper intends to demonstrate.

Austria is currently home to approximately 30,000 ethnic Chinese (Tektas 2012).[1] The majority of this population is based in Vienna. As of yet there has been no study of the lived religious experience of immigrant Chinese children. Indeed, in an interview with *DerStandard*, the founder of *Bildungszentrum für chinesische Sprache in Wien* (Vienna Educational Centre for Chinese Language; www.chineseschool.at/) described the Chinese community in Vienna as "not visible" (Stajić 2011). It should be noted from the outset that this study utilises a relatively small sample size. This paper, therefore, does not intend to offer any sweeping conclusion about the nature of the lived religious experience of immigrant Chinese children in Europe or even in Vienna. Instead, it intends to offer a rare window into what remains a severely under-studied area. Moreover, by doing this, I intend to challenge various theories of the lived religious experience of immigrant Chinese children. More specifically, after examining various scholarly trends in the field of childhood immigrant religion, I propose three major conclusions: contrary to what prior research suggests, Chinese immigrant children in Vienna are predominantly religious; although some Chinese immigrant children do undergo genuine conversion to Christianity, for the most part Christianity is used as an integration tool; and, in contrast to prior assessments, "filiality" (*xiào*)[2] is

1 Some estimates go as high as 40,000 (Latham and Wu 2013: 29).

2 As with my previous work (Chadwin 2020), I have again opted to use the term "filiality" instead of the more common "filial piety." The reason for this is that I believe that

a central feature of Chinese immigrant children's core beliefs and should be regarded as a religious one.

2. Chinese Popular Religion

Before examining the religious experience of Chinese immigrants in Vienna, a brief outline of Chinese popular religion is required. Yang (2001: 71) has very aptly pointed out that many Chinese individuals follow an assortment of personalised eclectic practices without identifying themselves with any particular religion. These often undefined practices are regularly referred to as "Chinese popular religion" (Johnson 1996: 123). This classification intricately echoes the Three Teachings (*sānjiào*): Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. I have previously (Chadwin 2020: 179–181) assorted Chinese popular religion into three separate categories. As this paper intends to demonstrate, these categories can very much be applied within an immigrant context. I shall therefore very briefly elucidate each category:

1. Gods (*tiānshén*), Ancestors (*zǔxiān*), and Ghosts (*guǐ*): The practice of god and ancestor commemoration is a crucial component of Chinese popular religion. There is a plethora of gods, some widely known and others unique to very specific locations. Ancestors, while not deities, are equally worthy of religious obligation. It is commonly believed that when a person dies, they will be taken care of (in death) by their surviving relatives (most commonly their son). The ancestor can then, in turn, bestow various boons to the living. Ghosts are spirits of those who are not commemorated. Those who die can become a ghost for varying reasons such as dying without offspring, violently, or after having been subject to unjust treatment. Ghosts are believed to have the potential to cause trouble for the living. There are therefore various means of dissuading ghosts from visiting, persuading them to leave if they do so, and, if need be, subduing them.

2. Bài: Possessing a large degree of semantic variety, the term *bài* can mean "to pray," "to pay respect," "to worship," "to visit," and "to salute." Within the context of Chinese popular religion, the term is the essential embodiment of religious belief through a bodily action. Peng (2020: xxii) de-

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the term "piety" has somewhat unavoidable Christian connotations. Similarly, I find the term "filial obedience" (Stafford 1995) to also be problematic on the grounds that filiality is more than simple obedience. I am thus in full agreement with Chén and Gān (2008: 200) who argue that children who truly embody filiality are thoughtfully obedient but never unquestioningly so.

fines it as "doing religion that might be filtered out by etic concepts and categories." Practically speaking, it usually constitutes giving various forms of offerings, ritual cleaning, evocation, and showing reverence (Chadwin 2020: 180).

3. Bào: The semantic variety of *bào* 報 is also broad. The term can mean: "to report," "to announce," "to inform," "to respond," "to repay," "to retaliate," and "to retribute." Within the context of Chinese popular religion, the term takes on the meaning of "reciprocity": simply put, it is the necessary reciprocal obligation within this universe. Filiality is the most obvious manifestation of this obligation: children are expected to repay their eternal debt to their parents by caring for them in old age and then later, via *bài*, in death.

Within the context of Chinese immigrants, Chinese popular religion is very rarely discussed; scholars instead focus on the aforementioned irreligiosity of Chinese immigrants or their conversion to Christianity. Yang (2001: 80), however, has specifically argued that Chinese immigrant children, who receive education in their new Western home and socialise with children of other ethnic and racial backgrounds, "find it hard to maintain the unstructured beliefs and practices of their parents." He goes on to argue that in the process of modernisation many Chinese immigrants inevitably experience, Chinese cultural traditions that form the basis of their popular religion break down. Chinese immigrants "continue to cherish many traditional values […] in conservative Christianity [where] these Chinese find a good match for their cherished social-ethical values" (ibid.: 90).

3. Chinese Immigrant Childhood Religion

China is commonly regarded as having the world's most irreligious population, with recent surveys suggesting that religious persons constitute a mere fourteen per cent of the overall population (Yang and Huang 2018: 2). It is therefore unsurprising that several scholars have identified a lack of religiosity among Chinese immigrant youth. Indeed, this is the most common conclusion drawn from examining the religious experience of Chinese immigrant children. Furthermore, the concept of filiality is a somewhat reoccurring theme in the existing scholarship, as is conversion to Christianity. This section shall therefore explore the scholarship pertaining to these three themes.

3.1. Chinese Immigrant Children are Irreligious

This academic finding exists as part of a much broader major issue in the academic study of immigration religion, namely, whether or not the process of immigration leads to a rise or decrease in the religious practices and beliefs of those immigrating. For the most part, the former is favoured. Foley and Hoge (2007: 15) referred to the process of immigration as a "theologizing experience." They also found that all manner of immigrant places of worship assist immigrants in a variety of ways, providing both psychological and cultural "refuge" in the form of social networks and social capital: "some of them directly contributing to their incorporation into the new society" (ibid.: 5). Similarly, both Handlin (1973) and Herberg (1983) have argued that the majority of new immigrants experience a reinvigoration of religiosity. Shen (2020) similarly concludes that "religious involvement is a very important landscape of immigrants' social lives." Hirschman (2004: 1212) argues that "most immigrants seek to maintain, or renew, their religious faith after arrival." He claims that immigrants, finding themselves in a new social context, find meaning and identity by reaffirming religious beliefs. However, it should be noted that some scholars believe in the contrary. In his study of immigrants living in Quebec, Conor (2008: 254) found that the process of resettlement majorly disrupted religious participation. This was especially the case during the first few years after arrival. Moreover, others have analysed "secularisation trends" among immigrants, but these studies usually only focus on synthetic generations and neglect to account for trends in religiosity among the majority population (Jacob and Kalter 2013: 39). They assert that a decrease in religiosity among immigrants becomes more likely for three reasons: "the more immigrants participate in central institutions of the host society, the more frequent their social contact to the native population and the greater their fluency in the destination language" (ibid.: 40). They go on to examine the theory of segmented assimilation which holds that immigrants might successfully integrate in certain domains, such as the education system and the labour market, but fail to culturally integrate due to a desire to maintain their own cultural heritage.

Unsurprisingly, this scholarly trend is found when applied to children as well. Scholars have for a long time identified the tumultuous nature of immigration. Castex (1997: 67), for example, writes that despite the process of immigration being exciting and new, it is, by nature, stressful: "adjusting to new living situations, different food, often learning a new language, learning how to get around, making new friends, and all the other details of daily life in a new country create stress for both parents and children." Many scholars

assert that this turbulent period can often lead to an increase in child religiosity. Thompson and Gurney (2003: 87), for example, write that immigrant children "report multiple ways in which religion or religious belief serves to protect them from the stressors of adolescence and immigration." In studies pertaining to their religious experience, immigrant children are often cited as commonly identifying religion as a major aspect of their life. Noting that religious rituals take on new meaning during the process of immigration, Hirschman (2004: 1211) asserts that the "normal feeling of loss experienced by immigrants means that familiar religious rituals learned in childhood, such as hearing prayers in one's native tongue, provide an emotional connection." Fleischmann and Phalet (2011: 320) highlight the "religious vitality hypothesis" which predicts the maintenance of family religious practices among immigrant children. Kogan (2019), builds upon Oppong's (2013: 10) assertion that the religious identity of younger individuals is more likely to be stronger compared to mature adults, by arguing that religion often becomes an "identity marker" that facilitates the "formation of a social identity and sense of belongingness that provide emotional and social support to individuals particularly in adolescence and early adulthood." She takes this further by arguing that, due to differences in the process of socialisation, religion often takes on a different meaning to immigrant children compared to the local child population: "the extent that these groups feel marginalised and discriminated against by the majority population, their anticipated process of identification with the majority gets diverted by a stronger orientation towards religion" (Kogan 2019: 3547). Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011: 278), who found that "immigrants are particularly likely to be religious; they are apt to be more religious than the average native-born resident of the ever more secular, postmodern nation-states, to which they migrate," also argue that the process of immigration is "likely to redouble" (ibid.) the faith of immigrants. Indeed, their in depth study of childhood immigrant religiosity came to four notable conclusions that will be subsequently applied to this paper's case study:

1. Religion provides immigrant children with guidance on how to behave and how not to behave.
2. Religion is the source of "ever present help" (ibid.: 265) for immigrant children that can be turned to in times of need.
3. Religion is of "cultural *value*" (ibid.: 267, original emphasis) to immigrant children.
4. Many immigrant children display an "inability […] to articulate the specific function of religion or God in their lives; nonetheless, they clearly affirmed their *belief* in God" (ibid.). This belief is usually unarticulated and unquestioned, with immigrant children turning to phrases such as "it just is" (ibid.). This is perhaps due to the fact that

> "these young people [are] yet to reach a stage in development where they closely examine and understand their beliefs" (ibid.).

Thompson and Gurney (2003) conducted a similar study to Suárez-Orozco et al. They focused on religion's role in the lives of immigrant children. In contrast to the latter finding of Suárez-Orozco et al., Thompson and Gurney (2003: 81) found that immigrant children were able to deftly describe a very personal experience: "[W]e were struck by how articulate and expressive the youth were [… and] [t]hey were able to describe in their own words the many ways that religion is important to them." However, they agreed with Suárez-Orozco et al. that immigrant youth are found to have both "undeniable faith" and the "perception of a very real and tangible help that God or spiritual powers" provide: "The help that these teenagers spoke about was experienced as very real and tangible" (ibid.: 82). Again, similar to Suárez-Orozco et al., they also found that "religion or a belief in God often provided immigrant youth with guidelines and ways in which they should live their lives" (ibid.: 84). They also concluded that "[a]n overarching theme interwoven in many responses was a sense of a personal relationship with God" (ibid.: 86).

However, despite this academic backdrop of immigrant children being, for the most part, religious, scholarly findings pertaining to the lived religion of Chinese immigrants (aside from studies focused specifically on Chinese converts to Christianity; see the following section) identify them as a distinct exception: Chinese immigrant children are, for the most part, irreligious. In their study of the religious affiliation of international migrants, the Pew Research Center (2012) found that China is "the primary country of origin for migrants who are religiously unaffiliated." In their study on the effect of immigration on religious belief, Masey and Higgins (2011: 7) found that, although immigrants are "a religious lot,"

> by far the most irreligious country of all is China, which is officially atheist and where no more than 10% profess a belief in any religion. Nearly three quarters of all immigrants from China (73%) report no religion at all.

Jacob and Kalter (2013: 40–41) utilised data from the still ongoing *Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries*[3] that seeks to examine the integration of children of immigrants in four European countries, namely, England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. The first wave of the study took place between 2010 and 2011. 18,716 14-year-old adolescents were surveyed as well as 11,201 parents. Three questions were used (and are still indeed being utilised) pertaining to religion: "What

3 See https://www.cils4.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=featured&Itemid=7 (accessed: November 24, 2020).

is your religion?"; "How important is religion to you?"; and "How often do you visit a religious meeting place?" (CILS4EU). Regarding the first question, the survey allows for ten responses: "No religion," "Buddhism," "Christianity," "Christianity: Catholic," "Christianity: Protestant," "Hinduism," "Islam," "Judaism," "Sikh," and "Other Religion" (ibid.). In their recent study on the importance of religious in-group members to adolescents, Leszczensky, Flache, and Sauter (2019) also relied upon the *Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Survey in Four European Countries* data. After examining the most up to date findings of the data, they found that a considerable amount of students in England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden were neither Christian nor Muslim, but other religious affiliations were also very rare. The vast majority of non-Christian and non-Muslims—and therefore the overwhelming majority of Chinese respondents—explicitly indicated not belonging to any religious group (Leszczensky, Flache, and Sauter 2019: 3709–3710). A similar study can be found in Suárez-Orozco et al.'s (2011: 258) aforementioned work that utilised *The Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation Study* to examine the role religion plays in the positive development of immigrant youth. This longitudinal study took place over five years and was developed in order to examine the adaptation of immigrant children that recently arrived from Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Mexico. Although not originally designed to primarily focus on religion per se, religion formed a major component of the study. 309 children (seventy-two Chinese) were interviewed each year. The study came to a number of important conclusions. It found that "not surprisingly, the only group that reported a different kind of pattern of attendance was the Chinese, because they have a very low religious affiliation; they reported low attendance at church or temple" (ibid.: 263). The study also found that the religious affiliations of the Chinese parents were "in keeping with the official Chinese governmental policy of atheism" (ibid.: 262). However, aside from the Chinese immigrants, religion was found to be a crucial component in the lives of both immigrant children and their parents, ninety-two per cent of which reported teaching their children about religion (ibid.: 264). In essence, the Chinese immigrant children and their parents were major exceptions to the study's findings: "Notably, nearly all of the students who provided such [irreligious] responses were of Chinese origin; this finding is consistent with the nonbelieving patterns reported by their parents and reflects the strength of parents as important socialization influences" (ibid.: 267).

Thompson and Gurney (2003) conducted a similar study on the role that religion plays in the lives of immigrant children. Their study was embedded in the *Harvard Immigration Project*—a five-year longitudinal, interdiscipli-

nary study of 350 immigrant youth from China, Haiti, Central America, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic. As with Suárez-Orozco et al.'s study, Thompson and Gurney found that Chinese immigrant children were deeply irreligious: seventy-two per cent of respondents answering "no" to the question "Is religion or a belief in God important for you?" (ibid.: 80). Responding to this finding, they wrote:

> Interestingly, religion appears to play a less significant role in the lives of Chinese immigrant youth. This perhaps is a reflection of the secular nature of Chinese society under communist rule (ibid.: 87).

Even in Yue and Simeng's work *Chinese Immigrants in Europe* (2020), religion is barely discussed; even the chapter pertaining to filiality does not address the religious beliefs of Chinese immigrants—instead, it removes filiality from its religious roots (Mengwei and Nehring 2020). This scholarly assumption that Chinese immigrants are irreligious is also very much prevalent in Chinese scholarship. Lǐ (2018: 15) even goes as far as to argue that

> [m]ost [Chinese] immigrants do not know about religion, so they cannot understand the special meaning of religious festivals. They usually do not express their rejection of formal religious festivals, such as Easter and Christmas, but keep a certain distance.[4]

She goes on to quote from an interview with a Chinese immigrant living in Moscow: "most Chinese immigrants hold atheistic thinking, and show indifference and incomprehension of such activities, even rejection, and even less willingness to understand its spiritual content" (2018: 36).[5] Similarly, Zhāng (2015: 78) draws a contrast between Indian immigrants who are, for the most

4 *Yímínmen dàduō duì zōngjiào bù ligojiě, yě jiù gèng wúfǎ míngbái zōngjiào jiérì de tèshū nèihán. Tāmen duì jí fù zōngjiào sècǎi de jiérì, rú fùhuó jié, shèngdàn jié, tōngcháng bù míngquè bigoshì páichì, dàn bnochí yīdìng jùlí*. 移民们大多对宗教不了解、也就更无法明白宗教节日的特殊内涵。他们对极富宗教色彩的节日、如复活节、圣诞节、通常不明确表示排斥、但保持一定距离。This and all of the following translations in this paper are my own.

5 *Zhōngguó yímínmen dàduō chí wúshénlùn sīxiǎng, duì zhè lèi huódòng biǎoshì lěngmò hé bù lǐjiě, shènzhì páichì, gèng bù yuàn linojiě qí jīngshén nèihán*. 中国移民们大多持无神论思想、对这类活动表示冷漠和不理解、甚至排斥、更不愿了解其精神内涵。

part, deeply religious, and Chinese immigrants who are overwhelmingly irreligious.[6]

3.2. Chinese Immigrant Children and Christianity

The second dominant scholarly assumption, next to the one that the majority of Chinese immigrant children are irreligious, is addressed in studies examining Chinese immigrants' conversion to Christianity. Yang (2001: 71) writes that Christianity appears to have become the largest religion for Chinese immigrants, with Christian churches becoming the predominant religious institutions. Both Yang (1999a: 113) and Lu, Marks, and Apavaloiae (2012: 119) have observed that both traditional family life and marriage are crucial tenets of Chinese culture—values that are mirrored in Christianity. Both studies assert that Western churches that attract Chinese immigrants are especially vital to Chinese immigrant families in terms of identity reconstruction, adapting to Western culture, and eventually assimilating. Lu, Marks, and Apavaloiae therefore argue that it is these shared ethical values matched with the "strong cultural pull and network of other immigrant Chinese families [… that make a] faith community more attractive to Chinese immigrants than other faith communities or secular groups" (ibid.: 119). They go on to claim that Chinese parents often rely upon the Christian Church to provide meaningful moral guidance via attractive activities "in an effort to keep immigrant youth away from the potential effects of American society that are viewed as damaging to traditional marital and family values" (ibid.). Several scholars (Min 2003; Yang 1999b; Waters 1999; Zhou and Bankston 1998) have even made the stronger claim that immigrant parents are so afraid of the corrupting immoral influence of Western culture that they convert, with their children, to Christianity for protection. Indeed, Chen's (2006: 580) study of Taiwanese immigrant families in the United States found that Taiwanese immigrants "perceive the individual freedom that Americans celebrate as a threat to family harmony." Maintaining that scholarship often overlooks how religion may change, rather than preserve, inherited traditions, Chen (ibid.: 575) asserts that Christianity provides a solution to this problem: in searching for this solution, out of a deeply rooted concern for their children's moral upbringing, Taiwanese immigrants find that the Church is the "last moral bastion in an otherwise immoral American society" (ibid.: 584). By utilising the image of

6 *Zài zōngjiào jiégòu fāngmiàn, yìndù yímín dàduō xìnyǎng yìndùjiào, ér zhōngguó yímín wú zōngjiào xìnyǎng de zhàn dào jué dà duōshù*. 在宗教结构方面、印度移民大多信仰印度教、而中国移民无宗教信仰的占到绝大多数。

a plaque that states "Christ is the Lord of this House" that she says adorns the homes of many Taiwanese Christians, symbolically superseding any remnant of Chinese religion, she concludes: "the symbolism of the plaque replacing the ancestral shrine vividly illustrates how evangelical Christianity shifts the moral foundation of Taiwanese immigrant families from filial piety to religious piety" (ibid.: 588). Similarly, Yang (2001: 89) also notes the recent rapid growth of Chinese immigrants converting to Christianity in Western contexts. He argues that their newfound Christian identity "provides a universal and absolute ground" (ibid.: 90) on which Chinese immigrants can selectively reject or accept certain cultural traditions. In essence, he asserts that Christianity essentially provides Chinese immigrants with the "order, purpose, and rules" (ibid.: 89) that their original beliefs and practices could no longer afford in the new Western context.

Christianity is also regarded by several scholars as being of immense practical use to Chinese immigrant families being often the source of provision of practical resources and services. Foley and Hoge (2007: 19), for example, argue that some Catholic and mainline Protestant congregations "provide significant social, economic and political linkages for immigrants, while most of the small, conservative Protestant churches serving Salvadorans, Koreans, and Chinese might provide valuable social ties but little in the way of 'bridging social capital'." Hirschman (2004: 1229) notes how young immigrants often go to church for social activities and everyday help. Examining Chinese immigrants in Moscow, Lǐ (2018: 20) highlights this practical side and argues that "the church helps the Chinese to communicate better with Russians in their personal life and work."[7] Voas and McAndrew (2014: 100) argue that "[r]eligion may integrate migrants in three ways: through providing a cultural identity consonant with a new national identity; in enabling socio-economic participation; and by reinforcing values promoting social order." Similarly, Wuthnow and Hackett (2003: 655) highlight the social capital potential: "religion provides opportunities both to cross social boundaries and forge ties with people from other groups, thus bridging into the wider society, and to maintain a distinctive identity."

Tied to scholarly studies of Chinese immigrant Christianity is the reported contrast experience of immigrants in Europe compared to those in the United States. Indeed, I believe that it is impossible to discuss the lived religious experience of Chinese immigrants in Vienna without framing it within the wider European context. A reoccurring theme in scholarship is that religion

7 *Jiàohuì yǒu zhù yú huárén zài gèrén shēnghuó hé gōngzuò zhōng, yǔ èluósī rén gèng hǎo de jiāowǎng*. 教会有助于华人在个人生活和工作中、与俄罗斯人更好地交往。

is of great assistance to those settling in the United States but a cause of problems in Europe. Although scholars tend to focus on Islamic immigrants in Europe, the theory is often applied to all immigrant religions. Foner and Alba (2008: 360) have asserted that "immigrant religion is viewed as a problematic area in Western Europe in contrast to the United States, where it is seen as facilitating the adaptation process." They specifically assert that "the difference is anchored in whether or not religion as belief system, institution, and community can play a major role for immigrants and the second generation as a bridge to inclusion in the new society" (ibid.). For the most part, immigrants to the United States are Christian, which subsequently assists in the integration process. They also argue that Americans are far more religious than the comparatively secular Western Europeans, and subsequently their state institutions and constitutional principles provide "foundation for greater acceptance and integration of non-Christian religions" (ibid.: 374).

3.3. Chinese Immigrant Children and Filiality

Both Western and Chinese scholars have identified filiality as a central component of a Chinese child's morality. It follows that this has also been applied to Chinese immigrant children. Liáng (1987: 307) explicitly writes that "Chinese culture is a culture of filiality."[8] There are two main themes that emerge out of scholarship pertaining to children and filiality: the concept inherently clashes with Western values and is increasingly becoming less important to Chinese immigrants. The former can be found in the works of Kibria (1993), Kim (1996), Zhou and Bankston (1998), and Yang (1999a), who have all argued that the notion of filiality and its associated family values clash with mainstream Western society. Chen (2006: 580) argues that filiality places "awesome responsibility" on a child, serving as a "powerful form of constraint on [their] behaviours" that conflicts with the Western moral tradition of allowing children to have a certain degree of freedom in order to develop their moral selves.

The latter theme can be found in the work of Mengwei and Nehring who, in their study of the importance of filiality to Chinese immigrant families in the UK, adopt Morgan's (1996) term "family practices"—that is, "the everyday actions of individuals towards their family members, to the interactions between family members, and to the culturally shared meanings that are attached to these actions and interactions" (Mengwei and Nehring 2020:

8 *Zhōngguó wénhuà shì 'xiào' de wénhuà.* 中国文化是'孝'的文化。

170)—and connect it to the practice of filiality. They argue that social research since the 1990s has found that "notions of reverence and obedience towards parents have become less important" (ibid.: 173). However, they also assert that "the abstract notion of filial piety [has] become a realized part of the migrant's identity, part of their *Chineseness*" (ibid.: 179). They conclude that the term "filial piety" has come to take on a new meaning: the immigrant child's "own happiness" has come to represent a crucial component of their filial duty (ibid.). Moreover, they found that the majority of Chinese immigrant parents are aware of the fact that their own family values differentiated them from those of previous generations and also from their own social environment in China: "They argued for what they perceived as the 'modern elements' of family relationships, such as more open and democratic intergenerational relationships between parents and children and a less dependent parental generation, and they noted how their views contrasted with those of more 'traditional' families in their local environment" (ibid.: 181). They also found that the use of the term, very much like family relationships, is fluid. Similarly, Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011: 256) write about how traditional patterns of parental authority are oftentimes undermined by the fact that immigrant youths are frequently placed in a position in which they have to adopt responsibilities beyond their years, such as sibling care, translation, and advocacy.

4. Methodology

This research took place over a period of two months, from October 1 to November 30, 2020. Utilising the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child's definition of "child," namely "a human being below the age of eighteen years" (U.N. General Assembly 1989), my sample size consisted of twenty-five ethnic Hàn children who were born in China: more specifically, thirteen males and twelve females. Although it should be noted that there is no official data, it is generally believed (Kwok 2013: 39) that seventy to eighty per cent of the Chinese population living in Austria are Zhèjiāngnese Hàn, especially those from the Qīngtián area, but there has been a steady increase of more affluent migrants who tend to come from Chinese urban areas across China. The vast majority reportedly work in the catering sector (Kaminski and Xu 2017: 96). My sample can be further subdivided into: eight children aged under eight years-old; eight children aged eight to thirteen; and nine children aged fourteen to eighteen. I also conducted twenty-five separate interviews with the respective guardian(s) of the children, following Ridgely's (2012: 11) methodology: "[C]hildren and the adults live together

and learn from one another [… and] I could not study the children without studying adults who taught them." For the most part, each family were relatively recent residents in Austria: the average length of time spent in Vienna was five years with the most recent family having migrated in 2018, and with nine years constituting the other end of the spectrum. The majority of the families (nineteen out of twenty-five) were semi-affluent and middle class with the parents working in skilled professions. Four families were working class and the remaining two were particularly affluent (with the children of both attending private schools). The religious background of each parent was wholly irreligious with one hundred per cent of the parents reporting absolutely no religious convictions. The average interview time was one hour and, for the most part, took place in the homes of the participants. I utilised Harvey's concept of "guesthood" (Harvey 2005: 227–228; 2013: 94) wherein meetings with interviewees are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed" (Arthur 2019: 16). I also heavily drew upon the excellent work of Ridgely (2012: 11) in that I did my best to ensure that when interviewing the children, the interview did not have an "adultist" perspective but instead a child-centred one. I achieved this by "allowing children to shape the research" (Ridgely 2011: 82), that is, by creating an atmosphere built upon mutual respect in which the children felt comfortable talking with me, but more crucially placing them in the position in which they are the expert with knowledge to impart to me (i.e., being the outsider with absolutely no prior knowledge). I therefore conducted each interview in the interviewee's preferred language which, in every case, was Mandarin. Moreover, I made sure to analyse what the interviewees told me using their own specific terms and standards instead of my own preconceived adult conceptions. These latter two points are crucial as this paper seeks to move the dialogue surrounding the research on Chinese childhood religion away from the use of the term *zōngjiào*. Indeed, utilising the term *zōngjiào* when attempting to gauge the religious views of Chinese children (or adults, for that matter) is highly problematic and has led to the predominance of false assumptions pertaining to whether or not ethnic Hàn are religious. Several scholars have identified the central importance of language when conducting ethnographic research (see Brempong 1992: 57; Gibb, Tremlett, and Danero Iglesias 2019). However, Gibb and Danero Iglesias (2016: 135) aptly note that "relatively few ethnographers have attempted to discuss in detail how their own knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of different languages and their decisions to use (or not to use) interpreters and/or translators during fieldwork have affected the research they have conducted." In the case of ethnographic research pertaining to Chinese religion, this problem is debatably exemplified

with researchers not only failing to account for the linguistic connotations that their chosen words (like, in this case, "religion") have when employed in interviews, but also the equally intricate cultural connotations. This paper thus seeks to demonstrate that once these problems have been accounted for and avoided, the subsequent resulting ethnographic data paints a very different picture to irreligious assumptions espoused by those who assume that extremely Western terms like "religion" cannot simply be implanted into the Chinese context.

Given that my interviewees were children, I adopted BERA's (BERA 2011: 5) guidelines to ensure that my project and subsequent data were "ethically acceptable." In my capacity as researcher, I did all in my power to ensure that the participants I interviewed were protected from any manner of harm at every stage of planning and execution of the project. I therefore thoroughly briefed each participant (including the guardians) about my project, provided an ongoing option to opt out at any moment, and ensured that I acquired informed consent.[9] Moreover, the names of all participants are anonymised and no residential addresses are disclosed. I have assigned pseudonyms that reflect both gender and ethnic background to each participant.

5. Discussion of Fieldwork Findings

The remainder of this paper shall be dedicated to outlining the findings of my fieldwork. I have opted to divide it thematically, with each of the aforementioned themes being discussed in turn. When referring to an individual child, I always list their age.

5.1. Chinese Immigrant Children are Irreligious

On the surface level, my fieldwork fully supports this observation. Unsurprisingly, twenty-four of the twenty-five children I spoke to told me they are irreligious. Indeed, Wàng Shū (16) found my question amusing, informing me that "no Chinese people believe in religion."[10] However, herein I believe that one encounters a serious problem with previous scholarship. The very term "religion" is exceedingly misleading in Chinese. The term in question

9 Informed consent, in this instance, constituted oral consent due to the fact that it, combined with the use of pseudonyms, ensures the full anonymity of each participant.

10 *Méiyǒu zhòng guó rén xìnyǎng zōngjiào*. 没有中国人信仰宗教。

is *zōngjiào*, the most common translation of "religion" in Chinese. With the exception of one girl who self-identified as Christian, each child I spoke to regarded the term as something of a distant other. Indeed, many regarded it having a striking difference between Austrian and Chinese culture: Wàng Shū (9), reportedly echoing what his parents had taught him, told me that "everyone in Austria is a Christian. If you are a Christian that means that you are religious. Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion."[11] Furthermore, the children I spoke to likened the term "religion" to belief in God within the context of the Abrahamic faiths. Wáng Xiùyīng (15) perfectly summarised this view when I asked her whether or not Christianity was the only example of religion: "not only Christianity but also Islam and Judaism."[12] Thus, one finds that the term *zōngjiào* is very limited in scope. I have found terms such as *jiàzhí tǐ* 价值体 (system of values), *chuántǒng* 传统 (tradition), and *lúnlǐ dàodé* 伦理道德 (moral ethics) far more useful in an ethnographic context. Moreover, as with my previous study of lived childhood religion in China (Chadwin 2020: 190), in terms of religious practice I found that *fèng* 奉 (commonly used in the context of "giving offerings") and *jìbài* 祭拜 (to offer to one's ancestors) were often employed by children, being vastly superior terms to employ as an interviewer (as opposed to "religious practices": *zōngjiào yíshì* 宗教仪式 or *zōngjiào xísú* 宗教习俗). Thus, by asking children about, for example, whether or not they offer to their ancestors, I found that all twenty-five of my interviewees participate in ancestor commemoration rites. Moreover, I found that twenty-four of the twenty-five believed that their ancestors were very real: an unseen force that can be contacted. In a most revealing interview, Yǔ Yān (10) eagerly showed me how to offer. After making an obvious show of asking his mother for permission, he took a can of coca cola (his favourite drink) and carefully placed it before pictures of his great grandparents. He then bowed and asked for his grandparents' help with his school work. Afterwards, he explained that he did not need to specifically request help with academic studies but could have, in theory, requested help regarding anything in particular. He adamantly denied that this practice had anything to do with religion, claiming that the two were "totally different" (*wánquán bùtóng*). When I asked him to explain this, he told me "I think that

11 *Měi gè zài àodìlì de rén dōu shì jīdūjiào túdì, rúguǒ nǐ shì jīdūjiào, zhè yìwèizhe nǐ xìnyǎng zōngjiào. Yīnwèi wǒ shì zhōngguó rén, wǒ bù xìnyǎng zōngjiào*. 每个在奥地利的人都是基督教徒弟、如果你是基督教、这意味着你信仰宗教。因为我是中国人、我不信仰宗教。This, interestingly, is close to being identical to what a six-year-old told me in China (Chadwin 2020: 189).

12 *Bùdàn jīdūjiào, érqiě yīsīlán jiào hé yóutàijiào.* 不但基督教、而且伊斯兰教和犹太教。

religion is when you believe in God but you do not know if he is actually there."[13] When I asked whether or not he knows if his ancestors are real, he thought that my question was a foolish one: "Of course my ancestors are real! Here is a photo of them!"[14] Thus, I found it extremely apparent that Chinese immigrant children in Vienna take their religious practice seriously although they most certainly do not refer to what they practise as religion. Without exception, each household I visited had some manifestation of an ancestral shrine. These ranged in scope—in some cases an entire room was given to ancestors, while in other cases I observed only a small table—but were constant in their function: every single household participated in ancestral commemoration. Parents were absolutely unanimous on this point, each one highlighting the importance of the practice. One mother, for example, told me that "it does not matter that we no longer live in China. Offering to our ancestors is something that we simply have to do."[15]

Given that, contrary to prior research (CILS4EU; Jacob and Kalter 2013; Leszczensky, Flache, and Sauter 2019; Lǐ 2018; Masey and Higgins 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011; Thompson and Gurney 2003; Zhāng 2015), my fieldwork findings saliently demonstrate religiosity among Chinese immigrant children, I believe it is necessary to examine the nature of this religiosity. I shall do this by applying my data to the aforementioned conclusions drawn by Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011) about immigrant children religion.

1. Religion provides immigrant children with guidance on how to behave and how not to behave. Evidence for this was most apparent in the under eight years-old category, and, to a lesser degree, the aged eight to thirteen category. All eight of the children under the age of eight as well as six of the children aged eight to thirteen referred to the importance of being well behaved at all times due to the watchful eye of their ancestors. Zhǐ Ruò (5) explicitly said: "My ancestors are watching me all the time!"[16] However, although these children were very clear that they were, as Hsu (1948) aptly put it, "under the ancestors shadow," they could not precisely specify how exactly they should behave, but instead gave very general answers: "behave oneself" or "obey the

13 *Wǒ juédé zōngjiào jiùshì, nǐ xìn shàngdì, dàn nǐ bù zhīdào tā shì bùshì zhēn de cúnzài.* 我觉得宗教就是、你信上帝、但你不知道他是不是真的存在。

14 *Wǒ de zǔxiān dāngrán shì zhēnshí cúnzài de! Zhè shì tāmen de zhàopiàn!* 我的祖先当然是真实存在的！这是他们的照片！

15 *Jīnguǎn wǒmen bù zhù zài zhōngguóle, dàn zhè méishénme yǐngxiǎng. Gòngfèng wǒmen de zǔxiān jiùshì wǒmen bìxū zuò de shì.* 尽管我们不住在中国了、但这没什么影响。供奉我们的祖先就是我们必须做的事。

16 *Wǒ de zǔxiān yīzhí zài kànzhe wǒ!* 我的祖先一直在看着我！

rules" (*shǒu guījǔ*) was a somewhat commonly used phrase. Moreover, listening to one's parents and teachers was a very common theme. Interestingly, the one thing that connected all age groups was not the ever watchful eyes of ancestors (teenagers were unfazed by the thought of being watched, although very much believed their ancestors to be a very present force); rather, it was filiality. Although I shall later explore this in more depth, I believe it is here worth mentioning that filiality very much constituted something of an overarching moral principle that absolutely each interviewee adhered to.

2. Religion is the source of "ever present help" (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011: 265) that immigrant children can turn to in times of need. As I have previously demonstrated, it is rather clear that children very much perceive their ancestors as an "ever present help" in times of need. What surprised me was the extent to which this was the case. Although many of those I spoke to cited feelings of comfort at the thought of being looked after by their ancestors, one case in particular stood out. Yìng Yuè (17) initially gave a somewhat reserved interview, giving what I thought to be somewhat non-committal answers to my questions. However, the tone of the interview changed abruptly when she was confident that her mother was no longer within earshot. She began to speak very quickly, evidently nervous about her mother finding out about what she was disclosing. She told me that for the past few years she had been going through a rather difficult period in her life. She felt particular academic pressure at school and was desperate to make her parents proud. She constantly stressed that it was imperative that I did not tell her parents about her feelings, claiming that due to the fact that Chinese culture is so different to Austrian culture and they just would not understand. Crucially, she told me that her ancestors were the only ones that she felt as though she could turn to. She would wait until her parents were asleep, go to the small ancestral shrine in the living room, and then tell her ancestors about her troubles and feelings: "I know that my parents love me but depression is simply something that you do not talk about in China. My ancestors are different. They will always listen to me and I know that they help me every day."[17] Although Yìng Yuè was certainly the strongest example of turning to religion in a time of need, she was certainly not the only one. Fourteen children explicitly told me that they ask their ancestors for help with school. Moreover, Wáng Xiùyīng (15) said that he told his ancestors about his girlfriend before he told his parents. What I found particularly interesting was the presence of

17 *Wǒ zhīdào wǒ fùmǔ hěn ài wǒ, dàn zài zhōngguó, rénmen bù zěme tánlùn yìyù zhèng. Dàn wǒ de zǔxiān bù yīyàng. Tāmen huì yīzhí qīngtīng wǒ, érqiě wǒ zhīdào tāmen měitiān dū zài bāngzhù wǒ.* 我知道我父母很爱我、但在中国、人们不怎么谈论抑郁症。但我的祖先不一样。他们会一直倾听我、而且我知道他们每天都在帮助我。

a running theme among the older children: Yìng Yuè and Wáng Xiùyīng were by no means alone in reporting disclosing to their ancestors' subjects that they felt that their parents would not understand. Fēi Hóng (16), for example, jokingly told me that his parents do not understand Austrian culture but he will nevertheless always be able to "rely upon my ancestors for the things my parents cannot help with."[18] Herein, I found a marked contrast between the younger and older immigrants. Whereas the younger children very much believed that their ancestors were a real presence in their lives, I found no evidence of any child below the age of fourteen taking the initiative in going to their ancestors for help. Instead, I was told they would *bài* whenever they were told to. In contrast, in reporting what can only be described as typical problems that teenage migrants often encounter, the majority of children over the age of fourteen reported turning to their ancestors for support out of their own initiative.

3. Religion is of "cultural *value*" (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011: 267, original emphasis) to immigrant children. It should already be apparent that evidence for this issue was abundant. Children of all ages were often quick to point out the multiple differences between Austrian and Chinese culture. I found that religion was at the very core of this perceived difference. As I have already mentioned, a most common assumption held was that Austria is religious (specifically Christian) whereas China is not. Children were often quick to distinguish themselves from their classmates by saying that they were the only ones in class who did not follow religion. Furthermore, another common theme that shall be explored further in a later section is that of filiality. Sixteen of the twenty-five interviewees claimed that Chinese children are more filial than their Austrian counterparts.

4. Many immigrant children display an "inability […] to articulate the specific function of religion or God in their lives." I find fault with this theory for two reasons. The first one is that I believe that my evidence suggests that children are perfectly capable of articulating their beliefs as well as the role of religion in their lives. Thus, I believe that Suárez-Orozco et al. are demonstrating something of an inability to prevent themselves from imposing adult standards onto children. The younger children I interviewed certainly did not express themselves in the same manner as an adult, but they did express themselves nevertheless—there was no inability. When speaking about the importance of filiality, I often found that the younger children (those under the age of twelve—those over this age predominantly gave answers in line with the adults) would give responses that differed from those given by adults.

18 *Zài wǒ fùmǔ bāng bùliǎo de shìqíng shàng, wǒ huì yīlài wǒ de zǔxiān.* 在我父母帮不了的事情上、我会依赖我的祖先。

One father perfectly summarised the general view held by the majority of the parents:

> Filiality is so important to us because in China it has always been that way. My parents raised me and so I look after them today. My son is being raised to be a good citizen by me and he will therefore look after me later on. When my parents died, I kept looking after them. When I die, my son will keep looking after me.[19]

This reflects, I believe, the classic belief of filiality. Although the younger children I spoke to did not express this classic belief, they still expressed a strong devotion to their own understanding of filiality. Even the youngest were able to express a sense of indebtedness to their parents. Zhǐ Ruò (5), for example, said: "My parents love me so much! They take care of me every day, so I study hard every day to improve!"[20] Moreover, each were able to explain belief in ancestors. The best example of this came about due to a game of hide and seek.[21] Lǐ Nà (6), when explaining the rules of hide and seek to me, very solemnly explained that we were allowed to hide anywhere except for the ancestral room. When I asked why this was the case, I was told that "if we play in there then my ancestors might get angry. I am allowed to go in to give offerings or to ask them for things, but I am not allowed to go in there to play."[22] I believe here one finds a strong grasp of the role of ancestors; indeed, a strong ability to articulate the specific function of religion in one's life.

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19 *Xiào duì wǒmen lái jiǎng hěn zhòngyào, yīnwèi zài zhōngguó yīzhí shì zhèyàng de. Wǒ fùmǔ yǎngyùle wǒ, suǒyǐ xiànzài wǒ yào zhàogù tāmen. Wǒ bǎ wǒ érzi péiyǎng chéngle yīgè hǎo gōngmín, suǒyǐ tā yǐhòu yě huì zhàogù wǒ. Wǒ fùmǔ yào qùshì shí, wǒ huì zhàoliào tāmen. Dāng wǒ kuài líshì shí, wǒ érzi yě huì zhàoliào wǒ.* 孝对我们来讲很重要、因为在中国一直是这样的。我父母养育了我、所以现在我要照顾他们。我把我儿子培养成了一个好公民、所以他以后也会照顾我。我父母要去世时、我会照料他们。当我快离世时、我儿子也会照料我。

20 *Wǒ de fùmǔ tèbié ài wǒ! Tāmen měitiān zhàogù wǒ, suǒyǐ wǒ měitiān hǎo hào xuéxí, tiāntiān xiàngshàng!* 我的父母特别爱我！他们每天照顾我、所以我每天好好学习、天天向上！

21 I have found from prior experience that cultivating strong relationships with children is crucial in enabling them to feel comfortable talking to me about personal topics. One such method for cultivating the said relationship is to play with them before or even during the interview.

22 *Rúguǒ wǒmen qù nàlǐ wán, wǒ de zǔxiān kěnéng huì shēngqì de. Wǒ kěyǐ qù nàlǐ gòngfèng tāmen huòzhě xiàng tāmen qíqiú xiē shénme, dànshì wǒ bùnéng qù nàlǐ wán.* 如果我们去那里玩、我的祖先可能会生气的。我可以去那里供奉他们或者向他们祈求些什么、但是我不能去那里玩。

My second reason for finding fault with this theory is far more straight forward. I believe that it is often the case that within the context of Chinese popular religion, adults as well as children employ phrases such as "it just is" (Suárez-Orozco et al. 2011: 267). Indeed, I have already reported that the practice of *bài* pertaining to ancestors is regarded as obligatory and the notion of whether one actually believes in it is of comparative unimportance (Chadwin 2020: 180). I would even go as far as to suggest that it could well be the case that the evidence in this study indicates the exact opposite of what Suárez-Orozco et al. suggest. The majority of the children I spoke to described their ancestors in far more human detail compared to their parents. Several children, for example, told me that ancestors need to be constantly fed because they will get hungry if they are not offered food. In contrast, when speaking to parents about why one offers to ancestors, the majority passed off my question as odd. One, for example, used a popular idiom to tell me that one should not dwell on profundities: *mòmíngqímiào*.[23]

5.2. Chinese Immigrant Children and Christianity

At first glance, my data suggests that Christianity plays a very minor role in the lives of the majority of immigrant Chinese children. Only one of my twenty-five interviewees self-identified as Christian. However, I did find that eleven of the twenty-five children had something of a unique relationship with Christianity, which will be examined in this section. Despite the fact that these eleven children did not self-identify as Christian, each one attended Catholic lessons at their respective schools. The reason for doing this was aptly summarised by Yǔ Yān (10) who said: "My parents say that I need to learn about Austrian culture. I learn about Christianity so that I can understand Austria better."[24] Simply put, these children attended classes about Catholicism as a means of integrating into Austrian society. Five of these eleven children even went to church (three without their parents) every Sunday. In contrast to prior scholarship (see Chen 2006; Lu, Marks, and Apavaloiae 2012; Min 2003; Waters 1999; Yang 2001; Zhou and Bankston 1998), I found no evidence of parents being worried about the corrupting influence of Western society or about the loss of Chinese family values. What I did find

23 This is a popular idiom that is employed when something is an "unfathomable mystery."

24 *Wǒ fùmǔ shuō wǒ xūyào xuéxí àodìlì wénhuà. Wǒ jiù xuéxíle jīdūjiào, lái bāngzhù wǒ gèngjiā liǎojiě àodìlì.* 我父母说我需要学习奥地利文化。我就学习了基督教、来帮助我更加了解奥地利。

evidence for was parents taking the active decision to send their children to Catholic classes for wholly pragmatic, as opposed to moral, reasons: they wanted their children to integrate into Austrian society and perceived learning about Christianity as a means of doing so. Indeed, I found strong evidence for Hirschman's (2004: 1229) use of Christianity to bridge "social capital." Whereas Foley and Hoge (2007), Hirschman (2004), Lǐ (2018), Voas and McAndrew (2014), and Wuthnow and Hackett (2003) all identified the practical aid granted to Chinese immigrants from within a conversion narrative, I found that absolutely no conversion took place. These children perceived Christianity as something of a means to an end. If anything, the impression I received from these children was that learning about Christianity was somewhat boring but something that they simply had to do. The overwhelming feeling I got from their parents was one of pragmatism and practicality: there was no hint of a deep and calculated decision being made, but instead one that simply made sense within their new social context. It should be acknowledged that this does not in any way mean that Chinese immigrants in Austria do not sometimes convert to Christianity. I also do not seek to suggest that the conversion of Chinese immigrants to Christianity is not genuine. What I do wish to bring to light is the fact that there is strong evidence for Chinese immigrant children not converting to Christianity but nevertheless using the religion as a means of assimilation. Moreover, in marked contrast to the argument that religion is the cause of social divide in Europe (Foner and Alba 2008), here one finds evidence of Chinese immigrants using religion to bridge the social divide.

I also believe that a brief examination of the one child who self-identified as Christian is necessary. Rú Shì (16) moved to Vienna at the age of seven and converted to Christianity when she was ten. Like the aforementioned eleven children, she too, at the behest of her parents, attended Catholic classes at her school. However, unlike the eleven students who self-identify as irreligious, Rú Shì eventually decided to self-identify as Christian. She told me this, however, after receiving my assurance that I would not tell her parents. She therefore keeps her Catholic identity strictly hidden from them. She is not necessarily worried about her parents being angry but she is deeply worried that they would not understand: "I don't think mum and dad really understand what it means to be a Catholic. They just think that everyone in Austria is a Christian so it makes sense for me to learn about it. When I got baptised, they thought that it was just something that everyone in Austria does. If I really think about it, I don't think they would really care if I told

them but I just don't think I can."[25] I therefore found that Rú Shì is undergoing something of an identity crisis. She told me that she does take part in family *bài*, but she then secretly prays to God for forgiveness for committing idolatry. Although Rú Shì constitutes an exception within my data, she provides evidence for the potential identity problems that those who immigrate at a young age can face.

5.3. Chinese Immigrant Children and Filiality

It came as no surprise that filiality was exceptionally important to each family I interviewed. What this section intends to do is provide evidence that contrasts the two aforementioned themes associated with Chinese immigrant children and filiality.

In contrast to the argument that filiality and its associated family values clash with mainstream Western society (see Chen 2006; Kibria 1993; Kim 1996; Yang 1999a; Zhou and Bankston 1998), I found that each family I interviewed experienced no such apparent tension. Many parents were quick to highlight the differences between Chinese and Austrian culture, and many argued that Chinese children are more filial than Austrian children, but none identified a problem or a clash of cultures. Furthermore, the older children I spoke to saw no reason why they could not be Austrian citizens while also being deeply filial—the younger children typically had little to no opinion on this matter. After I asked Wáng Xiùyīng (15) about whether or not he thinks that Austrian individualism is at odds with his aforementioned devotion to filiality, he explicitly stated: "Just because I want to be independent does not mean that I don't think that filiality is important. Being an individual does not mean that I don't show my parents devotion. Living in Vienna doesn't mean I won't look after them when they get old and when they die."[26] Similarly, Fēi Hóng (16) jokingly made the casually inappropriate comment that

25 *Wǒ juédé wǒ bà mā bù dà lǐjiě chéngwéi tiānzhǔjiàotú yìwèizhe shénme. Tāmen juédé zài àodìlì měi gèrén dōu shì jīdū jiào tú, suǒyǐ ràng wǒ qù xuéxí zhège jiù xiǎndé hěn hélǐle. Wǒ shòu xílǐ shí, tāmen juédé zhè jiùshì měi gè àodìlì rén dūhuì zuò de shì. Wǒ zìxì xiǎng xiǎng, rúguǒ wǒ zhēn de gàosù tāmenle, wǒ bù juédé tāmen huì zàiyì, dàn wǒ jiù juédé wǒ bùnéng gàosù tāmen.* 我觉得我爸妈不大理解成为天主教徒意味着什么。他们觉得在奥地利每个人都是基督教徒、所以让我去学习这个就显得很合理了。我受洗礼时、他们觉得这就是每个奥地利人都会做的事。我仔细想想、如果我真的告诉他们了、我不觉得他们会在意、但我就觉得我不能告诉他们。

26 *Wǒ xiǎng yào dúlì bù dàibiǎo wǒ rènwéi xiào bù chóng yào. Chéngwéi dúlì de gètǐ bù yìwèizhe wǒ bù zài ài wǒ de fùmǔ. Zhù zài wéiyěnà yě bù dàibiǎo dāng tāmen shuāilǎo huò kuài qùshì shí, wǒ bù huì zhàogù tāmen.* 我想要独立不代表我认为孝不重要。成为

"Chinese culture is not like Islam! Living in Austria makes no difference to filiality. I guess the only difference it makes is that my Austrian classmates think I study a bit harder than them."[27] In short, all twenty-five of my interviewees expressed the explicit desire to be filial towards their parents and ancestors. Not a single child believed that living in Vienna made any difference to their desire to look after their parents in old age and after death.

Although I fully agree with Mengwei and Nehring's (2020: 179) argument that filiality is part of Chinese immigrant children's "*Chineseness*," I find fault with their argument that "notions of reverence and obedience towards parents have become less important" (ibid.: 173). The children I spoke to all had an unmistakably deep devotion to the practice of filiality. Although I fully agree that filiality in an immigration context has come to take on various "modern elements" (ibid.: 181), such as Wáng Xiùyīng's (15) desire to be an individual, I do not think that this means that the worth of filiality has been lessened in the eyes of young immigrants. Granted, it should be acknowledged that in the case of filiality, I have found that children are oftentimes liable to give "textbook" responses (Chadwin 2020: 191). The very fact that this kind of response is quick to arise is significant: a great deal of emphasis is obviously placed upon the practice of filiality in order to cultivate a mindset whereby the child is quick to say what they believe is the "right" thing to say. I believe that the most revealing moment during my data collection came when Lǐ Nà (6) told me that, as her father was currently ill, she had, unbeknownst to both her mother and father, gone into the ancestral room to offer a chocolate bar to her ancestors in the hope this would cure her father's illness. I believe that here one finds evidence of a child very much putting her belief in filiality into practice: as her parents were, when I spoke to her, unaware of her action, I believe that this demonstrates that Lǐ Nà not only very much believed in the power of her ancestors, but also that she herself had something of an obligation to do something in her power to help her father. I therefore believe that it is not necessarily the case that the process of immigration impacts the importance of filiality for Chinese families. Admittedly, the nature of filiality might change—indeed, Wáng Xiùyīng's desire to be an individual could well be something that would not have occurred had he been going to school in China (very much a discussion for a later date)—

独立的个体不意味着我不再爱我的父母。住在维也纳也不代表当他们衰老或快去世时、我不会照顾他们。

27 *Zhōngguó wénhuà bù xiàng yīsīlán jiào! Zhù zài wéiyěnà duì xiào wénhuà méiyǒu yǐngxiǎng. Wǒ xiǎng wéiyī de qūbié shì, wǒ de àodìlì tóngxué juédé wǒ bǐ tāmen xuéxí dé gèng qínfèn yīxiē.* 中国文化不像伊斯兰教！住在维也纳对孝文化没有影响。我想唯一的区别是、我的奥地利同学觉得我比他们学习得更勤奋一些。

but the importance of it, at least in the case of the families that I interviewed in Vienna, remains the same.

6. Conclusion

Although the limited sample size of this case study should certainly be taken into account, I believe it has revealed a number of important conclusions about the nature of lived religious experience of Chinese immigrant children. First and foremost, I believe that future caution needs to be taken when conducting ethnographic research into Chinese immigrant religiosity. Although I do not mean to assert that all Chinese immigrants, in contrast to the bulk of prior research, are religious, the data presented in this paper leads one to suggest that claiming the vast majority of Chinese immigrants being irreligious is potentially problematic. I would therefore urge those conducting ethnographic research to consider the implications of the language they employ. Simply asking a Chinese child (or a Chinese adult for that matter) something to the tune of "are you religious?" should be done only after fully acknowledging the implications of the Chinese term *zōngjiào*. Although further investigation is warranted, I believe that the data presented in this paper leads one to believe that the first-generation Hàn Chinese children community of Vienna is, in contrast to what one might assume based on prior research, a deeply religious one. Furthermore, I believe that this paper has demonstrated that religion can be of great help to immigrant youth regardless of whether or not they actually undergo conversion. In Vienna, the Chinese children I spoke to very much used Christianity as a means of assimilating into Austrian culture without (except in one case) actually adopting Catholic beliefs. Although this paper offers only a small case study, it is clear that the data presented does not fit into the wider scholarly assumption that immigrant religion in Europe is the cause of social division. Filiality does not necessarily clash with Western individualism nor does the process of immigration necessarily mean that filiality loses importance. Finally, on a far broader note, I hope that this paper has presented an alternative to Suárez-Orozco et al.'s (2011: 267) argument that many immigrant children have an "inability […] to articulate the specific function of religion or God in their lives; nonetheless, they clearly affirmed their *belief* in God." The Chinese immigrant children I spoke to demonstrated a religious belief that was oftentimes slightly different in nature to their parents, but no less thought through and certainly not poorly articulated. Needless to say, the lived religious experience of immigrant children is a field that I hope continues to grow in scholarly attention. It is my hope that

this paper has, at the very least, added to this growing body of scholarship, and, at best, will generate further discussion.

Glossary

bài	拜
bào	報
fèng	奉
gǎigé kāifàng	改革开放
guǐ	鬼
hàn	汉
hànrén	汉人
jiàzhí tǐ	价值体
jìbài	祭拜
lúnlǐ dàodé	伦理道德
mòmíngqímiào	莫名其妙
Qīngtián	青田
sānjiào	三教
shǒu guījǔ	守规矩
tiānshén	天神
wánquán bùtóng	完全不同
xiào	孝
Zhèjiāng	浙江
zōngjiào xísú	宗教习俗
zōngjiào yíshì	宗教仪式
zōngjiào	宗教
zǔxiān	祖先

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Parental Popular Religion and Filiality: An Ethnographic Study of the Religiosity of Chinese Parents in Vienna

Joseph Chadwin

1. Introduction

Maliepaard and Lubbers (2013: 425) write that "among majority populations, parents are found to be the main source of religious socialisation." They also point out that there has, of late, been a proliferation of studies on immigrant religiosity. It is perhaps surprising that they then lament that "the role of the parents among migrant populations has rarely been studied." Finally, they also rightly point out that studies of parental transmission among immigrants "have rarely focused on religion" (ibid.: 426). This paper will examine the religiosity of Chinese parents living in Vienna. A problem that arises out of much of the scholarship pertaining to the religiosity of Chinese parents living outside of China is that Chinese scholarship (i.e., research carried out in Chinese) is neglected. I assert that neglecting this scholarship is problematic as it is impossible to claim to provide a comprehensive background into Chinese popular religion when a wealth of scholarship has been overlooked. For example, Newendorp's (2016) otherwise excellent study on the family values of Chinese-born migrants is weakened by the fact that not a single Chinese scholarly source is utilised. Moreover, it is too often the case that studies on Chinese religion fail to grasp the deep social nuances of Chinese popular religion and therefore draw conclusions that are problematic. It is, for example, frequently the case that the "world religions" narrative is forced upon the Chinese context. This has subsequently led scholars to regard the Chinese population (both in a national and international context) as irreligious. Lin and Fu (1990: 432–433) rightly pointed out that for "cross-cultural studies of child rearing it is necessary to take into account the traditional cultural values and attitudes particular to each of the groups under investigation, as well as the values, attitudes, and conventions of the cultural environments in which they currently reside." Wāng (2018: 111) indicates that the intergenerational transmission of religious beliefs has received little to no attention within the Chinese context. This paper therefore intends to solve this issue in two ways.

Firstly, it intends to offer a full view of the scholarship pertaining to Chinese parent religiosity—a window into the largely untapped Chinese scholarship as well as the most prevalent Western scholarly studies. Secondly, by utilising ethnographic data, it will demonstrate how Chinese parents living in Vienna construct their own lived religion. In short, I seek to elucidate how these Chinese parents in Vienna very much establish what Chén (2021: 58) aptly refers to as their own private "spiritual living space."[1]

Approximately 30,000 ethnic Chinese currently live in Austria, with the majority residing in Vienna (Tektas 2012). To date, the field of Chinese popular religion in Austria has been untouched by scholars and this paper will constitute the first study of Chinese parent religiosity in Vienna and, in fact, in Austria as a whole.

2. Chinese Parenting and Family Culture

This section will examine the scholarship surrounding Chinese family culture and parenting. The vast majority of Western scholarship pertaining to Chinese parenting has focused on parental influence over academic achievement and control (with the two often being linked). Gé (2015: 38) has argued that this deep focus on education has "triggered a family moral education crisis of valuing intelligence and devaluing morality."[2] By demonstrating that Chinese family life is grounded in a religiosity, I intend to offer an alternative view to this.

Huáng (1996: 29) writes that there are five qualities that Chinese parents should aim to instill in their children: "healthy, hardworking, honest, smart, and curious."[3] More recently, in her study of traditional Chinese parenting, Dewar (2019) has compiled a similar list detailing what research has claimed about Chinese parenting:

1. Traditional Chinese parenting has been labelled as "authoritarian" by some researchers.
2. "Authoritarian" implies that parents are rather cold and distant. But strict Chinese parents enjoy a sense of closeness with their kids. And

1 *Jīngshén shēnghuó kōngjiān*. 精神生活空间。All translations in this paper are my own.

2 *Yǐnfā zhòng zhì qīng dé de jiātíng dàodé jiàoyù wéijī*. 引发"重智轻德"的家庭道德教育危机。

3 *Jiànkāng, nǔlì xiàngshàng, chéngshí, cōngmíng jí yǒu hàoqí xīn*. 健康、 努力向上、 诚 实、 聪明及有好 奇心。

the kids may interpret their parents' coercive tactics as evidence that they are loved.

3. Traditional Chinese parenting has one clear advantage over contemporary Western parenting: like many other Asian parents, Chinese parents are more likely to emphasise effort over innate talent.
4. Chinese-American kids tend to have peer groups that support achievement.

Research grounded in psychology also commonly uses terms such as "restrictive," "controlling," and "authoritarian" to describe Chinese parenting (Kriger and Kroes 1972; Chiu 1987). However, it is worth noting that some scholars (Chao 1994: 1111) have argued that describing Chinese parenting in such terms is "rather ethnocentric and misleading." Chao rightly notes that in order to produce "conceptualizations for describing individuals from other cultures or sociocultural contexts, researchers must not simply offer reformulated or alternative conceptualizations from within the same theoretical discipline or framework […] [but rather develop] culturally viable concepts [… built on] a framework based on an indigenous or native appreciation of Chinese culture that does not involve an individualistic interpretation of childhood socialization and development" (ibid.: 1118). She alternatively argues that Chinese parenting is "built upon Chinese traditions, including but not limited to the Confucian influence" (ibid.: 1117), which stipulates that parents have an obligation to "govern" their children.

The term "culture" is often employed in the context of the beliefs of Chinese parents. Noting how cultural styles used by parents stem in part from their respective beliefs and goals, Pomerantz et al. (2014: 74) point out how "Chinese mothers base their worth on children's performance to a greater extent than American mothers, which contributes to their heightened use of control." They then use the example of learning being viewed more as a moral endeavour by Chinese parents compared to parents in the United States to assert that "parents' beliefs and goals may be rooted in cultural norms and values" (ibid.). Similarly, Ng, Pomerantz, and Deng (2014: 356) assert that "several aspects of Chinese culture may heighten the tendency for parents to base their worth on children's performance, which may heighten psychologically controlling parenting." They place "interdependence" and "face" at the very heart of this influencing culture. They argue that the former means that, as one's parental self-worth is largely constructed with reference to relationships with others, Chinese parents often perceive their children's accomplishments as their own. This ties in with the concept of "face," by which respect "is determined in part by others' judgments of their fulfilment of societal expectations" (ibid.). This paper intends, among other things, to demonstrate

how this seemingly non-religious culture is actually deeply seeped in religious belief and practice.

Unsurprisingly, the subject of parenting has been widely studied in China. In the subsequent section, on parenting and Chinese religion, I will delve into the Chinese scholarship that specifically connects parenting and religion (or, as is often the case, argues that Chinese parenting is primarily a secular endeavour). There are, however, studies of parenting in Chinese scholarship that do not concern religion at all. One common theme that emerges out of this scholarship is the importance of patriotism. For example, Dài (2016: 51) argues that parents have an obligation to teach their children patriotism and to love the Communist Party.[4] Similarly, Hán (2021: 76) asserts that family values are cantered upon "the construction of socialist core values [and] show the fundamental role of the family in supporting society."[5] Sòng explores Xí Jìnpíng's (b. 1953) teachings pertaining to parenting. Unsurprisingly, he argues that the Chinese Communist Party has "created a red family culture atmosphere"[6] (Sòng 2021: 210). Wáng Jūn (2020: 43) toes a similar line, stating that the heart of Chinese family values is about "being faithful to one's country."[7] Finally, Zhōu Qīng (2020: 52) writes that the main task of parents is to nurture their children in socialist morality.

3. Chinese Popular Religion

This section shall briefly discuss Chinese popular religion. It should be noted that this is very much a topic that I explore in both of my other papers in this volume.

3.1. Defining Religion

In order to make the case that Chinese parental beliefs and practice are rooted in religiosity, it is necessary to first establish a working definition of religion.

4 *Chuánchéng ài dǎng, àiguó zhī jiā fēng zài dǎngpài gōngzuò zhōng qīngqíng fèngxiàn* 传承爱党、爱国之家风 在党派工作中倾情奉献.

5 *Jiātíng wénhuà shēnghuó yǔ jiàzhí guānniàn, duìyú shèhuì zhǔyì héxīn jiàzhíguān jiànshè, chéngshì jiātíng duì shèhuì de gēnjī xìng zhīchí zuòyòng* 家庭文化生活与价值观念、对于社会主义核心价值观建设、呈示家庭对社会的根基性支持作用.

6 *Zàojiù chūle yī gǔ hóngsè jiā fēng wénhuà fēnwéi* 造就出了一股红色家风文化氛围.

7 *Jīngzhōng bàoguó* 精忠报国.

I have opted to employ both Pokorny's (2018: 9) and Yang's (2018: 1) definitions given their familiarity with the realm of Chinese religion. The former defines religion by focusing on the individual. He writes:

> Religion is a programme of self-positioning, bridging the lived worldliness with the transcendental, which is prompted by a tension of self and world experience. This tension can take different forms depending on time, space, and the individual. In order to harmonise this tension, the transcendental—be it a divine being, a cosmic principle, etc.—is referenced in a way through which meaning is created in the context of one's conduct of life.[8]

I will subsequently argue that Chinese parents, via frequent reported interaction with ancestors and deities, do contact the transcendental. Moreover, I will argue that *xiào* (filiality) constitutes a form of impersonal transcendence: an essential articulation of the law of reciprocity that governs the universe in Chinese popular religious belief.

Yang (2018: 1) examines religion from a group-oriented perspective. He asserts that religion includes four elements:

1. A belief in the supernatural.
2. A set of beliefs regarding life and the world.
3. A set of ritual practices.
4. A distinct social organisation or moral community.

I will subsequently conclude that the beliefs and practices of the parents in this study comfortably conform to these criteria. It is important to note—indeed as Yang does—that whereas some religions demonstrate something of a systematic development of beliefs, rituals, and organisation, others (such as Chinese popular religion) have developed in a far less systematic manner.

8 "Religion ist ein Programm von Selbstverortung, in welchem ein Brückenschlag von Lebensweltlichkeit hin zu Transzendentem erfolgt. Vorschub leistet hierbei ein sich in Raum und Zeit wie auch individuell unterschiedlich gestaltendes Spannungsverhältnis von Selbst- und Welterfahrung. Zur Harmonisierung dieses Spannungsverhältnisses führt die Situierung einer transzendenten Bezugsgröße (z. B. Gott, ein kosmisches Prinzip etc.), aus der sich im Rahmen von Lebensvollzug Sinn schöpfen lässt."

3.2. Defining Chinese Popular Religion

Chinese popular religion is deeply rooted in and often echoes the Three Teachings (*sānjiào*): Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. I have previously (Chadwin 2020: 179–181) broadly classified Chinese popular religion into three categories:[9]

1. Gods (*tiānshén*), ancestors (*zǔxiān*), and ghosts (*guǐ*): this essentially encapsulates the religious metaphysics, situating humans in a universe cohabited by supernatural beings.
2. *Bài*: this constitutes the ritual component of Chinese popular religion. It is, in essence, by means of various bodily actions, the physical embodiment of religious belief.
3. *Bào*: this encapsulates the core notion of reciprocity. It constitutes the necessary reciprocal obligations that exist within the universe. Its most obvious manifestation is the concept of filiality (see the following section). Má (2000: 129) aptly describes this relationship by writing that "a person exists because of his ancestors, and in turn his ancestors exist because of his descendants."[10] These categories are by no means comprehensive. Chinese popular religion is an extremely broad category; however, I do believe that these are common pervasive themes.

Hu (2016: 170) writes that ancestor commemoration (*zǔxiān chóngbài*) in Chinese society "is one of the most important cultural traditions, with its rituals, scripts, beliefs, and courtesies penetrating in almost every aspect of an individual's daily life." Má (2000: 130) argues that ancestor commemoration can be divided into three categories: "[F]irst, family rituals, second, tomb rituals, and third, temple rituals."[11] It is worth noting that in a migration context, these beliefs and practices very much continue. By examining the letters of Chinese migrants, Liu (2005: 168) writes that regarding family affairs "ancestral worship was most important." In Chinese scholarship, these everyday practices are usually not referred to as "religion" or are simply ignored. Liú Hóngméi (2020: 10) has recently argued that Chinese traditional culture has "even become a religion that is not a religion."[12]

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9 For further information, see also my paper entitled "'Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion': An Ethnographic Study of the Lived Religious Experience of Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna" in this volume.

10 *Yīgè rén de cúnzài shì yóuyú tā de zǔxiān, fǎn guòlái zǔxiān de cúnzài yěshì yóuyú tā de zǐsūn.* 一个人的存在是由于他的祖先、反过来祖先的存在也是由于他的子孙。

11 *Yī shì jiā jì, èr shì mùjì, sān shì cí jì.* 一是家祭、二是墓祭 、三是祠祭。

12 *Shènzhì chéngwéi bùshì zōngjiào de zōngjiào.* 甚至成为不是宗教的宗教。

Maliepaard and Lubbers (2013: 426) point out a common problem found in the study of Chinese popular religion: "[A]lthough there is an extensive literature on the transmission of religion (most often church attendance), this was mostly developed on the basis of research among majority religions." Therefore, misconceptions are rife in the study of Chinese popular religion. Chinese people who practice popular religion and hold popular religious beliefs, may not identify as belonging to a religious organisation and similarly may simply not self-identify as "religious." Zhāng and Lú (2018: 152) maintain that "these findings imply that the application of Western-style measures of religiosity to China is likely to leave out groups of believers."[13] They assert that not only scholars but ordinary Chinese as well have a relatively narrow understanding of the term "religion," and subsequently many practices are not regarded as religious activities.

4. Parenting and Chinese Religion

This section shall provide an overview of the main scholarly themes pertaining to Chinese parenting and religion.

4.1. Chinese Parents are Irreligious

The most common scholarly theme found both in Western and Chinese scholarship is that Chinese parents are irreligious—both in China and in an international context. This obviously ties in with the wider subject of contemporary Chinese irreligiosity. Liáng (2014: 112) encapsulates this line of argument by stating that contemporary "China has replaced religion with morality."[14] Guì (2013: 195) argues that aside from traditional family ethics and social norms, the significance of religion in China has been severely weakened and belief in the supernatural has all but disappeared. Guì (ibid.: 1) instead utilises the term "godless religion" (*Fēi shén lùn de zōngjiào xìng*).

Regarding the international context (which is this paper's primary focus), China is commonly regarded as "the primary country of origin for migrants who are religiously unaffiliated" (Pew Research Center 2012). Examining

13 *Shàngshù zhèxiē fāxiàn yìwèizhe jiāng xī fāngshì de zōngjiào xìng cèliáng yòng yú zhōngguó hěn kěnéng yílòu xìntú qúntǐ.* 上述这些发现意味着将西方式的宗教性测量用于中国很可能遗漏信徒群体。

14 *Zhōngguó yǐ dàodé dài zōngjiào.* 中国以道德代宗教。

migrant Chinese parenting, Qingling Yang (2015: 99–106) found that, despite making attempts to immerge themselves into Western culture for their children's good, the interviewed parents "were consequently alienated […] and therefore reinforced their belief in traditional Chinese culture and values for child parenting."

4.2. Irreligious but Engaged in Cultural Practices

The vast majority of scholarship pertaining to Chinese parenting both in China and abroad do not mention religion. Zhang (2014), for example makes utterly no mention of religious belief or practice when seeking to examine Chinese cultural child-rearing attitudes and practices. However, what does emerge out of the scholarship are terms such as "family culture" (*jiā wénhuà*), "code of conduct / set of laws" (*xíngwéi guīfàn*), "system of values" (*jiàzhí tǐ*), and "moral ethics" (*lúnlǐ dàodé*). Although the term "religion" is more often than not actively avoided unless used in a negative sense, I argue that all these common terms fall within the umbrella of Chinese popular religion. Chǔ (2003: 17), for example, describes "Chinese family culture" (*Zhōngguó de 'jiā wénhuà'*) as "the code of conduct based upon ancestor commemoration and the continuous prosperity of the family."[15] This family culture is typically taken very seriously. Thus, although believing that ancestor commemoration has nothing to do with the concept of religion, Má (2000: 129) not only argues that "people regard ancestor worship as 'the most important thing in life',"[16] but also that "ancestor commemoration usually plays a decisive role in cultivating family values."[17] More potently, Zhāng Shǎochūn (2014: 199) states that "[t]he 'home' of Chinese immigrants has three basic dimensions: 'ancestor's home,' 'emotional home,' and 'functional home.'"[18] What is particularly striking here is the acknowledgement of the central role of ancestors in the international Chinese family home. They go on to argue that in

15 *Yī zǔxiān chóngbài hé jiāzú miányán xīngwàng wéi rénshēng xìnyǎng de yī zhěngtào jiā fǎ zú guī.* 以祖先崇拜和家族绵延兴旺为人生信仰的一整套家法族规。

16 *Rénmen bǎ jì zǔ zuòwéi "rénshēng dì yī chǐjiǎn shì.*" 人们把祭祖作为"人生第一吃紧事。"

17 *Zǔxiān chóngbài tōngcháng zài péiyǎng jiāxì guānniàn zhōng qǐ juédìngxìng zuòyòng.* 祖先崇拜通常在培养家系观念中起决定性作用。

18 *Huárén yímín de "jiā" yǒusān gè jīběn wéidù: "Zǔxiān de jiā", "qínggǎn de jiā" hé "gōngnéng de jiā".* 华人移民的"家"有三个基本维度："祖先的家"、"情感的家"和"功能的家。"

the process of immigrant life, the meaning of "home" conflicts and compromises with these three dimensions, leading to division and instability.

Much of the existing scholarship ties these cultural practices to Confucianism. Qingling Yang (2015: 18), for example, grounding each in "secular Confucianism," defines seven aspects of traditional Chinese parenting practices:

1. Encouragement of modest behaviour.
2. Family relationships.
3. Parental control.
4. Shame.
5. Directedness.
6. Maternal influence.
7. Protection.

Moreover, Qingling Yang found that *guǎn* 管—literally meaning "to govern"—was one of the most frequent words employed by interviewed migrant Chinese parents. The concept is "essential for Chinese parents to educate, train and teach their children good virtues such as honesty, responsibility, obedience, respect, good behavior and habits, filial piety, love and hardworking" (ibid.: 60). Johnson (1996: 429) notes the overarching influence of Confucianism on Chinese parenting: "definitive views on parental control, obedience, strict discipline, emphasis on education, filial piety, respect for elders, family obligations, reverence for tradition, maintenance of harmony, and negation of conflict are attributed to the influence of Confucianism."

One of the primary aims of this paper is to demonstrate that although Chinese parents (in line with the above research) do not regard themselves as religious, the issue is one of semantics. Although reportedly being irreligious, the practices they engage in are very much within the realm of religiosity, falling comfortably into both Pokorny's (2018: 9) and Yang's (2018: 1) definitions of religion.

4.3. The Role of Christianity

Chinese immigrants converting to Christianity is a subject that I have addressed before.[19] The scholarly narrative also heavily plays into the broader narrative of the contrast between Chinese and Western culture (see section

19 For more information, see "'Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion': An Ethnographic Study of the Lived Religious Experience of Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna" in this volume.

7). I will, however, briefly point out how Christianity has been found to effect Chinese parents in a migration setting.

It should be acknowledged from the outset that although the number of Chinese churches has increased rapidly in recent years, their influence on the overall Chinese community is still limited (Yang 2001: 89). Nevertheless, Chinese immigrants from non-Christian backgrounds converting to Christianity upon migration is something of a popular subject among scholars examining Chinese immigration. Yang (ibid.) argues that a reason for this is that "facing these rapidly changing and increasingly relativized society, many people longed for order, purpose, and rules" that was granted by the Church, and goes on to argue (ibid.: 90) that these Christian converts very much maintain their Chinese cultural identity: "[T]hey have made efforts to differentiate Chinese nonreligious traditions from religious ones and selectively preserve nonreligious traditional values, rituals, and symbols. For example, they celebrate the Chinese New Year, but without offering to the ancestors."

Some scholars (Zhou and Bankston 1998; Yang 1999; Chen 2006) argue that Chinese immigrant parents convert to Christianity because it protects the second generation from the "immoral" influences of Western culture. Thus, it has been argued that "Churches occupy prominent positions in immigrant communities and shape how immigrant families adapt to and transform" (Chen 2006: 575). Moreover, where Chinese immigrant parents "struggle to apply Confucian principles of parenting" to their children, "Christianity offers an attractive new moral model of the family" (ibid.).

4.4. The Role of Mothers and Fathers

It is worth noting that it is often noted that mothers are the primary teachers of popular religion. For example, Johnson (1996: 126) writes that children "learn particularly from their mothers, the main practitioners of religious rituals at the level of the family." Similarly, Overmyer (1987: 293) claims that it is the mothers who predominantly teach Chinese children religious practice. Qingling Yang (2015: 74) also found that it was especially mothers who have "a primary responsibility to train their child from an early age to be a filial, respectful and obedient child." Fathers, on the other hand, are commonly regarded as the family figure of authority. To this end, Liú Jīng (2016: 227) writes that "in terms of family relations, parents, especially fathers, have absolute authority."[20] However, it is also worth noting that some scholars

20 *Zài jiātíng guānxì shàng jiù biǎoxiàn wèi fùmǔ yóuqí shì fùqīn yǒu juéduì de quánwēi.* 在家庭关系上就表现为父母尤其是父亲有绝对的权威。

(Liu et al. 2000: 213) have argued that this gender imbalance is no longer the case: "[T]he strict gender roles that characterized traditional Chinese society have given way to more gender-neutral prescriptions for relationships between parents and children." Moreover, traditionally speaking, daughters should only provide support to the family until they undergo marriage, after which their primary attention is redirected to her husband and his parents (Whyte 2004).

5. Filiality

The concept of filiality is absolutely central to the lived religion of Chinese parents. This section shall briefly explore the concept.

5.1. Defining Filiality

Laidlaw et al. (2010: 283) have aptly argued that fully defining filiality "is not possible, but it is easy to assess the importance of this concept in contemporary Chinese society." They also rightly point out that although the concept is often "simplified as obedience to older generations and care for one's parents, it is, however, a multidimensional concept among Chinese people" (ibid.). Ikels (2004: 2) also rightly notes that definitions and expectations of filiality are "subject to contestation even within the boundaries of a single community." With this in mind, this section shall briefly attempt to grant something of an overview of this nuanced term.

The character for filiality is *xiào* 孝. Broken down, the character is composed of *lǎo* 老 and *zǐ* 子: the former denotes "old" and the latter "a child." From this, one can already ascertain meaning. As 子 sits under 老, one could argue that the character 孝 depicts a child dutifully carrying an elder. Thus one finds that the "officially preferred" meaning is that "the old are supported by the young(er generation)" (Ikels 2004: 4). However, some scholars—particularly those who argue that filiality is oppressive by nature—read the character as a child being weighed down by an elder. For example, Hashimoto (2004: 193) argues that filiality "is ultimately a discourse that diminishes the power of the young successively in the interest of safeguarding the hierarchy of social difference." Finally, given that Chinese was originally written from top to bottom, one can also read the character as a father producing a son: "[F]ilial piety is the continuation of the family line, that is, the father produces the son" (Ikels 2004: 4).

It should be noted at this point that I have opted to translate *xiào* as "filiality" instead of the far more common "filial piety." I have chosen to do this because I believe that the term "piety" is simply too laden with Christian connotations. Given that I seek to move away from the World Religions narrative that typically utilises Christianity as the prototype religion, I believe that it is important to present religious concepts in their own cultural light as opposed to being in the shadow of Christianity. Furthermore, although the term "filial obedience" (Stafford 1995: 81) is certainly an improvement on "filial piety," I believe that it too is misleading. To be truly filial in Chinese popular religion does not mean to blindly obey one's parents (Chadwin 2020: 181). Instead, one should "thoughtfully assimilate the lessons they have taught and carry on their legacy in a cosmopolitan world that they may not be able to comprehend" (Madsen 2008: 306).

The concept is grounded in Confucianism. One finds in the *Xiàojīng* (*The Classic of Filiality*) the following description:

> The service which a filial son does to his parents is as follows: In his general conduct to them, he manifests the utmost reverence. In his nourishing of them, his endeavor is to give them the utmost pleasure. When they are ill, he feels the greatest anxiety. In mourning for them (dead), he exhibits every demonstration of grief. In sacrificing to them, he displays the utmost solemnity. When a son is complete in these five things, (he may be pronounced) able to serve his parents (translation by James Legge).

Similarly, exploring the popular Mèngzǐ quote "there are three ways to be unfilial; having no sons is the worst,"[21] Má (2000: 129) argues that the very "meaning of life lies in the continuation of the ancestor's 'incense.'"[22]

Yeh (2003: 67) ascribes a "dual framework" to filiality: reciprocal and authoritarian filiality. The former is the more traditional manifestation and involves repaying one's parents out of love for them. The latter is built upon obedience and is seen as a form of control. One needs to acknowledge this dual nature. Definitions of filiality in Chinese scholarship often regard the concept as secular and fully removed from any religious connotation. Liú Hóngméi (2020: 161), for example, although claiming that "filiality is not only a code of conduct in Chinese families, it also has something of the nature

21 *Bùxiào yǒusān, wú hòu wéi dà.* 不孝有三、无后为大。

22 *Rènwéi shēngmìng de yìyì jiù zàiyú bǎ zǔzōng de "xiānghuǒ" yánxù xiàqù.* 认为生命的意义就在于把祖宗的"香火"延续下去。

of religious belief,"[23] argues that at its core the term "belongs to the cultural category of ethics and morality, has a rational nature, and is an important criterion for regulating family relations."[24] Seeking to distance Confucianism from religion, Liú Hóngméi—echoing Liáng (2014)—argues that "the Confucian rituals with filiality at their core, can replace religion."[25] Similarly, Má (2000: 129) argues that "it is not religious theology that dominates Chinese culture, but rather the patriarchal concept of respect and kinship."[26]

This study, however, seeks to move away from this secular rendering of filiality and demonstrate that the concept is deeply tied to Chinese popular religion. Although in the minority, elements of this can already be found in scholarship.

5.2. Chinese Parents and Filiality

Chéng (2017: 14) notes that filiality is reflected in all aspects of family moral education.[27] Similarly, Liáng and Zhōu (2010: 81) define filiality as "the core principle of family ethics."[28] Indeed, the very act of having children in the first place is regarded as an inherently filial act. After acknowledging that there are a plethora of blessings available in Chinese traditional culture, Má (2000: 129) points out that the highest possible blessing is the child blessing which is innately tied to the concept of continuity. However, some scholars highlight that it is still the case that boys are very much favoured as girls are unable to conduct the necessary *bài* once her parents have died. Má (ibid.: 131) thus describes how if a Chinese village hears that a certain family has given birth to a boy, people will immediately flock in, congratulate the family, and celebrate; if they give birth to a girl, people will be disappointed.

23 *Xiào zài zhōngguó jiātíng zhōng bùjǐn shì yī zhǒng xíngwéi zhǔnzé, hái jùyǒu zōngjiào xìnyǎng dì xìngzhì.* 孝在中国家庭中不仅是一种行为准则、还具有宗教信仰的性质。

24 *Xiào běnshēn shǔyú lúnlǐ dàodé de wénhuà fànchóu, jùyǒu lǐxìng dì xìngzhì, shì tiáojié jiātíng guānxì de zhòngyào zhǔnzé.* 孝本身属于伦理道德的文化范畴、具有理性的性质、是调节家庭关系的重要准则。

25 *Yǐ "xiào" wèi héxīn de "zhōu kǒngzhīlǐ" zhī* […] *Néng dàitì zōngjiào* 以"孝"为核心的"周孔之礼"之 [...] 能代替宗教.

26 *Zài zhōngguó wénhuà zhōng zhàn tǒngzhì dìwèi de bùshì zōngjiào shénxué, ér shì zūn zūn, qīn qīn de zōngfǎ guānniàn* 在中国文化中占统治地位的不是宗教神学、而是尊尊、亲亲的宗法观念.

27 *Xiàodào de jiàoyù yě zuì néng tǐxiàn zài jiātíng dàodé jiàoyù de fāngfāngmiànmiàn* 孝道的教育也最能体现在家庭道德教育的方方面面.

28 *Jiātíng lúnlǐ de héxīn zhǔnzé* 家庭伦理的核心准则.

Therefore, "the relationship between father and son is the core"[29] (ibid.: 132) of popular filial belief, whereas "the husband and wife are not equal"[30] (ibid.).

Thus one finds a common assumption that Chinese parents are very much the superior figures compared to their children. Gé (2015: 37) writes that in Chinese family moral education "there is an obvious unequal relationship between the educators [namely the parents] and the object of education [namely the children]."

Liú Jīng (2016: 227) holds that "another meaning of filiality is obedience."[31] More pointedly, Qingling Yang (2015: 56) found that migrant Chinese parents often believe that one of the best ways for their children to be filial is to achieve academic success. Lieber, Nihira, and Mink (2004: 325) have argued that, motivated to meet the challenges that come with migration, Chinese parents in such a context demonstrate "persistence of filial piety as a meaningful and important cultural value."

5.3. The Decline of Filiality

One could argue that filiality has never been a static concept but is "constantly evolving and as such it is difficult to define precisely and simply" (Laidlaw et al. 2010: 283). Nevertheless, a common theme found in both Western and Chinese scholarship is that the value of filiality is declining. One commonly finds striking statements such as "[f]orget filial piety. Young Chinese are fed up with the old" (Hunwick 2014).

Yáng Zhènhuá (2009) laments the decline of the culture of filiality in Chinese education and urges schools to introduce activities that will restore the original culture. Noting how the development of science and technology, the cultural exchanges of various countries, and the wave of the times are impacting the educational values of Chinese families, Huáng (1996: 29) points out that "at present, 70.6% of [Chinese] mothers and 69.4% of fathers consider 'obeying their parents' as unimportant items."[32] Laidlaw et al. (2010: 284) similarly write that the process of modernisation, industrialisation, and migration has damaged filiality, "eroding its dominance in the contemporary life of Chinese societies." They also point out that emigration from China has

29 *Qízhōng fùzǐ yītǐ shì héxīn* 其中父子一体是核心.

30 *Fūqī yītǐ bìngfēi shì píngděng de* 夫妻一体并非是平等的.

31 *Xiào de lìng yī hányì shì shùncóng.* 孝的另一含义是顺从。

32 *Xiànzài "tīngcóng fùmǔ dehuà" yǒu 70.6% De mǔqīn jí 69.4 Xíng de fùqīn rènwéi shì bù chóng yào de xiàngmù.* 现在" 听从父母的话" 有 70.6 % 的母亲及 69.4 形的父亲认为是不重要的项 目。

become a damaging strain on filiality, an argument echoed by Sung (2000). Laidlaw et al. (2010: 284) argue that "Chinese emigrants face the challenge of living in societies that may not understand or endorse traditional values such as FP [filiality], and this may have an impact on the experience and exchange of these values from one generation of emigrants to another." Similarly, Hwang (1999: 179) asserts "the prevalence of filial piety and its accompanying authoritarian moralism in Chinese societies has diminished as a consequence of modernization and exposure to Western influences." Wáng Bǐngyù (2019: 143–144) also notes that the common difference between the generations' recognition of local society and culture and the traditional power structure of the Chinese family have also made intergenerational relations increasingly tense. Wang Danyu (2004: 30) argues that although young and old generations genuinely desire "to bridge the gap between filial practice and filial expectation," in reality the younger generation's aspiration for independence has led to an inevitable decline. Yáng Yáng (2019: 68) cites urbanisation and modern ideas as the predominant challenges to filiality, and notes that individual family units have become the Chinese norm. Finally, Ikels (2004: 4–10), noting that "researchers, policymakers, and advocates for the elderly generally assume that the practice of filial piety in East Asia is not what it used to be," offers five interconnected reasons for its decline:

1. The land of the elderly, the source of much of their influence over the young, is no longer the only means of gaining a livelihood. Young people may choose to migrate to work in factories in nearby towns or cities and live economically independent lives.
2. As literacy becomes widespread with the development of compulsory education, knowledge is no longer the special property of age, and the rural experience of the older generation becomes less relevant for solving the problems of urban life.
3. Due to urbanisation, young people are exposed to a range of new ideas; they no longer have to accept uncritically the ideas and values of their parents, including those about the proper relationship between the old and the young.
4. The physical separation of the home community and the workplace allows young people to escape the prying eyes of their neighbours and to evade gossip and other community-level sanctions should their behaviour be found wanting.
5. The nuclear family has come to prevail over the extended family as young people become attached to the conjugal family of spouse and children at the expense of their relationship to their (distant) natal family of parents and siblings.

Some studies have placed the weakening of filiality specifically within the international migrant context. Ho and Chiang (2017: 302), for example, explain:

> Although filial beliefs and practices remain salient for [our] sample of first generation immigrants, they recognize the challenges of maintaining this core Chinese cultural value in younger generations of Chinese families living in Western countries […]. Hence, some respondents feel that a weakening of filial piety values in their children is perhaps inevitable.

Similarly, Liu (2005: 187) quotes the letter of a Chinese migrant: "It is already the twentieth century. We don't follow the old idea of filial piety." Lieber, Nihira, and Mink (2004: 342–343) argue that "traditional conceptualizations of filial values have been challenged" by migration, and Newendorp (2016: 187–188) argues that the social and cultural discourses around the notion of filiality are reconfigured within the context of family migration: "[M]any Chinese seniors today find that they can rely on neither state nor family for support, thus rendering their future precarious." She goes on to argue that although the legacy of filiality continues to perpetuate the notion that family elders hold the most power, in reality "younger adults [are] now more in control than the senior generation" (ibid.: 193). Newendorp also draws attention to conflict that can rise between parents and their adult children over caregiving practices. She writes that "although most conflicts reported to me by grandparents had their roots in generational differences among Chinese seniors and their adult children, these conflicts were exacerbated by the immigrant context" (ibid.: 198). Finally, Rèn (2014: 1–2) describes how conflicts between Chinese immigrant parents and their children are common in Western contexts due to the parents' firm belief in Chinese culture, which clashes with their children who adopt Western culture. Even mundane matters such as attending a sleepover can cause a conflict, with Chinese parents being reluctant to allow their children to stay with a family they do not know.

It is certainly worth noting that one can debatably find the narrative of filiality in the new guise of Chinese Communist narrative. Sòng (2021: 210) notes how Xí Jìnpíng once said that the older generation of revolutionaries in the past have long given us a model of cultivating a good family tradition, and they are an example for us to learn from. More potently, Sòng also writes: "General Secretary Xí Jìnpíng respects his parents very much. This is known

to everyone. On the bookshelves of his office there are always pictures of him walking hand in hand with his mother."[33]

Although certainly distanced from any association with religion, one could easily argue that this is filiality under a new guise. Similarly, Ikels (2004: 14) notes that "although specific state policies democratizing the family, reducing family size, and circumscribing death rituals have more or less restricted the practice of filial piety to providing support to elderly parents, other state policies, though not aimed directly at the family, have also had an impact on the ability of family members to provide such support."

As a final note, it should be acknowledged that some scholars take the opposite stance. Whyte (2004: 122–123) argues that "filial support obligations have survived quite well despite the hectic pace (and contrasting paths) of social change." Much of this scholarship can be found within Chinese academia. For example, Gé (2015: 28) argues that filiality is very much alive and constitutes the essence of traditional Chinese ethics; it is a "national virtue" that has been passed down from generation to generation in families.[34] Chéng (2017: 14) argues that "the most important thing in Chinese families is their children's filiality."[35] Finally, Liáng (1987: 307) makes the strong statement by emphasising that "Chinese culture is a culture of filiality."[36]

Other scholars take more of a middle way, arguing that filiality has changed in nature. Thus, Qingling Yang (2015: 78) found that migrant Chinese parents "interpreted the 'filial piety' differently although they still emphasized those obligations to the family […]. All the participants mentioned that although their children's accomplishments might bring honors and glories to the family, but their children themselves would benefit from their own achievements, not the parents or their siblings."

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33 *Xíjìnpíng zǒng shūjì shífēn xiàojìng fùmǔ, zhè shì zhòngrén suǒ zhī de, zài tā de bàngōngshì shūjià shàng, yīzhí bǎi fàngzhe tā qiānzhe mǔqīn de shǒu yīqǐ sànbù de zhàopiàn.* 习近平总书记十分孝敬父母、这是众人所知的、在他的办公室书架上、一直摆放着他牵着母亲的手一起散步的照片。

34 *Xiàodào shì zhōngguó chuántǒng lúnlǐ dàodé de jīnghuá nèihán, shì zhōngguó jiātíng dài dài chuánchéng de zhōnghuá mínzú měidé.* 孝道是中国传统伦理道德的精华内涵、是中国家庭代代传承的中华民族美德。

35 *Zhōngguó jiātíng zuì qiángdiào de jiùshì zǐnǚ xíngxiào.* 中国家庭最强调的就是子女行孝。

36 *Zhōngguó wénhuà shì 'xiào' de wénhuà.* 中国文化是'孝'的文化。

6. Relationship with Family in China

A very common theme that emerges particularly out of Chinese scholarship pertaining to the migration experience of Chinese parents is how they navigate their relationship with the family they leave behind in China. This narrative is often tied to the wider study of filiality in an international context. Unlike most European countries that have developed social welfare infrastructures to support senior citizens, China has generally depended significantly more on family than on institutional support for their elderly (Newendorp 2016: 187). Discussing how Chinese families living abroad take great pains to maintain strong contact with their family back in China, Chén (2021: 58) describes this relationship with China as "distanced but not dispersed."[37] Ho and Chiang (2017: 283) write that the traditional meanings and practices of filial piety are changing:

> Intergenerational co-residence is no longer the only way for adult children to demonstrate filial piety. It can occur at a distance when children living away from their parents retain regular contact with parents via telephone, mail and visitation.

Studying Chinese immigrants in New Zealand, Wáng Bǐngyù (2019: 143) notes how it is common for Chinese migrants living apart from their parents to feel as though they are not being sufficiently filial (due to the distance). In similar fashion, Lín (2019: 147) notes that one of the most difficult aspects of Chinese immigration is that of leaving family behind, and it is extremely common for immigrants to send money back to their parents in China. Zhōu and Wáng (2013: 72) discuss that problems arise no matter what decisions are taken by families: it is obviously difficult to be filial from another country and parents often do not wish to leave China; but when parents do decide to join their children abroad, a plethora of new problems arise out of moving into a new culture. Lín also raises the important issue of transnational support manifesting as the children of international immigrants, who were born abroad and acquired foreign nationality, being sent back to China for a certain period of time to be raised and educated by other family members or relatives staying in the country. Lín (2019: 149) writes how these children are often sent to China shortly after birth, and usually spend approximately four to five years before returning to their parents abroad. Zhāng Jīngjīng (2017: 74) highlights a generational conflict in the understanding of filiality between Chinese migrants and their parents back in China: "[I]n the eyes of parents,

37 *Lí ér bú sàn.* 离而不散。

the basic prerequisite of 'filiality' is the children's 'presence' […] and in the eyes of children, the basic premise of 'filiality' is to ensure the parents' old-age security."[38] She concludes that "under the Western welfare system, young and old immigrants have changed their understanding of intergenerational and family relations"[39] (Zhāng Jīngjīng 2017: 75).

7. Contrast between Chinese and Western Parenting

Another common theme to emerge in the relevant scholarship is the identified difference in how Chinese parents and those in the West morally educate their children. Liú Jīng (2016: 227) argues that "the concept of family occupies an important position in both Chinese and American cultures, but the attitudes towards family and the relationship between family members are quite different."[40] For example, Gé (2015) writes that moral education in the USA is based on religion (*zōngjiào*), whereas in China it is built upon the non-religious "Confucian moral ethics."[41] Yáng Lán (2014: 38) problematically takes this assumption even further, asserting that—unlike the irreligious Chinese family households—the fact that parents in the West are dependent on religion for the teaching of moral values is evidenced by the fact that all family homes in the West possess a Bible.

In a comparative study of family moral education in Germany and China, Chéng (2017: 36) concludes that "Chinese families are linked by family heritage, [whereas] German families are nurtured by religious culture."[42] Chéng (ibid.: 34) argues that because of the infiltration of religious culture in German popular culture, regardless of whether they claim to believe in religion or not, Germans are subtly influenced by the moral content of Christianity,

38 *Zài fùmǔ yǎnzhōng,"xiào" de jīběn qiántí shì zǐnǚ de "zàichǎng xìng"*[...] *Ér zài zǐnǚ yǎnzhōng,"jìn xiào" de gēnběn shì quèbǎo fùmǔ de yǎnglǎo bǎozhàng*. 在父母眼中、"孝"的基本前提是子女的"在场性" […] 而在子女眼中、"尽孝"的根本是确保父母的养老保障。

39 *Zài xīfāng fúlì tǐzhì xià, qīngnián hé lǎonián yímíng duìyú dài jì guānxì hé jiātíng guānxì de lǐjiě dōu fāshēngle biànhuà* 在西方福利体制下、青年和老年移民对于代际关系和家庭关系的理解都发生了变化。

40 *Èr, bùtóng de jiātíng guān jiātíng de guānniàn zài zhōng měi liǎng guó wénhuà zhōng dōu zhàn jù zhuó zhòngyào dì dìwèi, dànshì duìdài jiātíng de tàidù yǐjí jiātíng chéngyuán zhī jiān de guānxì què dà bù xiāngtóng.* 家庭的观念在中美两国文化中都占据着重要的地位、但是对待家庭的态度以及家庭成员之间的关系却大不相同。

41 *Rújiā lúnlǐ dàodé.* 儒家伦理道德。

42 *Zhōngguó jiātíng yǐ jiāzú chuánchéng wèi niǔdài, déguó jiātíng yǐ zōngjiào wénhuà wéi xūntáo.* 中国家庭以家族传承为纽带、德国家庭以宗教文化为熏陶。

subsequently internalising religious morality into personal morality.[43] Ironically, one could argue that this is an apt description of the subtle way in which Chinese popular religion seeps into the everyday lives of Chinese people living home and abroad. The irony lies in the fact that Chéng is adamant that this subtle influence of religion contrasts with irreligious Chinese culture. The same argument can be found in Gé's (2015: 33) assertion that in contrast to Chinese family culture, which is built upon the wider traditional non-religious culture, "religious doctrines are the source of the American society's moral and behavioral norms, which subtly guide citizens' practical behaviors."[44] This paper seeks to demonstrate that Chinese popular religion is central to Chinese parents.

Gé (2015: 35) also discusses the contrast of roles between Chinese families and US families: contrary to the unequal Chinese family structure that places the parents on top, parents and children are equal subjects in the American family and solutions to problems can be discussed together. Similarly, Liú Jīng (2016: 227) notes that Western parents emphasise the independent development of the individual in the family, and they do not interfere too much with their children. In contrast, Chinese family members are not equal, with parents holding the higher authority.

Ng, Pomerantz, and Deng (2014: 358) argue that "Chinese parents exert more control over children than do American parents in part because their feelings of worth are based on children's performance to a greater extent." Finally, comparing Chinese parenting to parenting in the USA, Lin and Fu (1990: 30) identified four major conclusions about Chinese parenting:

1. Chinese parents tend to control their children more than American parents.
2. Chinese parents tend to be less expressive of their affection than American parents.
3. Chinese parents are less likely to encourage independence than American parents.
4. Chinese parents emphasise the value of academic achievement more than American parents.

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43 *Yīnwèi zōngjiào wénhuà de shèntòu, wúlùn zài déguó xìnjiào yǔ fǒu, déguó rén dōu qiányímòhuà dì shòudào zōngjiào wénhuà lǐ guānyú dàodé bùfèn de nèiróng de yǐngxiǎng, màn man bǎ zōngjiào dàodé nèi huà wéi gèrén dàodé.* 因为宗教文化的渗透、无论在德国信教与否、德国人都潜移默化地受到宗教文化里关于道德部分的内容的影响、慢慢把宗教道德内化为个人道德。

44 *Zōngjiào jiàoyì shì měiguó shèhuì dàodé xíngwéi guīfàn de yuánquán, qiányímòhuà dì yǐndǎo gōngmín de shíjiàn xíngwéi.* 宗教教义是美国社会道德行为规范的源泉、潜移默化地引导公民的实践行为。

Some scholars point out how these contrasts can cause enormous problems for Chinese immigrants. For example, Zhōu and Wáng (2019: 8) note that "there is a violent conflict between mainstream culture and traditional Chinese Confucian culture"[45] in the lives of Chinese immigrants.

8. Children are Shown Religion Rather than Taught about It, and the Issue of Belief is Unimportant

Another common scholarly finding pertaining to the religious beliefs of Chinese parents is that whereas it is important to them to teach their children how to enact religion, the issue of belief is unimportant. Stafford (1995: 49) writes that while parents never directly teach their children about religion, they certainly make their children participate, "sometimes literally put through the motions of rituals." Similarly, Johnson (1996: 136) noticed children being "led through the proper gestures of ancestor worship by the guiding hands." Zhou (2009: 338) notes how the "notion of one's membership in and obligations to the patriline was instilled in young children by, among other things, having them participate in the numerous ancestral rites." Johnson (1996: 129) argues that "[p]opular religion is not based on the concept of belief or faith – it emphasizes sets of practices that may not be deeply believed in but are performed either because they are hoped to be efficacious in obtaining benefits and warding off evil, or in order to fulfil ethical obligations, particularly with respect to ancestors." Finally, Peng (2020: xxiii) writes that "in order to fulfill designated social roles, on various ritual occasions [… parents] instruct little children to imitate them to *bài* ancestors and gods."

This was a theme that I have explored before. In a previous study (Chadwin 2020: 194–197), and after conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a rural Chinese village, I found that this conclusion was somewhat accurate. Parents did not formally or informally teach their children about belief; however, they did go to great lengths to teach their children how to *bài*. Although I found that, in many cases, belief was of great concern to children, my findings were in line with the theory that adults do not find it important.

45 *Zhǔliú wénhuà yǔ huárén de rújiā chuántǒng wénhuà cúnzàizhe jùliè de chōngtú.* 主流文化与华人的儒家传统文化存在着剧烈的冲突。

9. Methodology

This paper constitutes an ethnographic study. I have opted for ethnography because I believe that it is the best research tool that enables the researcher to (as much as possible) get a sense of the religiosity (or lack thereof) of the interviewee in the latter's own language and terms. Indeed, by utilising ethnographic fieldwork, I believe that I have successfully taken Wang and Chang's (2010: 60) advice of looking "within the Chinese household instead of arbitrarily employing cross-culture comparisons."

My fieldwork took place over a period of six months, from December 1, 2020, to May 30, 2021. The data collection consisted of both semi-structured interviews (carried out in Mandarin) and participant observation, with interviews typically lasting one or two hours. I utilised Harvey's concept of "guesthood" (Harvey 2005: 227–228; 2013: 94) wherein meetings with interviewees are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed" (Arthur 2019: 16).

When conducting a similar ethnographic investigation into Chinese parenting in the US, Qingling Yang (2015: 106) found that religion was an incredibly difficult subject to broach:

> They tried to avoid talking about anything related to the western religions, and spoke and acted very carefully in church from the researcher's observation. They were reluctant to engage into further discussion on religion because they intended to protect themselves from any possible prosecution again them if they are back to China.

Thus, due to the sensitive nature of religion among Chinese immigrants and to best avoid causing any discomfort or inconvenience to my interviewees, I have opted to anonymise my sample by giving them pseudonyms that reflect their gender and ethnicity. Moreover, given that the interview subject was often about their children, this also ensures that this project was "ethically acceptable" and in line with BERA's (BERA 2011: 5) guidelines to guarantee the safety of children in research.

My sample itself consists of twenty ethnic Hàn households in Vienna, with my overall sample size being twenty mothers and nineteen fathers.[46] Eleven parents are Zhèjiāngnese Hàn, the majority coming from the Qīngtián area. The remaining nine come from major Chinese cities: three from Běijīng,

46 There is an imbalance due to the fact that one father wished to be excluded from my study for undisclosed reasons.

four from Shànghǎi, one from Chéngdū, and one from Guǎngzhōu. Four families were working class and two were particularly affluent (with the children of both attending private schools). The majority (fourteen out of twenty) are semi-affluent middle class with parents working in skilled professions. For the most part, each family were relatively recent residents in Austria. The average length of time spent in Vienna was five years with the most recent family having migrated in 2018, while the family who have lived in Austria the longest have lived here for nine years. The entire sample reported irreligiosity.

10. Discussion of Fieldwork Findings

This paper will now turn its attention to discussing the fieldwork findings. It is divided thematically based upon the aforementioned scholarly findings.

10.1. Chinese Parents and Popular Religion

As previously mentioned, every single parent self-identified as irreligious. However, upon closer inspection it becomes quickly apparent that Chinese popular religion plays an enormous role in the lives of each interviewed family. In contrast to the prevalent view that Chinese parents are irreligious, I would argue that the realm of popular religion has a clear important role. Central to my observations was the immigrant context of the parents. As with the university students,[47] I found that parents commonly utilised the practice of popular religion to create something of a "diasporic cultural enclave" or, as Chén (2021: 58) puts it, a "spiritual living space"[48]: a private and safe space in which their popular religious beliefs could be expressed. Mrs Hóu, for example, told me: "I miss China every day. When I used to live there, I would only sometimes pray to Guānyīn. However, now that I am living in Austria, I pray to her every day. It makes me feel close to home."[49]

47 See my other paper in this volume: "An Ethnographic Study of How Chinese University Students in Vienna Observed Spring Festival during Covid-19."

48 *Jīngshén shēnghuó kōngjiān.* 精神生活空间。

49 *Wǒ měitiān dū hěn xiǎng zhōngguó. Zhù zài nǎlǐ de shíhòu, wǒ zhǐyǒu shí bài guānyīn, rán'ér yīnwèi wǒ xiànzài zhù zài àodìlì, wǒ měitiān dū bài tā. Zhè ràng wǒ gǎndào lí jiā gèng jìn.* 我每天都很想中国。住在哪里的时候、我只有时拜观音、 然而因为我现在住在奥地利、我每天都拜她。这让我感到离家更近。

This is significant for two reasons. It firstly demonstrates an obvious sense of religiosity: despite research claiming that most Chinese immigrants are irreligious, this quote suggests quite the contrary. Indeed, it falls into Foley and Hoge's (2007: 15) general statement about the process of immigration being a "theologizing experience": a statement that is contradicted by the case of Chinese immigrants who appear as something of an anomaly. It is also significant because it suggests that religion is playing a role in maintaining and reinforcing group identity and culture (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). Mr Hǎo similarly told me that: "Moving to Austria has actually strengthened my bond with my ancestors. Being away from China made me think about how important family is."[50] Moreover, I believe that it is certainly significant that absolutely every parent was able to show me, often proudly, their home shrine. Although these shrines varied in size and grandeur—some families had an entire room, whereas others had only a small table—the importance granted to these shrines was obvious.

I believe that Chinese popular religion was so prevalent among my sample that I would go as far as to argue that it was the most important factor of Chinese parenting. Whereas aforementioned studies have utilised concepts such as education, control, patriotism, or even secular cultural values, I wish to make the case that these terms fall under the larger umbrella of Chinese popular religion (I will return to this point during my discussion of filiality). While discussing education, Mrs Hán told me that "[w]henever my daughter does well at school, I can hear my parents and ancestors singing with joy!"[51] I believe that this quote reveals intent. It is obvious that Mrs Hán deeply regarded education as important. However, exclaiming that it is her parents and ancestors who are "singing for joy" whenever her daughter achieves academic success implies that the *reason* why Mrs Hán places so much worth in the education of her daughter is because of the broader field of Chinese popular religious belief: she wants to please her parents and ancestors. Similarly, Mr Jiǎ told me: "Of course I want my son to work hard at school! But I do not think that school is the most important thing in the world."[52] When I asked what *is* the most important thing in the world, he instantly replied "family."[53]

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50 *Bān dào àodìlì ràng wǒ hé zǔxiān de guānxì gēngshēn. Yuǎnlí zhōngguó ràng wǒ gèng lǐjiě jiātíng de zhòngyào.* 搬到奥地利让我和祖先的关系更深。远离中国让我更理解家庭的重要。

51 *Měi dāng wǒ de nǚ'ér zài xuéxiào zuò dé hǎo de shíhòu, wǒ néng tīng dào wǒ fùmǔ hé zǔxiān gāoxìng de chànggē.* 每当我的女儿在学校做得好的时候、我能听到我父母和祖先高兴地唱歌。

52 *Wǒ dāngrán xiǎng wǒ de érzi nǔlì xuéxí! Dànshì zhè bùshì shìjiè shàng zuì zhòngyào de.* 我当然想我的儿子努力学习！但是这不是世界上最重要的。

53 *Jiātíng.* 家庭。

Then, when I asked him what family means to him, he told me that it was his wife, his parents, his son, his brother, and his ancestors. Once again, one finds ancestors at the heart of Chinese parental values. Furthermore, herein one finds an instance in which a father, despite his international setting, places emphasis on his broader rather than his immediate family. More potently, it places religiosity at the very centre of international Chinese family life. It also demonstrates the strength of ethnography. This link of family to religion was only revealed through open-ended questioning: it is highly unlikely that these religious views would be registered on a questionnaire.

One of the most striking findings of my fieldwork was the number of mundane instances of religious expression. The best example of this was during an evening of participant observation when I heard Mrs Rèn excitedly exclaim to her daughter: "Your ancestors are blessing you!"[54] Mrs Rèn's husband went to find out what was happening, and we learned that Mrs Rèn had been attending a parents' evening with her daughter. According to the daughter, during this meeting, Mrs Rèn was very thankful to her daughter's teacher but made sure not to give her daughter any praise despite her teacher telling her how well she was doing at school. When the teacher revealed that her daughter got the highest possible mark in her math exam, the mother apparently made a large show of expressing how this was entirely due to the teacher's excellent teaching. Mrs Rèn, in a very good mood, told me that she simply could not have praised her daughter in public because to do so would have been bad "face" (*miànzi*).[55] It was therefore only when Mrs Rèn and her daughter arrived home that Mrs Rèn felt that she could praise her child. This interaction is significant for two distinct reasons. Firstly, the fact that Mrs Rèn actively chose not to publicly praise her child gives a valuable insight into the social nuances of the concept of "face" and how it is a prevalent factor in the way Chinese immigrant parents conduct their everyday interactions. It reveals how these parents wished to uphold this facet of Chinese culture despite being in a non-Chinese setting. The second insight one can draw from this example pertains to popular religion. Although it is highly likely that public praise and "face" were the main issues for Mrs Rèn rather than belief in ancestors—indeed it was exactly this that was raised in her subsequent explanation—I believe that one can also ascertain valuable insights into the relationship between parents and the supernatural in Chinese popular

54 *Zǔxiān zài bǎoyòu nǐ!* 祖先在保佑你！

55 The ability to "feel the hurt that comes from public humiliation, and the desire to protect oneself [and by extension one's family] from public humiliation" (Schoenhals 2015: 67).

religion from this example. Herein, the first question that arises is one of religious sincerity. One must question the extent to which Mrs Rèn actually believed in what she was saying in the same manner that one would question whether or not someone who exclaims "thank God" is actually thanking God. This exclamation therefore becomes all the more significant due to the fact that Mrs Rèn had indeed been frequently asking the family ancestors to help her daughter in school. A further interesting observation one can make is that Mrs Rèn was only able to praise her daughter privately and, in a sense, divert the praise and success onto the ancestors instead of her daughter. Even believing that the ancestors were in any way efficacious in these circumstances is proof of mundane religious expression in my view. A similar instance occurred during a moment of parental discipline that I witnessed. Mrs Féng, wanting to ensure that her young (five years old) son would not steal anything from the kitchen (the son asked if he could go to his room and play while I was interviewing his mother), sternly told him "[t]he ancestors are watching you!"[56] I believe that the importance of these mundane interactions cannot be overstated. They demonstrate how Chinese popular religion seeps into the everyday life of Chinese immigrant parents.

I believe that already one can find evidence for substantial religiosity as opposed to cultural belief. Indeed, rather than finding evidence for the aforementioned secular parenting beliefs of Chinese parents that prior research so often points out, I think that herein one finds clear indications that Chinese parents not only believe that their ancestors are a very real force in their lives in Austria, but that they are of crucial importance. Mrs Kāng, for example, solemnly explained that: "It is my responsibility as a parent to teach my daughter about Chinese culture. She therefore has to be with me every time I commemorate our ancestors." [57] Thus, during participant observation, I watched as Mrs Kāng went through the motions of ancestral *bài* with her daughter, making sure that her daughter acted accordingly. Although Mrs Kāng, to my knowledge, has not discussed belief with her daughter, this meticulous attention to detail matched with the fact that she regarded the teaching of ancestral commemoration as a crucial part of her parental duty is deeply significant. Moreover, this instance brings to light how important it is for Chinese parents to engage in Chinese popular religion with their children.

56 *Zǔxiān zài kànzhe nǐ!* 祖先在看着你！

57 *Jiào wǒ de nǚ'ér zhōngguó wénhuà shì wǒ de yìwù. Suǒyǐ tā měi cì dōu yīnggāi hé wǒ yīqǐ bài zǔxiān.* 教我的女儿中国文化是我的义务。所以她每次都应该和我一起拜祖先。

Mrs Liào told me: "It was my mother who taught me how to *bài*. It is important for me to also teach my daughter."[58]

As a final point, I found it very striking that seven parents referred to the same phrase when talking about their experience of living in Austria: "[L]ong for one's ancestors, miss one's home."[59] In contrast, not one parent referred to the importance of socialism. However, one could argue that scholarship identifying Chinese socialism as the core of family life are more so studies of what Chinese parents *should* believe rather than what they actually believe.

10.2. Religious Austria and Irreligious China

Although I have argued that each parent I interviewed adhered to Chinese popular religion, it is nevertheless important to remember that none of them regarded themselves as religious. They did, however, very much regard Austria as a religious culture. This, interestingly, greatly informed the parenting practice and beliefs of many of the parents. As I found in my previous research,[60] many parents perceived Christianity as something of a tool. However, whereas in my previous work I found that children utilise Christianity to essentially assimilate into Austrian culture, this was not the case for the parents of this study. Eleven families made an active effort to make sure that their children learned about Christianity, but none of the parents of these families made the effort to learn about it themselves. Mr Zhāng explained:

> We do not teach our children about Chinese culture. They live in Austria so it is more important that they learn about Austrian culture. We still often give offerings but it is more important for our children to go to church.[61]

Herein, one finds a divergence of roles. Mr Zhāng felt as though he and his wife should still commemorate their ancestors but believed that it was more

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58 *Wǒ māmā jiào wǒ bài. Duì wǒ lái shuōjiào wǒ nǚ'ér bài yě hěn zhòngyào*. 我妈妈教我拜。对我来说教我女儿拜也很重要。

59 *Niàn zǔ ài xiāng*. 念祖爱乡。

60 For more information, see "'Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion': An Ethnographic Study of the Lived Religious Experience of Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna" in this volume.

61 *Wǒmen bù jiào wǒmen háizi zhōngguó wénhuà. Tāmen zhù zài àodìlì, suǒyǐ tāmen xuéxí àodìlì wénhuà gèng zhòngyào. Wǒmen hái chángcháng bài, dànshì ràng háizi qù jiàohuì gèng zhòngyào*. 我们不教我们孩子中国文化。他们住在奥地利、所以他们学习奥地利文化更重要。我们还常常拜、但是让孩子去教会更重要。

important for their son to focus on learning about Christianity. This has led to difficulties for some parents. Mr Liú told me:

> I feel as though being a Chinese parent in Austria is very difficult. I think it is very important for our children to learn about Christianity. However, I also do not want them to forget about their Chinese culture. I am worried that the longer we live here the less important Chinese culture will be. For example, I am worried that because filiality is not important to Austrians, our son will one day feel the same.[62]

Other parents were far less worried. Mrs Wú explained that:

> Filial piety is very complicated. I have to do what is best for my son but I also need to make my ancestors happy. Because we live in Austria, I think that it is my son's duty to learn about Austrian culture. This is his filial piety. I therefore want him to learn about Christianity. If he understands Christianity, then he understands Austria. He now prays every day to God but he also still commemorates his ancestors when I tell him to. Our ancestors probably find this very strange but they never lived in Austria [she thought that this was particularly funny]! I am sure they are happy.[63]

It very much appears to be the case that Chinese immigrant parents in Vienna regard Austria as a Christian culture that contrasts to their own secular Chi-

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62 *Wǒ juédé zài àodìlì dāng fùmǔ hěn nán. Wǒ juédé ràng wǒmen de hái zǐ xué jīdūjiào hěn zhòngyào, dànshì wǒ yě bùxiǎng ràng tāmen wàngle zhōngguó wénhuà. Wǒ dānxīn zài zhèlǐ dāi de shíjiān yuè zhǎng, zhōngguó wénhuà duì tāmen yuè bù chóng yào. Wǒ dānxīn xiào duì àodìlì rén bù chóng yào, wǒ de érzi yě huì zhèyàng juédé.* 我觉得在奥地利当父母很难。我觉得让我们的孩子学基督教很重要、但是我也不想让他们忘了中国文化。我担心在这里呆的时间越长、中国文化对他们越不重要。我担心孝对奥地利人不重要、我的儿子也会这样觉得。

63 *Xiào hěn fùzá. Wǒ zhǐ xiǎng yào wǒ de érzi zuì hǎo, dànshì wǒ yě yào ràng wǒ de zǔxiān gāoxìng. Yīnwèi wǒmen zhù zài àodìlì, wǒ juédé wǒ érzi de zérèn shì xuéxí àodìlì wénhuà. Zhè shì tā de xiào. Wǒ suǒyǐ yào tā xuéxí jīdūjiào. Rúguǒ tā míngbái jīdūjiào, jiù tā míngbái àodìlì. Tā xiànzài měitiān xiàng shàngdì dǎogào, dànshì wǒ yě yào ràng wǒ de zǔxiān gāoxìng. Wǒ měi cì dōu gàosù tā, tā yě yào bài zǔxiān. Wǒmen de zǔxiān kěnéng juédé hěn qíguài, yīnwèi tāmen méi zhù zài àodìlì! Wǒ juédé tāmen yīdìng hěn gāoxìng.* 孝很复杂。我只想要我的儿子最好、但是我也要让我的祖先高兴。因为我们住在奥地利、我觉得我儿子的责任是学习奥地利文化。这是他的孝。我所以要他学习基督教。如果他明白基督教、就他明白奥地利。他现在每天向上帝祷告,但是我也要让我的祖先高兴。我每次都告诉他、他也要拜祖先。我们的祖先可能觉得很奇怪、因为他们没住在奥地利！我觉得他们一定很高兴！

nese culture. This is in line with the previously discussed research that contrasts irreligious Chinese culture with religious Western culture. Mr Sūn explained it thus:

> Austrian culture is different to Chinese culture. Austrian culture is a culture of Christianity. All Austrian children must learn their moral ethics from the church. Chinese children learn moral ethics from their family.[64]

Thus, I think that one encounters an interesting issue here. The international context and the parental desire for their children to assimilate into it has brought about an observable change in classic Chinese popular religion. Whereas belief is not important in the Chinese context,[65] evidence here suggests that belief is *very* important. Parents would discuss the issue of Christian belief with their children and with their spouse. They would worry about this Christian belief eroding their children's Chinese values. Although they saw Christianity as a means to help their children assimilate, the international context of migration has brought about religion at the family level discussions—something that would not occur in China. Indeed, in contrast to seeking Chinese values in churches to protect their children from Western influence, parents *wanted* their children to adapt to Austrian culture, perceived Christianity as a means of doing so, and sometimes worried about the consequences.

Finally, although for the most part, parents were perfectly happy talking to me about Christianity (especially the parents who push their children to learn about it), I did notice that five parents were visibly uncomfortable discussing this topic. Moreover, I suspect that the father who withdrew from the study did so upon learning that I wanted to discuss religion. Qingling Yang (2015: 106) had this problem as well and hypothesised that "they were reluctant to engage into further discussion on religion because they intended to protect themselves from any possible prosecution again[st] them if they are back to China." This certainly could have been the case with my sample. Several families did express desire to return to China. However, I think a more interesting comparison can be found when one reflects on Qingling Yang's (ibid.: 99) subsequent conclusion:

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64 *Àodìlì wénhuà hé zhōngguó wénhuà bù yīyàng. Àodìlì wénhuà shì jīdūjiào de wénhuà. Suǒyǒu de àodìlì hái zǐ gēn jiàohuì xuéxí lúnlǐ dàodé. Zhōngguó hái zǐ gēn tāmen de jiātíng xuéxí lúnlǐ dàodé.* 奥地利文化和中国文化不一样。奥地利文化是基督教的文化。所有的奥地利孩子跟教会学习伦理道德。中国孩子跟他们的家庭学习伦理道德。

65 In Chadwin 2020 I conclude that belief was indeed something of a non-issue for the parents.

> This uncertainty for their future influenced their parenting practices in U.S. [O]bviously these four parents in the research still relied on traditional Chinese methods of socialization to achieve their goals. They still placed emphasis on traditional parenting styles, and they didn't consider themselves as part of American culture. They parented their children, therefore, mainly in the traditional Chinese way.

Unlike Qingling Yang, I found that although the parents did not regard themselves as belonging to Austrian culture, nor made any obvious efforts to assimilate, many had a spoken desire for their children to be a part of it.

10.3. Filiality

It became almost instantly apparent that filiality was of crucial importance to every parent I interviewed. What also became very quickly evident was that the parents' practice and conception of filiality had been deeply informed by their international status. By far, filiality was the most commonly cited centre of parental morality. In my experience, parents would often place it above all other values. Although, as previously mentioned, parents deeply valued the academic achievements of their children, they often cited filiality as the reason for this. Mr Dèng, somewhat echoing Liáng (1987: 307), told me:

> You should know that Chinese culture is a culture of filiality. To say that education is more important that filiality is very strange because getting a good education is filiality. It is because of this culture of filiality that Chinese people work so hard.[66]

Similarly, Mrs Jiǎng explained that "[m]y son's filiality is to succeed in school. It is my duty to make sure that he works hard every day."[67] Although these quotes certainly echo scholarship claiming that education is the most important value for Chinese parents, I think that herein one finds that education comes second to filiality. More specifically, I reckon that my fieldwork

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66 *Nǐ yīnggāi zhīdào zhōngguó wénhuà shì 'xiào' de wénhuà. Jiàoyù bǐ xiào gèng zhòngyào zhège shuōfǎ hěn qíguài. Yīn wéi dédào yīgè hǎo de jiàoyù jiùshì xiào. Yīnwèi zhège xiào de wénhuà zhōngguó rén dōu nǔlì gōngzuò.* 你应该知道中国文化是'孝'的文化。教育比孝更重要这个说法很奇怪. 因为得到一个好的教育就是孝。因为这个孝的文化中国人都努力工作。

67 *Érzi de xiào shì zài xuéxiào zuò dé hǎo! Wǒ de yìwù shì ràng tā hǎo hào xuéxí, tiāntiān xiàngshàng!* 儿子的孝是在学校做得好！我的义务是让他好好学习、天天向上！

findings lead one to believe that filiality is the foundational belief and practice from which the desire to academically succeed arises. Mrs Lǚ, in a very honest interview, told me: "My parents are always asking me about how [my son] is doing in school. I actually think I want him to do well at school so that I can make my parents happy."[68]

When discussing the concept of filiality in relation to their children, parents would most commonly tie it to education: it was their filial duty to ensure their children's success, and they saw it as their children's filial duty to strive for such success. Moreover, like Qingling Yang, I also found that *guǎn* was an extremely commonly used term. However, I believe that this concept existed under the umbrella of filiality rather than the other way around.

Likely the most significant finding was that filiality apparently exists within the realm of Chinese popular religion. Although no parent cited it as a religious concept, in practice, when I delved into their actual beliefs about filiality, I found that it was very much a religious rather than a secular concept. The most revealing moment that I think best encapsulates this finding was when Mr Chén explained:

> My son needs to be filial to me. I need to be filial to my parents. My parents need to be filial to our ancestors. Our ancestors probably need to be filial to the Yellow Emperor! We live in a world of filiality![69]

This quote perfectly frames filiality within the broader realm of Chinese popular religion. It demonstrates how parents believe filiality constitutes a manifestation of their obligations in a spiritually hierarchical universe. Indeed, it constitutes the aforementioned impersonal form of transcendence by which the parental action of utilising ancestors and deities is, in essence, their means of adhering to and playing their role in a universe governed by reciprocity. I believe it is deeply significant that, when pushed, Chinese parents would relate filiality to their ancestors. Although many found my questions to be strange—indeed, in line with the theory that belief is unimportant in Chinese popular religion, many regarded this as simple fact that one need not discuss—by drawing a direct relationship between filiality and their ancestors,

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68 *Wǒ de fùmǔ zǒng shì wèn wǒ [my son] xuéxiào zěnme yàng? Wèile ràng fùmǔ gāoxìng, wǒ xīwàng tā zài xuéxiào zuò dé bùcuò.* 我的父母总是问我[my son]学校怎么样？为了让父母高兴、我希望他在学校做得不错。

69 *Wǒ érzi xūyào duì wǒ xiào. Wǒ xūyào duì wǒ fùmǔ xiào. Wǒ fùmǔ xūyào duì wǒmen de zǔxiān xiào. Wǒmen de zǔxiān hěn kěnéng duì huángdì xiào! Wǒmen zhù zài xiào de shìjiè!* 我儿子需要对我孝。我需要对我父母孝。我父母需要对我们的祖先孝。我们的祖先很可能对黄帝孝！我们住在孝的世界！

they were demonstrating religious beliefs that comfortably fall within Pokorny's (2018: 9) and Yang's (2018: 1) previously discussed definitions.

Contrary to being in decline, I witnessed parents holding filiality in extremely high regard. However, I did note that the international context of filial practice in Vienna did bring about changes and, in some cases, problems. The biggest noticeable change could be found in family roles. Six of the twenty families stated that the father was the head. The remaining fourteen families had a more equal parent relationship. Boys were not found to be generally favoured and parents placed the same filial expectations on both genders. Furthermore, many families readily admitted that were they still living in China, they would allow their children less freedom. The majority wanted the best of both worlds—the Austrian and the Chinese cultures—for their children. Indeed, many parents would willingly admit that while they have yet to assimilate to Austrian culture, their children had. Given that these families live in Vienna, this obviously gives the children power over their parents that they would not otherwise have. I saw this shift in power dynamics play out in an exchange between Mrs Cuī and her teenage daughter. Mrs Cuī was, rather heatedly, explaining how it was inappropriate for her daughter to have a boyfriend when she should instead be primarily focused on studying. Her daughter replied that she *was* focused on studying and that going to a café with a boy did not mean that they were a couple. When her daughter explained that this was simply the way things work in Austria, Mrs Cuī relented. When I asked her about this, she cited an idiom: "Wherever you are, follow local customs."[70] When I asked if she herself follows these customs, she laughed and told me that she was Chinese through-and-through but she was perfectly happy for her daughter to follow local customs as long as she also strove to "bring honour to her ancestors."[71] Herein, one finds a reflection of Orellana et al. (2001: 588) who noted that immigrant parents sometimes grant "more power to children than they had *vis-à-vis* adults in their home countries." One also gets a sense of how immigrant parents often "try to revise traditional approaches or develop new ones that better respond to contemporary circumstances" (Lieber, Nihira, and Mink 2004: 325).

Although I certainly found evidence for the changing nature of filial relations between parents and their children, I did not find evidence for the concept's decline. In some ways, I believe that the immigration context even strengthened filiality. Orellana et al. (2001: 588) argue that children in immigrant families can play "an important role in keeping parents connected to

70 *Suí xiāng rù sú.* 随乡入俗。

71 *Guāngzōng yàozǔ.* 光宗耀祖。

their homelands." This was indeed the case with many families. The vast majority told me at length how important it was for them to have their children well versed in Chinese filial culture and would take great pains to ensure that Chinese popular religion was a very present force in the household.

The only strain that was apparent in the parents' practice of filiality was the international migration context of living in Vienna that brought about split families. Eighteen of the twenty parents spoke about facing difficulties pertaining to having family living in China. For example, Mrs Hóu put this very simply: "The hardest part about living in Austria is that we are so far from my parents."[72] Mr Fàn stated: "I send money to my parents in China every week, but I am worried that I am a bad son. It is my duty to take care of them and I am worried that sending money is not enough."[73]

Similarly, Mrs Rèn asked me:

> Why would I worry about my children being filial? My children live with me. I can therefore teach them. Filiality, Chinese culture, good morals, etc., they will certainly learn. It is my own parents that I am worried about. They still live in China so I am worried that I cannot be a good daughter to them.[74]

Thus, many parents worried that being so distant from their own parents made it difficult for them to sufficiently be filial children despite reportedly sending money and visiting as frequently as possible. In fact, this international context even caused generational conflicts in several cases. Responding to my question about navigating the international context of parenting, Mrs Shí told me:

> That is a very difficult problem. I really want my child to be happy in Austria and succeed in school. As a parent, I simply want what is best for my child. However, my parents who still live in China are not happy with my decisions. They think that I should do more to teach my child about Chinese culture.

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72 *Zhù zài àodìlì zuì nán de shì shì lí fùmǔ tài yuǎnle.* 住在奥地利最难的事是离父母太远了。

73 *Wǒ měi gè xīngqí gěi fùmǔ huì qián, dàn wǒ hái dānxīn wǒ bùshì yīgè hǎo er zi. Zhàogù tāmen shì wǒ de zérèn zhǐ huì qián shì bùgòu de.* 我每个星期给父母汇钱、但我还担心我不是一个好儿子。照顾他们是我的责任只汇钱是不够的。

74 *Wǒ wèishéme dānxīn wǒ de háizi xiào bùxiào? Wǒ de hái zǐ gēn wǒ zhù, suǒyǐ wǒ kěyǐ jiào tāmen. Xiào, zhōngguó wénhuà, hǎo dàodé, děng děng, tāmen dāngrán yào xuéxí. Wǒ dānxīn wǒ de fùmǔ. Tāmen hái zhù zài zhōngguó, suǒyǐ wǒ dānxīn wǒ shì yīgè bù hǎo de nǚ'ér.* 我为什么担心我的孩子孝不孝？我的孩子跟我住、所以我可以教他们。孝、中国文化、好道德、等等、他们当然要学习。我担心我的父母。他们还住在中国、所以我担心我是一个不好的女儿。

> They think it is my duty to teach my child how to *bài*. Filiality is hugely important, but I do not know how to best enact it.[75]

The case of Mrs Shí was particularly interesting because her parents believed that ancestral *bài* could only be performed in China. Mrs Shí, who dutifully conducts ancestral *bài* very frequently in her Vienna family home, disagrees but nevertheless is upset that such a clash of interest is occurring. She thinks that staying in Austria is the best for her son, but also feels a deep filial obligation to her parents. Although not necessarily unique to the international migration context—this conflict is certainly possible in China when children move away from their hometown—it is certainly exacerbated by it. Filiality lies at the heart of the problem. Mrs Shí is torn between her filial obligation to her son and her filial obligation to her parents. Not only can one quite plainly see the importance of filiality being played out, one can also see how migration can be regarded as simultaneously filial (Western education is certainly perceived to be a good thing) and unfilial. Debatably the most extreme example found in my fieldwork was the case of Mr Mèng. He was part of the only family in my sample who had a child but not in Vienna:

> Sending our son back to China was the hardest thing we have ever done as parents. He now lives with my parents in my hometown. We actually did not want to send him to live in China but my parents told me that he needs to learn about Chinese culture. I want what is best for my child, but I also want to be a good son. In the end, I decided the best decision was for him to live with my parents for a few years.[76]

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75 *Zhīshì hěn nán de wèntí. Wǒ hěn xiǎng wǒ de háizi zài àodìlì gāoxìng, zài xuéxiào xué dé hǎo. Zuòwéi yīgè fùmǔ wǒ zhī xiǎng yào wǒ de háizi zuì hǎo. Dànshì wǒ de fùmǔ hái zhù zài zhōngguó, tāmen duì zhège juédìng bù mǎnyì. Tāmen xiǎng ràng jiào wǒ hái zǐ gēng duō zhōngguó wénhuà. Tāmen xiǎng ràng jiào wǒ háizi bài. Xiàotài zhòngyào dànshì wǒ bù zhīdào zěnme zuò.* 只是很难的问题。我很想我的孩子在奥地利高兴、在学校学得好。作为一个父母我只想要我的孩子最好。但是我的父母还住在中国、他们对这个决定不满意。他们想让教我孩子更多中国文化。他们想让教我孩子拜。孝太重要但是我不知道怎么做。

76 *Zuòwéi fùmǔ bǎ háizi sòng huí zhōngguó shì zuì nán de shì. Tā xiànzài gēn wǒ de fùmǔ zhù zài jiāxiāng. Wǒmen shíjì shang bùxiǎng bǎ tā sòng huí zhōngguó qù, dànshì wǒ de fùmǔ gàosù wǒ tā xūyào xuéxí zhōngguó wénhuà. Wǒ xīwàng wǒ de háizi shì zuì hǎo de, yěshì yīgè hǎo er zi. Zuìhòu, wǒ juédé ràng tā gēn wǒ de fùmǔ zhù jǐ nián shì yīgè hǎo de juédìng.* 作为父母把孩子送回中国是最难的事。他现在跟我的父母住在家乡。我们实际上不想把他送回中国去、但是我的父母告诉我他需要学习中国文化。我希望我的孩子是最好的、也是一个好儿子。最后、我觉得让他跟我的父母住几年是一个好的决定。

This was an example of a family who took their filial duty so seriously that they adhered to parental wishes that cause the couple noticeable emotional pain—a clear example from my fieldwork about how seriously parents take filiality.

Finally, I also found no evidence that Chinese families are becoming increasingly nuclear and individualistic. Granted, given the Austrian context of my fieldwork, the majority of families I interviewed lived as a nuclear unit, but they were acutely involved and aware of their larger family. Mr Liú even worked this sentiment into his definition of filiality: "Filiality means that when you cry, the whole family cries, and when you laugh, the whole family laughs. I want my son to work hard so that the whole family will prosper!"[77] Herein one also finds a counter-narrative to the popular notion that it is the children of Chinese migrants who benefit from their own achievements rather than the entire family (Qingling Yang 2015: 78).

11. Conclusion

A modern sentiment among scholars is that parenting styles and practices should be interpreted within a certain cultural context (Qingling Yang 2015: 111). In their study of attitudes towards ageing and filiality across British and Chinese cultures, Laidlaw et al. (2010: 286) compiled a questionnaire in which participants responded on a five-point Likert scale. Often, questionnaires enable a far greater sample size than the one offered in this paper. However, Zhāng and Lú (2018: 153) rightly point out that questionnaires not only play into the problematic World Religions narrative, but they also fail to capture the intricate and unique way in which Chinese popular religion functions. Thus, our primary statistics on Chinese parent religiosity in an international setting (Pew Research Center 2012) are fundamentally flawed. This paper has attempted to offer a potential solution to the "difficult problem"[78] (Zhāng and Lú 2018: 153) of measuring Chinese popular religion. By conducting in-depth ethnographic fieldwork that examines Chinese parent religiosity within their own cultural context and in their own terms, this paper has demonstrated the central role of religion in the lives of Chinese parents living in Vienna. Although the sample size was small, it has hopefully

77 *Xiào de yìsi shì dāng nǐ kū de shíhòu quánjiā rén dōu kū, dāng nǐ xiào de shíhòu, quánjiā rén dōu xiào. Wèile jiāzú de xīngwàng, wǒ xīwàng wǒ de ér zǐ chénggōng*. 孝的意思是当你哭的时候全家人都哭、当你笑的时候 、全家人都笑。为了家族的兴旺、我希望我的儿子成功。

78 *Nántí*. 难题。

demonstrated the importance of providing as full a picture as possible: acknowledging both Western and Chinese scholarship and enabling interviewees to elucidate in their own terms as opposed to complying to imposed (outsider) ones.

At the beginning of this paper I laid out two definitions of religion. Pokorny's (2018: 9) definition comfortably applies to the data presented here. The beliefs and related actions of the parents very much connected "the lived worldliness with the transcendental." Each parent readily made contact with the transcendental, which took on the form of ancestors and various deities. Furthermore, by my observation, filiality connects to an impersonal form of transcendence; it is an important means to ensure harmony, that is, the fullest articulation of this transcendent governing principle. Filiality was the most obvious manifestation of a universal law of reciprocity that applies to all beings (both mundane and transcendental) in Chinese popular religious belief. When Mr Chén spoke of the chain of filiality extending from humans to ancestors to gods, he effortlessly encapsulated how the law of filiality necessarily applies to all. By simultaneously teaching their children filiality and demonstrating filiality towards their own parents, the parents of this sample were essentially perpetuating the wider, all-pervading causal law of reciprocity—with their ancestors and deities essentially being manifestations of it. The notion of not respecting the law of filiality was unthinkable to the extent that the parents regarded it as simply common necessity to teach and uphold it. Moreover, the "tension" described by Pokorny was readily seen in the international context of the parents: outside of the geographical context of China, the parents steadfastly clung to their Chinese popular religious beliefs and practices as a means of providing meaning. Indeed, Chinese popular religion provided these parents with a foundation of comforting certainty. Even in an international and foreign context, they still perceived themselves as existing in the same moral cosmos governed by reciprocity they had experienced when they resided in China. Religion clearly granted meaning to each parent interviewed. Filiality and their place within the wider universe inhabited by ancestors and gods granted them clear moral purpose and direction.

Similarly, I reckon that the data presented in this study is comfortably in line with each of Yang's (2018: 1) criteria:

1. *A belief in the supernatural*. Every single parent in this study demonstrated a deep belief in the supernatural. Their ancestors were perceived as a very real presence in their lives and the vast majority also spoke of various gods.
2. *A set of beliefs regarding life and the world*. Tied to the first criterion, each parent perceived themselves as belonging to a hierarchal universe populated by both natural and supernatural beings. They had

very strong beliefs pertaining to their place within this world, holding that, for example, they had a filial obligation to their parents and ancestors.

3. *A set of ritual practices*. Every single household I visited had some form of an ancestral shrine. Although the parents differed in ritual frequency, absolutely everyone very much had a set of rituals tied to, among others, ancestor commemoration.
4. *A distinct social organisation or moral community*. In Chinese popular religion, the moral community constitutes those who hold popular religion, with the family making up the very core of this broader community. Each parent demonstrated a moral obligation to their parents and ancestors, making decisions based on this moral obligation. Furthermore, many parents build their decisions upon the wishes of their own parents, or at the very least, deeply respected their words and advice.

Therefore, I assert that the parenting practices of these migrant parents were seeped in religious belief and practice. Unlike prior research that has placed secular concepts, such as education and authoritarianism, at the core of Chinese parental belief, I have argued that these beliefs are in fact secondary to the broader belief in Chinese popular religion. Granted, it is important to acknowledge that the parents themselves did not regard these beliefs and practices as religious. However, given that this paper is written in English, and I have demonstrated how the beliefs and practices of these parents comfortably conform to Pokorny's (2018: 9) and Yang's (2018: 1) definitions of religion, I would argue that religion is the term that is best used to describing these beliefs and practices. Herein, an understanding of the differences between the Western and the Chinese cultural contexts is crucial. The term religion can be misleading in the Western context because of the prevalent use of the World Religions narrative. Examining Chinese popular religion through a Christian lens is simply problematic. Once one is able to remove the term from this narrative and allow for a wider use of the term, religion becomes a far more useful category. It can be misleading in the Chinese context due to the Western connotations that come with the word: indeed, one should remember that the term *zōngjiào* (religion) is a somewhat modern Chinese term. It is for this reason that one finds terms such as cultural practice far more common when referring to Chinese popular religious practice in Mandarin.

Another major conclusion is that the concept of filiality, so often regarded as secular, was found to be deeply tied in with religiosity. Chinese popular religion was at the very core of parenting belief and practice. Filiality was a crucial part of this religiosity.

The final major conclusion is that the international context was a crucial influence on the religiosity of Chinese migrant parents. It led them to utilise popular religion to create a private "spiritual living space" (Chén 2021: 58) in their home; compelled them to push their children into learning about Christianity as a means of assimilating into Austrian society; caused worry and tension over how best to navigate filiality when one's parents are half way across the world; allowed for a reconfiguration of family roles in which children are granted a certain degree of more freedom; and created situations in which the very notion of belief was discussed.

The scholarly field of Chinese parent religiosity in an international context is still very much in its infancy. I hope that this paper will generate further dialogue into a topic that is incredibly worthy of additional scholarly attention.

Glossary

bài	拜
bào	報
fēi shén lùn de zōngjiào xìng	非神论的宗教性
guǎn	管
guǐ	鬼
hàn	汉
jiā wénhuà	家文化
lǎo	老
miànzi	面子
sānjiào	三教
tiānshén	天神
xiào	孝
Xiàojīng	孝經
Xí Jìnpíng	习近平
xíngwéi guīfàn	行为规范
zi	子
zhōngguó de 'jiā wénhuà	中国的‘家文化
zōngjiào	宗教
zǔxiān	祖先
zǔxiān chóngbài	祖先崇拜

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Contemporary Filiality and Popular Religion: An Ethnographic Study of Filiality Among Chinese University Students and their Parents

Whether one opts to refer to it as filial piety, filial obedience, or filiality, the concept of *xiào* 孝 has been widely studied throughout history. However, to this day, the religious dimension of *xiào* is far too often ignored. This paper intends to demonstrate that beyond merely having a religious dimension to it, the very concept of *xiào* cannot be removed from the realm of Chinese popular religion. More specifically, this paper constitutes an ethnographic examination of the beliefs and practices pertaining to *xiào* of undergraduate university students in Beijing. This beliefs and practices will be compared and contrasted with how *xiào* is regarded by the parents of these students. I will ultimately conclude that in contrast to the popular view that China is a deeply irreligious country, I will assert that *xiào* is a *religious* belief that has deep meaning and importance to all the interviewees. I will also assert that there is a notable generational difference in how *xiào* is conceived.

1. Introduction

There is no shortage of studies pertaining to filiality. Indeed, between 2020 and 2022 upwards of 2,300 articles (both scholarly and journalistic) were uploaded to CNKI[1] (*zhōngguó zhī wǎng* 中国知网 China National Knowledge Infrastructure). One of the largest and most significant studies pertaining to filiality took place in 2018 when the Research Center for Filial Piety Culture of Hubei Institute of Technology undertook a major study on the topic of "Contemporary Filial Piety in the Heart of the Elderly."[2] A total of more than 3,300 elderly people were interviewed and 3,149 valid questionnaires were returned. The results found that filiality still has a deeply strong influence in China. It also found that "respecting one's parents"[3] through material support and physical presence is how the concept was typically defined. However, Du has rightly pointed out that "while generating valuable scholarly dialogues, studies of parent–child relations in the context of the sentimental family have not adequately studied either the state, with its coercive legal machinery, or non-elites, who constituted the greatest portion of society."[4] More specifically, Gans, Silverstein, and Lowenstein rightly point out that "religiosity has been largely overlooked by many studies on intergenerational support despite growing evidence to its significant role in shaping parent-

[1] CNKI, https://www.cnki.net/index/
[2] Wáng, "Zhōngguó xiàodào de "biàn" yǔ "bù biàn."" Note that all translations in this paper are my own.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Du, *State and Family in China: Filial Piety and its Modern Reform*, 4.

child relationship"[5] and despite the abundance of scholarship, the contemporary religious dimension of filiality remains a severely understudied field, with scholars often holding that the concept is a secular one: Mengwei and Nehring, for example, in their study of filiality and the "moral grammar"[6] of Chinese families, completely avoid the subject of religion. I have previously argued that filiality constitutes something of a form of impersonal transcendence: "an essential articulation of the law of reciprocity that governs the universe in Chinese popular religious belief."[7] This paper intends to build upon this study and demonstrate that the concept of filiality is, on the family level, an inherently religious concept that is deeply tied to Chinese popular religion. More specifically, this paper intends to accomplish three interconnected goals. Firstly, by comparing the popular religious beliefs and practices of Chinese students in Beijing with those of their parents, I intend to demonstrate that despite reporting irreligiosity, the interviewees of this study possess deep religious views. Secondly, by contrasting the lived religious views of students with their parents, this paper will argue that there is a noticeable generational difference in how the concept of filiality is conceived. This study therefore proposes an alternative to the view that filiality is conceived in the same way across generations.[8] Finally, I will argue that despite the difference in perception, both students and their parents believe (albeit not overtly) that filiality is a deeply religious concept that cannot be removed from the realm of popular religion. I have opted to compare and contrast university students (specifically undergraduates) and their parents because undergraduate students are situated in a unique position: they are (in the majority of cases) living away from home for the first time. Indeed, none of the parents of this study lived in Beijing. Moreover, the undergraduate period of one's life has been referred to as "a critical time when students search for meaning in life and examine their spiritual/religious beliefs and values."[9] The parents of undergraduates, on the other hand, are usually well established in their religious beliefs. I therefore believe that comparing filiality as conceived by undergraduates in comparison to their parents gives an excellent sense of filiality (the similarities and differences) across generations.

The paper itself will be divided into two parts. I will begin by examining the concept of filiality as it has been previously studied. This first section will therefore serve as something of an

[5] Gans, Silverstein, and Lowenstein, "Do Religious Children Care More and Provide More Care for Older Parents?", 187.
[6] Mengwei and Nehring, "The moral grammar of Chinese transnational one-child families."
[7] Chadwin, "Parental Popular Religion and Filiality", 71.
[8] See, for example, Ho and Chiang, "Long-distance Filial Piety", 304.
[9] Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno, "Understanding the Religious and Spiritual Dimensions of Students' Lives in the First Year of College", 726.

overview of the main themes and concepts pertaining to the field of filiality as well as popular religion. The second part of this paper will turn to the Chinese students in Beijing and their parents.

2. Filiality

Filiality is an incredibly broad concept that has a long and complicated history. Although deeply tied to Confucianism, it was already a formal concept during the early Eastern Zhou Dynasty.[10] In written Mandarin it is denoted by *xiào* 孝, a character that is made up of two components: *lǎo* 老 (old; aged; parents) and *zǐ* 子 (a child). The original meaning of the character was someone who serves their parents, and the "officially preferred"[11] modern reading is the old are supported by the young (hence why the character is composed of *lǎo* sitting atop *zǐ*). However, some scholars such as Hashimoto argue that filiality is oppressive by nature and this is reflected in the very character of *xiào* in which the child is being physically burdened by the weight of the old person they are carrying: thus the concept "effectively regulates the interests of the younger generation by assigning obligations and debt to them."[12] Ikels, noting that Chinese was originally written from top to bottom, also notes that the character could alternatively be taken to mean "the continuation of the family line, that is, the father produces the son."[13]

This paper employs the term "filiality" as opposed to the somewhat more common "filial piety." As I have previously argued,[14] the term "piety" has unavoidably Christian connotations. Moreover, the term "filial obedience" that is employed by, for example, Stafford,[15] is also, in my opinion, problematic as I hold (as this paper intends to demonstrate) that filiality is more than obedience.

The importance of filiality was already abundantly clear in the teachings of Kǒngzǐ who famously wrote "Filial piety and fraternal submission! - are they not the root of all benevolent

[10] Chén, "Xiào" duì zhōngguó chuántǒng fùzǐ guānxì de yǐngxiǎng jí biànhuà."
[11] Ikels, "Introduction", 3.
[12] Hashimoto, "Culture, Power, and the Discourse of Filial Piety in Japan", 193.
[13] Ikels, "Introduction", 3.
[14] Chadwin, "Parental Popular Religion and Filiality", 71.
[15] Stafford, *The Roads of Chinese Childhood*.

actions?"[16] Similarly, in the Xiào Jīng one finds that "filial piety is the root of (all) virtue, and (the stem) out of which grows (all moral) teaching."[17]

Bedford and Yeh, noting that filiality has "provided the moral underpinning for Chinese patterns of parent–child relations and socialization for millennia"[18] argue that the concept not only dictates family norms but also provides the social and ethical foundations for maintaining social order.

Lin and Fu assert that filiality has a crucial influence on how Chinese parents control and discipline their children, equating the concept with the Confucian dictum that "parents are always right."[19]

This section shall briefly explore this concept. It should be acknowledged from the outset that this paper does not intend to offer a full picture of scholarship pertaining to filiality. There are countless studies that examine the concept and even a full-length monograph would be too limited in scope to enumerate them all. What this paper does intend to do, however, is elucidate the key themes found in the study of filiality.

2.1 Defining Filiality

A common definition of filiality is the moral behaviour of children towards their parents. Liáng and Zhōu situate filiality as the very core of family ethics and write that the concept refers to roles –specifically mutual obligations and responsibilities– that govern the family: the father, for example, is responsible, among other things, for raising his son, ensuring safety, education and socialisation.[20] These filial obligations traditionally extend beyond the grave, "with careful tending to the needs of deceased parents and earlier kin through ancestor worship seen as essential to the fates of surviving family members."[21] Chén therefore states that the core

[16] Lúnyǔ.
[17] Xiào Jīng.
[18] Bedford and Yeh, "The History and the Future of the Psychology of Filial Piety", 1.
[19] Lin and Fu, "A Comparison of Child-Rearing Practices among Chinese, Immigrant Chinese, and Caucasian-American Parents", 430.
[20] Liáng and Zhōu, "Zhōngguó chuántǒng fùzǐ guānxì zhōng de "xiào" jí qí hányì biànhuà", 81.
[21] Whyte, "Filial Obligations in Chinese Families", 106.

meaning of filiality is to respect one's ancestors, respect one's parents, and pass on the lineage.[22]

Family is central to the concept of filiality. Zhao, Kong, and Yang, for example, assert that filiality is essentially to maintain "the harmony, unity and happiness of the family."[23] However, the concept can also be broadened to encapsulate society as a whole: children must be filial towards their parents, parents to grandparents, and grandparents to ancestors. Liáng and Zhōu write that the implementation of filial piety begins with serving one's parents, and ultimately lies in realizing the grand ambition of self-cultivation.[24] They argue that filiality, when practiced properly, is far more than merely loving and obeying one's parents, but instead constitutes achieving success in one's career, cultivating a good reputation, and frequently giving honor to one's parents and ancestors.[25] Thus, one can liken the concept of filiality to the layers of an onion or the ripple effect of a stone being thrown into water:

> "Our [Chinese] pattern [of filial culture] is not a bundle of neatly tied matches, but rather like a ripple caused by throwing a stone on the water. Everyone is part of the circle and pushed out by his social influence: connected by the ripples of the circle."[26]

At its most simple level, filiality can be taken to mean obedience, particularly obedience towards one's parents.[27] Kǒngzǐ 孔子 (Confucius) reportedly stated:

> "Mèng Yì asked what filial piety was. The Master said, 'It is not being disobedient.'… "That parents, when alive, be served according to propriety; that, when dead, they should be buried according to propriety; and that they should be sacrificed to according to propriety."[28]

Similarly, in the Xiào Jīng (*The Classic of Filial Piety*) one finds:

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[22] Chén, "Xiào" duì zhōngguó chuántǒng fùzǐ guānxì de yǐngxiǎng jí biànhuà."
[23] Zhao, Kong, and Yang, "Study on the Relationship Between Confucian Filial Piety Culture and Chinese Youth's Entrepreneurial Intention", 2.
[24] Liáng and Zhōu, "Zhōngguó chuántǒng fùzǐ guānxì zhōng de "xiào" jí qí hányì biànhuà", 82.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Fèi, *Xiāngtǔ zhōngguó shēngyù zhìdù*, 26.
[27] Indeed, this is probably the most common definition of the term in scholarship. See, for example, Liú, "Kuà wénhuà shìjiǎo xià zhōng měi jiàzhíguān de pèngzhuàng", 227.
[28] Ibid.

> "The Master said, 'The service which a filial son does to his parents is as follows: In his general conduct to them, he manifests the utmost reverence. In his nourishing of them, his endeavor is to give them the utmost pleasure. When they are ill, he feels the greatest anxiety. In mourning for them (dead), he exhibits every demonstration of grief. In sacrificing to them, he displays the utmost solemnity. When a son is complete in these five things, (he may be pronounced) able to serve his parents.'"[29]

The Research Center for Filial Piety Culture of Hubei Institute of Technology's 2018 study of filiality concluded that the concept has three crucial components[30]:

1. *Rén* 仁 (typically translated as "benevolence")

Rén is the root of the body, filiality is the root of *rén*: benevolence and filial piety are one. Therefore, to self-cultivate is to cultivate filiality.

2. Having children so that the family line can be passed down.

Chinese people have a strong sense of the root of life, which is prominently manifested in the pursuit of filiality.

3. Inheriting the will of the father

Children should shoulder the historical mission of making the family business prosper.

Laidlaw et al. write that although filiality is "often simplified as obedience to older generations and care for one's parents, it is, however, a multidimensional concept among Chinese people."[31] Similarly, Lieber and Mink write that the concept is "frequently oversimplified in terms of obedience, respect, and care for one's parents."[32]

Yeh believes that the aspects of filiality are integrated into a dual framework: reciprocal filiality and authoritarian filiality. He describes:

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[29] Xiào Jīng.
[30] Wáng, ""Zhōngguó xiàodào de "biàn" yǔ "bù biàn.""
[31] Laidlaw et al., "Attitudes to ageing and expectations for filial piety across Chinese and British cultures", 283.
[32] Lieber and Mink, Filial Piety, Modernization, and the Challenges of Raising Children for Chinese Immigrants", 325.

"The former is the more traditional manifestation and involves repaying one's parents out of love for them. The latter is built upon obedience and is seen as a form of control. One needs to acknowledge this dual nature."[33]

Li and Wu also ascribe a duel framework to filiality. They hold that two components are required in filiality: "the material support and the spiritual respect."[34] Therefore, although the meaning of filiality and related policies pertaining to it have historically undergone multiple changes, the core of the concept lies in material support and spiritual respect.

He, on the other hand, defines filiality by comparing it to the rule of law in China. He argues that in the ethical sense, filiality and rule of law share the same goal: namely hoping that people live a universal just life. The difference herein is that the rule of law equates to codified ethical principles whereas filiality is the manifestation of conscience: "they belong to ethical issues and moral issues respectively."[35]

2.2 Changing Face of Filiality

Many scholars have examined how filiality has evolved over time. Liu et al., for example write that "the strict gender roles that characterized traditional Chinese society have given way to more gender-neutral prescriptions for relationships between parents and children."[36] Similarly, Yang believes that the development of the market economy and social changes have effected the transformation of many traditional values, including filiality. Yang crucially asserts that this change not only occurs in young people, but also in the elderly who "lower their requirements and expectations of filial piety from their children, and reach a consensus with them."[37]

Ho and Chiang highlight the changing face of filiality by arguing that "intergenerational co-residence is no longer the only way for adult children to demonstrate filial piety…[and] it can occur at a distance when children living away from their parents retain regular contact with

[33] Yeh, "The beneficial and harmful effects of filial piety", 67.
[34] Li and Wu, "Implications of China's filial piety culture for contemporary Elderly Care", 82.
[35] He, "Filial piety, rule of law and edification", 17.
[36] Liu et al., "Filial Piety, Acculturation, and Intergenerational Communication Among New Zealand Chinese", 213.
[37] Yang, "The Change of City Elderly Filial Piety Expectations", 140.

parents via telephone, mail and visitation."[38] Herein, one can find something of a generational divide. Zhāng, for example, writes that "in the eyes of parents, the basic prerequisite of 'filiality' is the children's 'presence' […] and in the eyes of children, the basic premise of 'filiality' is to ensure the parents' old-age security."[39] Similarly, the Research Center for Filial Piety Culture of Hubei Institute of Technology's 2018 study 78.9% of interviewees responded that serving parents in a physical sense (i.e. frequently visiting) defined filiality, whereas "love from one's children" accounted for 31.9%, and material support a mere 8.6%.[40] The study, along the same lines, found that 77.6% of parents believed that paying for the elderly to live in a nursing home to be deeply unfilial.[41]

Liáng and Zhōu take a somewhat modest approach to contemporary expressions of filiality, arguing that children (particularly sons and fathers) have a much more harmonious relationship built upon democratic foundations but the father still, nevertheless, predominantly has control over his son's decisions and life in general.[42] Chén also follows this line, arguing that due to the influence of Western values, children's personal wishes are more respected today and they enjoy greater autonomy. More specifically, this relationship is today built on "equality and mutual respect, and uses democracy, consultation, and dialogue."[43]

Wang, after conducting a fieldwork study pertaining to filiality, identified a generational gap: on the one hand, the parents in Wang's study shared a common practical concern over being supported by their children, hoping that their children would provide them with food, clothing, household necessities, and, more generally, hoped that their children would visit often and not make them unhappy by doing what they disapproved of or treating them in an unfilial manner. Moreover, the parents "were seriously concerned about their children's lack of submission and obedience to parental authority."[44] On the other hand, Wang found that the younger generation aspired predominantly for independence, thus rendering parental domination and authority in deciding household matters that filiality used to dictate "a nostalgic recollection."[45] Zhōu and Wáng, noting common phrases such as "filiality should be repaid as soon as possible" and "the

[38] Ho and Chiang, "Long-distance Filial Piety", 283.
[39] Zhāng, "Xīfāng fúlì zhìdù xià xīnxīlán huárén xīn yímín jiātíng de dài jì qídài yǔ lúnlǐ wénhuà chōngtú", 74.
[40] Wáng, "Zhōngguó xiàodào de "biàn" yǔ "bù biàn.""
[41] Ibid.
[42] Liáng and Zhōu, "Zhōngguó chuántǒng fùzǐ guānxì zhōng de "xiào" jí qí hányì biànhuà", 83.
[43] Chén, "Xiào" duì zhōngguó chuántǒng fùzǐ guānxì de yǐngxiǎng jí biànhuà."
[44] Wang, Ritualistic Coresidence and the Weakening of Filial Practice in Rural China", 26.
[45] Ibid., 27.

elderly cannot wait"[46] also draw attention to how generational difficulties pertaining to filiality can arise

2.3 Decline of Filiality

Many scholars argue that filiality is, and has for a long time been, in decline. Liu brings attention to a letter from the early Twentieth Century that states:

> "But, mother, why do you want my brother to marry now? It is already the twentieth century. We don't follow the old idea of filial piety."[47]

Lǐ situates this decline within the broader decline of Confucian ethics as a whole, arguing that the changes brought about by China becoming increasingly modern has led to the diminishing value of Confucianism that has ceased to be the dominant force in society.[48] Newendorp also writes that as "the social and cultural discourses around longstanding Confucian ideals of filial duty and family reciprocity in contemporary China are reconfigured, many Chinese seniors today find that they can rely on neither state nor family for support."[49] Ho and Chiang in their study of contemporary attitudes towards filiality found that "some respondents feel that a weakening of filial piety values in their children is perhaps inevitable."[50] Similarly, Huáng's investigation into the educational values of parents and children in China found that 70.6% of mothers and 69.4% of fathers considered obeying one's parents as unimportant.[51]

Some scholars such as Laidlaw et al.[52] and Sung[53] cite the process of modernization, industrialisation, and migration as reasons for the continued fall of filiality. Liáng and Zhōu, on the other hand, argue that individualistic values are the single greatest threat to filiality today and the main reason why the concept has diminishing value.[54] They also emphasise the family tension that can come about due to filiality: "since filiality emphasises the son's absolute

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[46] Zhōu and Wáng, "Dúshēngzǐ nǚ "wài yí" hòu jiātíng yǎnglǎo wèntí fēnxī", 72.
[47] Liu, *The Transnational History of A Chinese Family*, 187.
[48] Lǐ, *Lǐyìyuán zìxuǎn jí*, 219.
[49] Newendorp, "Negotiating Family "Value", 187-188.
[50] Ho and Chiang, "Long-distance Filial Piety", 302.
[51] Huáng, "Yòu'ér jiāzhǎng de jiàoyù jiàzhíguān tiáo chá", 29.
[52] Laidlaw et al., "Attitudes to ageing and expectations for filial piety across Chinese and British cultures", 284.
[53] Sung, "Respect for Elders", 197.
[54] Liáng and Zhōu, "Zhōngguó chuántǒng fùzǐ guānxì zhōng de "xiào" jí qí hányì biànhuà", 84.

obedience to his father, it will inevitably lead to conflict and estrangement."[55] Wang et al., offers a similar conclusion: after analysing questionnaire data pertaining to contemporary college students' inheritance of morality and filial piety culture from the aspects of society, school and family, they conclude that university students place low importance on filiality.[56]

Tied to modernization, the process of moving to another city or province has been regarded as an assault on the value of filiality. Li and Wu argue that with modern economic development and social mobility, it is no longer sustainable for children to perpetually stay with their parents. Therefore, although children might continue to support their parents in a material sense, they "cannot fulfil the respect component of filial piety by remaining companions for their parents and caring for them…[which therefore] highlights a lack of support and respect in the traditional filial piety culture."[57]

Western influence is a commonly given reason for the supposed decline of filiality. Hwang, for example, writes that the "prevalence of filial piety and its accompanying authoritarian moralism in Chinese societies has diminished as a consequence of modernization and exposure to Western influences."[58]

Wang offers a wholly different perspective, arguing that filiality is not, contrary to popular belief, under direct attack in (post)socialist reforms or ideological discourse. Instead, the state "has reinforced, through official media, the renewed individual civil (and family) obligation to take care of elderly parents, and promoted the "socialist family virtues" of respecting, supporting, and caring for the elderly."[59] Du also seeks to argue against the notion that filiality is declining, claiming that the proportion of the older people who perceive their children to be filial increased between 2000-2010.[60] Finally, Hé argues that it is specifically the political function of filiality that has declined and the concept is still a crucial moral value.

Finally, several Chinese scholars have recently responded to the common identification that filiality is declining in importance by calling for an increase in filiality education. Lín, for

[55] Ibid., 82.
[56] Wang et al., "Research on College Students' Inheritance and Development of Morality and Filial Piety Culture in the New Era", 79.
[57] Li and Wu, "Implications of China's filial piety culture for contemporary Elderly Care", 80.
[58] Hwang, "Filial piety and loyalty", 179.
[59] Wang, "Ritualistic Coresidence and the Weakening of Filial Practice in Rural China", 24.
[60] Du, "Filial Piety of Children as Perceived by Aging Parents in China", 30.

example, believes that filiality needs to be utilised as a society as a means of dealing with the modern problems of society: "it should start from the individual, go beyond the scope of the traditional family, and enter the field of social responsibility, manifested as a full sense of social trust."[61] Li, on the other hand, has a far less grand vision for filiality, arguing that contemporary filiality should simply focus on being kind to one's parents.[62] Lei and Zhang take the case of Xinliangdi village to propose how other localities can implement filiality initiatives:

> "The village creates an atmosphere of filial piety by taking the following measures. Establish a filial piety fund. Transform mutual assistance happy homes for the elderly. Create the filial piety banquet and regularly implement voluntary services."[63]

3. Chinese Irreligiosity

China is often identified as being the world's most irreligious population, with many recent surveys placing the religious population of the country between 10 and 15%.[64] Indeed, one finds this rhetoric at the heart of Chinese education. Hansen found that "due to their Chinese school education, which emphasized how religion and superstition obstruct modernization, students felt that it was very important to disassociate themselves from religious practices."[65] Hansen's ethnographic survey reported that students were "very embarrassed"[66] about any beliefs or practices that seemed in any way superstitious.

Guì argues that aside from traditional family ethics and social norms such as filiality, the significance of popular religion in China has diminished drastically to the point that the supernatural no longer has any significance in family homes.[67] Guì instead utilises the term "godless religion" (非神论的宗教性)[68] to describe Chinese family ethics.

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[61] Lín, "Zuòwéi rénlèi wénmíng xīn xíngtài de xiào dé wénhuà", 30.
[62] Li, "The Three Dimensions of the Transformation of Filial Piety in the New Era", 17.
[63] Lei and Zhang, "Analysis on the Practical Path of Rural Filial Piety and Beneficence in the New Era", 127.
[64] See, for example, Yang and Huang, "Religious Beliefs and Environmental Behaviors in China", 2: a study in which 14% of the overall population are said to be religious.
[65] Hansen, *Lessons in being Chinese*, 153.
[66] Ibid., 137.
[67] Guì, "Shèng fán yītǐ: Lǐ yǔ shēngmìng jiàzhí", 195.
[68] Ibid., 1.

This irreligious assumption also applies to the concept of filiality. There are a plethora[69] of studies that refer to filiality in a secular light: an irreligious principle of obeying one's parents that is tied to broader principles such as respect for elders and an emphasis on the family. Indeed, one could argue that some of this can be related to the changing face of filiality. To this end, one could assert that filiality in modern day China has relinquished its religious character but nevertheless remains a crucial part of popular culture and family life. Sòng, analysing speeches of Xí Jìnpíng is quick to note how everyone in China knows how much Xí respects his parents: "there are always pictures of him walking with his mother's hand."[70] Indeed, Sòng argues that the entirety of Xí's childhood narrative is steeped in respect and obedience towards his parents. Similarly, Wáng actively argues that filiality "can promote social harmony and stability, and is an important way for people to practice the socialist core values."[71] Arthur also notes how ancestral temples "continue to support lineage-focused ritual activities in their local ancestral hall – due to the importance of filial piety – even if they think other religious practices are merely superstitious."[72] This paper, however, intends to offer an alternative to this discourse, asserting that filiality cannot be removed from the realm of Chinese popular religion.

4. Chinese Popular Religion

This paper will now briefly turn to discussing the category of popular religion in China. Poon writes that popular religion was "coined by scholars in recent decades to categorize diverse religious cultures with no systematized beliefs and no sense of a religious entity, or any agreed upon collective name among practitioners and believers."[73] Goossaert writes that it is "best analyzed as a pluralistic religious system, characterized by many ritual and theological continuities as well as many distinctions, and sometimes tensions, between groups and practices based on locality, social class, economic status, ethnicity, or other particularistic identities."[74] The concept is informed by but simultaneously distinct from the Three Teachings

[69] Kriger and Kroes, "Child-Rearing Attitudes of Chinese, Jewish, and Protestant Mothers"; Chao, "Beyond Parental Control and Authoritarian Parenting Style"; Chiu, "Child-Rearing Attitudes of Chinese, Chinese-American, and Anglo-American Mothers" are to name but a few.
[70] Sòng, "Xí jìnpíng zǒng shūjì guānyú jiā fēng jiànshè zhòngyào lùnshù de gēnyuán jí jiàzhí tànxī", 210.
[71] Wáng, "Zhōnghuá chuántǒng xiào wénhuà de lìshǐ yǎnjìn jí dāngdài jiàzhí", 137.
[72] Arthur, *Contemporary Religions in China*, 241.
[73] Poon, *Negotiating Religion in Modern China*, 5.
[74] Goossaert, "The Beginning of the End for Chinese Religion?", 310.

(*sānjiào* 三教): namely, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Goossaert and Palmer have subsequently defined popular religion as "a coherent system (but a system with several hierarchies) […] [in which] all communities and religious specialists… share common cosmological notions, even though these notions are interpreted in many different ways."[75]

Chau is debatably the most well-known and prolific scholar of Chinese popular religion. He argues that the concept is defined by "magical efficacy […] [which is] conceived of as a particular deity's miraculous response […] to the worshiper's request for divine assistance."[76] He also holds that popular religion is "socially constructed: it is people and their actions that enable the establishment of human-deity relations and interactions."[77] People subsequently enact popular religion in a plethora of ways from giving offerings to planting trees. Chau also, albeit more recently, has argued that *guānxì* 关系[78] is central to popular religion. Herein, *guānxì* relations are enacted "not just between people in socio-political life […] but also between people and spirits, between people and sites of worship and spiritual empowerment, among religious co-practitioners […] [and] between deities."[79]

Due to the nature of popular religion, some scholars draw attention to how difficult it is to study. Hu argues that although Chinese popular religion (ancestor worship in particular) penetrates "almost every aspect of an individual's daily life"[80] it is infamously difficult to study due to the fact that "as a type of diffused religion, [it] is embedded in secular institutions, so it is difficult to separate ancestor worship from Chinese cultural habitus."[81]

In my previous work,[82] I have broadly categorised Chinese popular religion into three interconnected categories:

1. Gods (*tiānshén* 天神), Ancestors (*zǔxiān* 祖先), and Ghosts (*guǐ* 鬼). The former two are beings subject to commemoration. There are innumerable gods that range from deities known nationwide to those known only to a specific locality. When one dies and is succeeded by a child (particularly a son) who can take care of them in death, they

[75] Goossaert/Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, 20.
[76] Chau, *Miraculous Response*, 2.
[77] Ibid.
[78] A term with large semantic variety. It is usually taken to mean connections; relations; relationships.
[79] Chau, *Religion in China*, 4.
[80] Hu, "Ancestor Worship in Contemporary China", 170.
[81] Ibid., 172.
[82] See, for example, Chadwin, "Speaking to My Ancestors", 179-180.

become an ancestor. These beings can, in return for continued care, bestow boons upon the living. Má aptly writes that "a person's existence is due to his ancestors, and in turn, the ancestor's existence is also due to his descendants." [83] Thus, ancestor commemoration usually plays a decisive role in cultivating family values. Finally, ghosts are beings that can cause problems for the living. One can become a ghost for numerous reasons but the most well-known is dying with offspring.

2. *Bài* 拜 and *lǐ* 理. Both terms have a large semantic variety. The former can mean "to pray," "to pay respect," "to worship," "to visit," and "to salute." The latter can mean "inner essence," "intrinsic order," "reason," "logic," "truth," "to pay attention to," and "put in order." Within the specific context of popular religion, *bài* and *lǐ* denote the essential embodiment of religious belief through a bodily action: "doing religion that might be filtered out by etic concepts and categories." [84] The most obvious manifestation of this are offerings to gods and ancestors.
3. *Bào* 報 and *yīng* 应. As with the former terms, these two terms POSSESS A large degree of semantic variety. *Bào* can mean: "to report," "to announce," "to inform," "to respond," "to repay," "to retaliate," and "to retribute." *Yīng* can mean "to answer," "to respond," "to comply with," and "to deal or cope with." Within the realm of popular religion, these terms denote the concept of reciprocity, or rather more specifically, the necessary reciprocal obligations that exist within a universe that is inherently hierarchical. It is herein that one finds the concept of filiality. Indeed, I have previously argued that filiality is the most obvious example of *bào* and *yīng*.[85]

5. Defining "Religion"

As this paper intends to demonstrate that filiality is a religious concept that is intricately a part of Chinese popular religion, a working definition of religion is required. Given his knowledge of the contemporary religious landscape of China, I have opted to employ Yang's categorisation. He argues that religion necessarily includes four elements:

1) A belief in the supernatural.
2) A set of beliefs regarding life and the world.

[83] Má, ""Jiè nǚshēng zǐ" tiányě zhájì", 129.
[84] Peng, *Religion and Religious Practices in Rural China,* xxii.
[85] Chadwin, "Speaking to My Ancestors", 180.

3) A set of ritual practices.
4) A distinct social organisation or moral community.[86]

It should be acknowledged that this is, by no means, a comprehensive definition of religion. This is a system of categorisation that is being utilised given the ethnographic nature of this paper. This definition does not, for example, include esoteric practices that one could very much argue can be regarded as religious.

6. Methodology

This paper constitutes an ethnographic study of university students in Beijing and their parents. In line with Wang and Chang, I believe that ethnography enables one to look "within the Chinese household instead of arbitrarily employing cross-culture comparisons."[87] The data collection took place between December 2022 and April 2023. The sample size consisted of 30 university students, 29 mothers, and 29 fathers. One mother and one father (isolated instances: to my knowledge they did not know one another) decided to opt out of the study: the former for unspecified reasons and the later due to feeling "uncomfortable" about the subject of religion. Given that 9 of the parents voiced concerns over the subject of religiosity, I have opted to anonymise the data. I will therefore not disclose real names,[88] the addresses of the students or the parents, nor refer to the university that the students attend by name. It is interesting to note that it was only parents who voiced concern over the subject matter of this study. All 30 students were happy to talk openly about religion and their own beliefs.

All of the interviewees were ethnic Hàn 汉[89] and all were residents of the PRC.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted, on average, between 2 and 3 hours. I conducted one on one interviews with each parent and also held 24 interviews with both parents present. As with my previous work, I utilised Harvey's concept of "guesthood"[90] wherein meetings

[86] Yang, *Atlas of Religion in China*, p. 1.
[87] Wang and Chang, *Parenting and Child Socialization in Contemporary China*, 60.
[88] Pseudonyms are given and I provide the gender that the participant identifies with and, in the case of the students, note which year of study they are in.
[89] China's majority ethnic group.
[90] See, for example, Harvey, *Food Sex and Strangers*, 94.

with interviewees are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed."[91]

7. Discussion of Fieldwork

This paper will now turn to discussing the fieldwork findings. The data is divided into two parts: the first section concerns the parents and the second concerns the students.

7.1 Parents and Filiality

It should be acknowledged that absolutely all (58 out of 58) of the parents self-identified as irreligious. Moreover, all 58 believed filiality to be an irreligious concept. Mr Fāng, for example told me:

> "Filiality has nothing to do with religion. It is about family, respect, and there is nothing superstitious about it."

Mrs Lǐ similarly explained:

> "Filiality and religion are not the same. Filiality makes me think of children respecting their parents while religion makes me think of gods and superstition. They are totally different."

Although I intend to explain how filiality as conceived by these parents is very much tied to religion, the very fact that they themselves regard the concept as irreligious cannot be understated. I do not seek to claim that their view is wrong as their very conception of religion was different to my own. Mrs Nà. For example, when I asked her what religion is, began listing various organised religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam. I, nevertheless, would argue that all 58 parents fully adhered to popular religion. Each home had some form of a shrine (that ranged from a table in the dining room in the smallest case to an entire room in the largest case) and all 58 parents spoke of the importance of these shrines. Crucially, it was herein that

[91] Arthur, *Contemporary Religions in China*, 16.

I observed not only religious practice, but filiality operating at the very heart of the practice. When I asked Mr Fēng why he offers an apple to his late parents every Monday before work, he told me:

> "It is my duty. I have to be a filial son."

It was at this point that his wife gleefully interjected and told me that a few years ago, Mr Fēng had asked her to do this for him:

> "I told him he was being foolish! I told him that this was bad filiality! But he would not listen to me. So *I* was a good filial wife [she playfully hit him at this point] and I offered the apple for you. I did this for around two months and the whole time, this stupid old fool could not stop sneezing! It took him ages to realise that it was his own parents punishing him for not being filial!"

Mr Fēng was noticeably embarrassed by this story but nevertheless told me:

> "An apple a day keeps the doctor away [he said this part in English]. I did not know that my parents knew this phrase!"

Herein, one finds a blatant example of not only belief in ancestors, but also ancestors having very real power. Moreover, Mr Fēng's duty of offering an apple as well as the subsequent punishment that came from his delegation of this duty to his wife, were matters with filiality at their heart.

A somewhat similar instance was observed in the case of Mr Zhāng who told me that he had inherited the family business from his father who, in turn, had inherited it from his father. Mr Zhāng explained that Covid-19 had damaged the family business and in 2022, he was worried that he might lose it. During the Qīngmíng (清明) Festival,[92] he decided to skip visiting his grandfather's tomb in favour of working. This was against the advice of his own father. He described his problem thus:

[92] Commonly known as "Tomb Sweeping Festival" in English. It takes place on the first day of the fifth solar term (15 days after Spring Equinox). During this festival, families traditionally visit the tombs of their ancestors in order to clean and give offerings.

> "This was a very hard time for me. I know that my father was unhappy with my decision so I suppose you could say that I was not being filial. My argument was that I was worried that I would lose the business and then *this* would make me unfilial."

He then explained that after the festival, things very suddenly went from bad to worse with the business:

> "I did not know what to do. When I spoke to my father about it, he gave me absolutely no work advice but simply told me that I need to go and apologise to my grandfather."

Mr Zhāng explained that he took his father's advice and presented an offering at his grandfather's grave:

> "I even asked grandfather for help with saving the business."

Afterwards, Mr Zhāng's family business reportedly recovered. Mr Zhāng told me his own explanation:

> "I suppose I was being foolish. Grandfather was the one who founded the business so I should have just asked him for help in the first place. When I think about it now, missing the Qīngmíng Festival was very careless of me."

When I asked him to relate this story to filiality, Mr Zhāng explained:

> "Filiality is the most important thing. This whole problem started because I failed to be a good filial son. It was my carelessness that led to the business failing and it was my stupidity that led to grandfather punishing me."

Thus one finds another example, with filiality at the centre, of belief in ancestors.

The role of filiality in popular religion could also be observed in the relationship the parents had with their own children. Unsurprisingly, the vast majority of parents used terms such as obedience and respect when referring to filiality and their children. What was interesting was

that, when pressed, the parents would eventually relate the practice of filiality to the family ancestors. Mrs Rèn explained:

> "Filiality is what connects us all. Our son is filial to us, and we are filial to our ancestors."

When asked for examples how they thought their children should be filial, many answers, unsurprisingly, related to education and career success, but the most common related to presence. Once again, when pressed, this could eventually be traced to ancestral belief. Mr Máo related to me how it was his son who was the one who usually printed off money to offer to ancestors during Spring Festival[93] but Covid-19 had meant that during his first year of university, he was unable to return home:

> "I found this even more difficult than I thought I would. Of course I didn't mind making the money myself but it made me realise how important it is for everyone to be together on these special occasions."

When asked to elaborate about "everyone", he explained:

> "These occasions are special because we know that everyone can be together. Sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, brothers sisters, grandparents, ancestors, everyone."

Once again, one finds a casual instance of the normalisation of the presence of ancestors.

Finally, it is worth noting that an obvious way that filiality has changed is in the way that daughters are perceived by parents. I was very surprised to find that aside from 7 fathers and 6 mothers who believed that it was their daughter's filial duty to marry into another family, the remaining 8 fathers and 9 mothers with daughters expected their daughters to tend to them in death. Indeed, in contrast to Johnson who argues that sons as opposed to daughters are more likely to participate (and be encouraged to participate) in rites pertaining to the commemoration of ancestors above the level of the household (for example the Qīngmíng Festival),[94] I found

[93] A common practice whereby money is printed and then burned as an offering to ancestors.
[94] Johnson, "Child and Family in Chinese Popular Religion." 134.

that the majority of parents in this study held a very different view. Mrs Hú, for example, told me:

> "Things have definitely changed from when I was a child. I was expected to carry out my filial duty by leaving my old family and marrying into a new one. Who knows? Maybe it is because of the One Child Policy. Maybe it is just modern. It doesn't matter. I don't think that people really think that sons are preferable. The way I see it and the way that we have taught our daughter is that she can do everything that a boy can. Jobs, education, and filiality. Therefore, when I die, I expect my daughter to take care of me."

Mr Liáng, on the other hand, came to the same conclusion but only did so because of influence from his daughter:

> "To be honest, while she was little, I always just assumed that she would one day get married and leave the family. I was very surprised when she one day told me that she wanted to look after me and her mum in old age and eventually death. I was very happy!"

Regardless of whether the change came from the younger or older generation, the results are still clear: many parents believed that their daughters could fulfil filial duties that would have, in the past, fallen to only sons.

7.2 Students and Filiality

As with their parents, all 30 students reported irreligiosity and regarded filiality as a secular concept. However, unlike their parents, there was a noticeable sense of nuance in my of the student's responses. Lǐ Nà (female, second year undergraduate), for example, demonstrated a surprising degree of political reflection, told me:

> "If filiality had anything to do with religion, do you really think the government would encourage us to be good filial children?"

When asked what filiality is, they also, for the most part, like their parents, utilised terms such as "respect." However, many (24) took fault with the term "obedience. Chén Xiào told me:

> "If filiality means obeying the will of your parents then I don't think that it is important or even feasible. If filiality means respect then I think this is very very important."

Although I eventually found that all 30 students regarded filiality as crucially important in their lives, this was not necessarily apparent at the beginning of the conversations. Similarly, on the surface level, it seemed as though the majority of the students placed less importance on the religious component (i.e pertaining to ancestor commemoration) of filiality. One could argue that the student's position in the filial line was crucial to how they perceived their ancestors. Rèn Xiào (female second year undergraduate) somewhat bluntly told me:

> "Why would I care about what my ancestors want when I know that my parents are looking after them? I know it's important to be there to sweep the tombs but I also think it's not really my duty. All my life my parents have told me that I need to do well at school and would say things like 'this will make grandpa and grandma really happy' whenever I did well."

Similarly, Kāng Wěi (male first year undergraduate) told me:

> "I know that because I am always reluctant to join in with ancestor commemoration, my parents are worried that I won't look after them when they die. Of course I am going to look after them. I just don't understand why they think I also need to be there when they commemorate my great grandparents when they are already doing it themselves. I don't have anything to contribute so I don't see the point."

Similarly, Yǔ Yān (male second year undergraduate) made light of the matter:

> "I certainly don't care [about ancestor commemoration] now but I wouldn't be surprised if you met me in 20 years and I told you 'My children are so unfilial! Why don't they show more respect to our ancestors?'"

Herein, one finds a generational difference. Although all 30 of the students accepted that commemorating ancestors was important, only 11 believed that it was something that directly concerned them in the here and now. Moreover, whereas all parents found it easy to relate

filiality to ancestor commemoration, this was less so the case for the students. Indeed, although all 30 accepted that ancestor commemoration was important, 24 also claimed that this was not a subject that they thought about often. I would therefore argue that, contrary to the popular notion that younger generations increasingly demonstrate "a lack of support and respect in the traditional filial piety culture",[95] the students of this study very much do place enormous importance on filiality but believe that they have their own specific role to play. In a particularly revealing interview, Ōu Tíngtíng (female second year student) told me about how she had been struggling with moving away from home and beginning university life in her first year as an undergraduate. She told me that she had confided in her mother who told her in response that she would give an offering so that the ancestors would watch over her and give her the help that she needed. Ōu Tíngtíng stated:

> "I immediately felt better. It was so comforting knowing that I was being protected."

What was particularly interesting about this case was Ōu Tíngtíng's response to my question of why she had not asked her ancestors herself:

> "I didn't even think of that. I wouldn't even know how to do it in the right way. That's the kind of thing that mum is in charge of. I guess this will change if I ever have children or when my parents can't do it anymore."

The belief in ancestors was clear and there was a distinct presence of defined family roles.

The parents of this study were quick to assign importance to locality: it was vital to visit one's hometown to commemorate because the physical location of, for example, a family tomb, was crucial. In contrast, not only did many of the students (22 out of 30) believe that it was not necessary for them to physically be present to be filial, a surprising number (16 out of 30) thought that location was not important in general. Zhèng Lǐ (female third year student) firmly told me:

> "When it comes to this matter I don't really care what my parents have to say. When they die, of course I will do everything I need to. I will make a shrine and give them

[95] Li and Wu, "Implications of China's filial piety culture for contemporary Elderly Care", 80.

> food. But this shrine will be where *I* want it to be. If I want to live in Shanghai then this is where I will commemorate. If I want to live in the US then this is where I will commemorate. My shrine will come with me and if my parents want to be commemorated then they will come too. I am not going to go back to our village every single year. What's the point?"

This has apparently been a major point of contention between Zhèng Lǐ and her parents. Her mother, Mrs Lǐ, although noticeably upset that her daughter did not want to conform to filiality in the "right" way, was nonetheless convinced that:

> "She will eventually understand. She is still young and has not yet felt the true weight of filiality."

Sòng Yǔ (female third year undergraduate) also disagreed with the importance of location albeit for a slightly different reason:

> "My parents keep telling me that I need to come home more often. They even keep using my grandpa as an excuse. He died three years ago and obviously we still visit his grave all the time. But I've skipped the last few times because I know grandpa. I know that he doesn't mind whether or not I am there at his grave. He only cares that I do well at university. He also probably cares that I eventually have children."

In the most extreme cases, this generational difference noticeably led to family conflict. A very heated Máo Hónghán (male third year student) explained:

> "Throughout my entire childhood, my patents did nothing but talk about filiality, telling me that I need to do well at school. Well I did do well at school and now I am at university. But suddenly now I'm a bad son because I don't visit enough and I missed Spring Festival. My parents kept asking me 'who will make the money for our ancestors if you don't come?' Well I didn't come and I guess the ancestors must have been happy enough with dad printing the money. So why is this still a problem?"

Similarly (albeit less angry), Gé Shū (male second year student) gave me a wry look when he asked me:

> "Do you really think that my great grandfather cares whether or not I actually visit his grave or give him some incense?"

However, what is interesting is that despite what initially seemed to me to be religious scepticism was in fact just a new perspective. Gé Shū still very much believed that his great grandfather was a real presence that could impact his life:

> "My great grandfather was a head master. I therefore offered incense to him all the time while I was studying for the Gāokǎo.[96]"

Another generational difference could be found in life priorities. Whereas 51 parents explicitly told me that they wanted their daughter or son to eventually take over the family business and/ or family home, only 6 of the students shared this view. Wú Wěi (male second year student) told me:

> "I know my parents think that it is my filial duty to take over the family business when I graduate but I simply don't want to. I have found my own path in life and I think I am still able to be a good son even if I don't do exactly what they want me to."

This was likewise the case with the matter of children: whereas 55 parents expressed the wish for their daughter or son to continue the family line by having children, only 3 students held this view.

Therefore, although one very much finds a generational difference between how parents and their children perceive filiality and their filial duties, the belief itself is constant. The students, like their parents, believed that filiality was important and that the filial duty of ancestor commemoration was important. The difference lies in the how and the priorities.

8. Conclusion

[96]高考: the national university entrance examinations.

The term for religion in Mandarin is *zōngjiào* 宗教. The character 宗 depicts a building (*mián* 宀) and an ancestral table (*shì* 示) that is used for commemorating the dead. The original meaning of the character was therefore a generic term for ancestral shrines and temples. The character 教 is comprised of *xiào* 孝 and *pū* 攵. However, the *xiào* component is modern and the radical component used to be 子 (*zi*: a child) paired with 爻 (*yáo*: two fives): namely a child being instructed in numbers. The *pū* radical is a form component: it is a hand holding an implement to hit someone with. The significance of 宗教 is twofold. On the surface level, it is significant that the very character for religion contains the character for filiality (孝). This immediately suggests that filiality is a religious concept. However, even with the deeper reading of acknowledging the original composition of the character that did not include 孝, the presence of filiality can still be seen within the term: ancestor commemoration and teaching are both crucial components of filiality. I therefore attest that the concept of filiality is written into the very term religion.

The data sample of this paper was extremely small. This is especially the case when compared to the Research Center for Filial Piety Culture of Hubei Institute of Technology 2018 study. However, what I hope that this paper has accomplished is shedding light on a component of filiality that is all too often ignored: when asked to fully explain their reasoning, all the respondents of this study eventually related the concept of filiality to belief in ancestors and various commemoration rites. This paper has therefore demonstrated that filiality cannot be removed from the realm of popular religion. I have previously argued that "filiality connects to an impersonal form of transcendence; it is an important means to ensure harmony, that is, the fullest articulation of this transcendent governing principle."[97] In short, I asserted that filiality was the strongest manifestation of reciprocity in popular religion. However, in this study, I have gone a step further. I believe that this study has demonstrated how filiality is something of a unifying principle in popular religion. Indeed to apply filiality itself to Yang's religious elements[98]:

1) A belief in the supernatural: filiality necessitates belief in ancestors. These are supernatural beings that the interviewees believed held genuine power and presence.

[97] Chadwin, "Parental Popular Religion and Filiality", 102.
[98] Yang, *Atlas of Religion in China*, p. 1.

2) A set of beliefs regarding life and the world: filiality is situated within the broader popular religious concepts of bào and yīng. It is a belief that humans have various obligations to fulfil in a hierarchical universe.
3) A set of ritual practices: filiality necessitates ancestor commemoration. These practices took various forms depending on the interviewee but all were means of contacting one's ancestor(s).
4) A distinct social organisation or moral community: filiality is built upon the community of the family. Herein the family is itself the moral community. It is a hierarchical one with ancestors presiding on top, but it is a moral community nevertheless in which each member has their own obligations.

In my previous study, I would have argued that filiality applies only to the second element. This study, however, demonstrates that filiality is present in all four.

This paper has also demonstrated that even though the parents and students of this study place believe filiality to be extremely important, the generational divide was noticeable. The concept of filiality has since its inception been in a state of flux. It has remained an important concept in China but it has changed drastically. I therefore hope that this paper generates further discussion: filiality will continue to evolve as a concept and I hope that, especially in the field of religious studies, it will receive further attention.

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Chinese Families and Their Encounter with the Secular: An Ethnographic Study of Chinese Parents and Their Children in Edinburgh

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Abstract

The Chinese, both in China and in an international migration setting, are commonly regarded as the world's most secular population. However, the relationship between Chinese people and Chinese Popular Religion is nuanced and survey data, more often than not, do not account for the plethora of religious activities Chinese people engage in despite simultaneously self-identifying as secular. This paper examines the supposed secularity of Chinese immigrant families living in Edinburgh. It asserts that although self-identifying as secular, these families engage in undeniable religious activity and possess religious beliefs. Crucially, there is a marked difference between the beliefs pertaining to secularity of the parents and their children, with the former being adamant in their secularity and the latter being more willing to acknowledge the complicated relationship between religion and the secular.

Keywords

secular – Chinese religion – Chinese Popular Religion – childhood religion – family religion – migration

1 Introduction

Despite reportedly studying "the moral grammar"[1] of Chinese immigrant families, Mengwei and Nehring somewhat ironically neglect to address religion. Indeed, in general one finds that the study of Chinese immigrant religiosity is a severely understudied field, with the majority of the existing scholarship focussing on Christianity.[2] It is highly probable that the reason for the complete lack of discussion about religion in Mengwei and Nehring's paper is due to the existing prevalent assumption that the Chinese, both home and abroad, are extremely secular. MacInnis, for example, has identified that "total secularization of [Chinese] society and culture"[3] has taken place. However, Laliberté rightfully notes that China "is not a secular state in the sense that most people who write about the contemporary secular state understand that concept."[4] This paper intends to explore the concept of secularity within the context of Chinese families living in Edinburgh: home to approximately 8,000 Chinese people and accounting for 1.7% of the total population of the city.[5] More specifically, this paper intends to identify whether Chinese parents and their children self-identify as secular, whether or not they engage in popular religious belief and practice, and whether or not there is a generational difference. By delving into the realm of popular religion, this paper also seeks to explore how Chinese families who engage in popular religious beliefs and practices reconcile this with their self-identified secular identities.

By examining secularity within the context of Chinese immigrant families, I seek to shed a modicum of insight into the ongoing question "How can differences with regard to the form of secularity be understood and explained in relation to historical, socio-economic, political and cultural conditions?"[6] I also seek to add a new perspective to the ever growing corpus of scholarship on the nature of Chinese secularism: this paper seeks to compliment these studies (that will be discussed in the following section) with ethnographic data on the family level.

Scotland is commonly identified as becoming increasingly secular.[7] Scotland's 2011 Census found that 36.7 percent of the population claimed to

1 Mengwei/Nehring, *The Moral Grammar of Chinese Transnational One-child Families*.
2 Pan, *Actors, Spaces, and Norms in Chinese Transnational Religious Networks*, p. 210.
3 MacInnis, *The Secular Vision of a New Humanity in People's China.*
4 Laliberté, *China in a Secular Age*, p. 2.
5 Edinburgh Population 2022, *World Population Review.*
6 Kleine/Wohlrab-Sahr, *Preliminary Findings of the CASHSS "Multiple Secularities"*, p. 13.
7 See, for example, BBC, *Most people in Scotland 'not religious.'*

have no religion, an increase from the 27.5 percent in 2001.[8] The most prominent religion is the Church of Scotland with adherents making up 32.4 percent of the population in 2011 (a decrease from 42.4 percent in 2001).[9] It is worth noting that analysis of the 2001 Scottish Census data reportedly reveals that "Chinese people are the most likely to report no current religion: 63% responded that they had no current religion."[10]

2 The Secular

In order to fully explore how Chinese families in Edinburgh encounter the secular, this paper shall initially begin by briefly exploring the concept of the secular. There have been a plethora of scholarly works pertaining to the secular, secularity, secularism, and secularisation that have, in various ways, added to the popularised secularisation thesis. Dobbelaere has proposed multiple dimensions of secularisation, – macro-secularisation (society), meso-secularisation (organisational level), and micro-secularisation (private)[11] – some scholars have argued for the "deprivatization"[12] of religion as part of the secularisation debate, and others have focussed more on how religion is becoming increasingly "deinstitutionalized"[13] as a result of, for example, modernity. Recently, Casanova has aimed in a series of talks entitled "Global Religious and Secular Dynamics" to encapsulate the field by drawing attention to two historically competing theories: "the secularization thesis, dominant for much of the past half-century, which views the rise of European-style secularism as an inevitable byproduct of modernization; and on the other hand, contemporary theories which instead view modernization as a pluralizing force and which treat European secularism as an exception to a general trend of religious differentiation."[14]

This paper will draw upon the findings of the Leipzig project. Coining the term "multiple secularities" Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt distinguish between four forms of secularities:

1) Secularity for the sake of individual rights and liberties
2) Secularity for the sake of balancing/pacifying religious diversity

8 Scotland's Census, *Religion*.
9 Scotland's Census, *Religion*.
10 Office of the Chief Statistician, *Analysis of Religion in the 2001 Census*, p. 15.
11 Dobbelaere, *Secularization*.
12 See, for example, Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World*, p. 5.
13 See, for example, Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion*.
14 Berkley Forum, *World-renowned José Casanova Offers "Last Word" on Secularization*.

3) Secularity for the sake of societal or national integration and development
4) Secularity for the sake of the independent development of functional domains of society[15]

More recently, CASHSS' ongoing project "Multiple Secularities" has developed the original theory of multiple secularities. Herein one finds the purposeful use of the term "secularity" as an analytical concept that avoids the "ideological connotations" of the term "secularism" and is ultimately "conceived as an ideal-type [that] describes how *conceptual distinctions and institutional differentiations* are made between religious and non-religious spheres and practices."[16]

However, despite recent studies such as CASHSS' "multiple secularities", it is often the case that studies, as with the classical secularisation thesis that is based primarily on European Christianity, are intrinsically tied to the (Christian) West. To this end, Ji notes how previous theories often "remain essentially concerned with Western models of religious change"[17] and calls for the notion of secularisation to be "dissociated from a particular set of assumptions and expectations grounded in specific Western religious and social structures … [and to instead] work with a definition of religion that is implicitly based on the features of Christianity and its social integration."[18] Thus one finds that the nature of the term secular within the Chinese context has received comparatively, given the extensive body of secularisation scholarship, little attention. Part of the reason for this is that the term does not have a perfect translation into Mandarin. *Shìsú* 世俗 is the most common translation of the term, but this paper intends to demonstrate that the meaning, within a Chinese context, does not mean the same as the English term "secular." Wang writes that "the secular departed from a religious norm, whereas in China, what was worldly was the norm … Religious affairs were never so influential in China that an indigenous concept was needed to determine how to deny or minimize the power of religion."[19]

The seminal meta-study on the subject of the secular in China can be found in Goossaert and Palmer's *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Herein, they assert that today, the majority of the Chinese population simultaneously engage in multiple religious beliefs and rituals while also keeping in line with modern secularity. This volume traces the history of religion and secularity

15 Wohlrab-Sahr/Burchardt, *Multiple Secularities*, p. 889.
16 Kleine/Wohlrab-Sahr, *Preliminary Findings of the CASHSS "Multiple Secularities"*, p. 3.
17 Ji, *Secularization as Religious Restructuring*, p. 234.
18 Ji, *Secularization as Religious Restructuring*, p. 235.
19 Wang, *Secular China*, p. 126.

demonstrating that the Republican period witnessed the "adoption of the Christian-secular normative model"[20] that found its roots in the importation of the categories of "religion" and "superstition" from the West; a continuation of this trend during the early Mao era; a halt of religious activity during the Cultural Revolution; and the recent adoption of a more managerial role of the government as the state relaxed its measures against religion. Chinese religious institutions that were "decimated" during the Cultural Revolution, must adhere to the state's secular ideology which thus leads to the proliferation of popular religion "not only beyond the regulatory reach of the state, but beyond the normative reach of official religious institutions."[21] In light of their assertion that "[a]s China becomes a full player in an increasingly integrated global society, and even begins to have an influence on the global religious arena, its religious question will remain an open one",[22] this paper seeks to examine this religious question within the specific context of immigration.

One could argue that the concept of secularisation is tightly woven into the history of China. Roetz, as part of the CASHSS project, for example, argues that "elements of a secular civilization were a reality in China long before latter-day Western philosophers strove for it."[23] Much of the scholarship pertaining to secularisation in China, both historically and presently, pertain to three core themes: blurring of the religious-secular divide, paradox, and the noted difference between the Chinese and Western context. The former is essentially the assertion that the Chinese historically and presently engage in secular religiosity. The interconnectivity of the religious and the mundane is often portrayed as a pragmatic fine line: Lǐ, highlighting the sectarian and utilitarian nature of the Chinese, argues that "under the guidance of the secular spirit, Chinese people will unconsciously transform the gods and make supernatural powers blend with human beings under the influence of human affection and human nature, so that the boundaries between the sacred and the secular are blurred."[24] Lǐ concludes that "Chinese people are accustomed to using secular logic to treat gods, they treat supernatural gods the same way they treat mundane things."[25] One thus finds something of an interconnectivity between religion and the secular. Indeed, Van der Veer coins the concept of "religion-magic-secularity-spirituality" to demonstrate this intricate interconnectivity

20 Goossaert/Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 89.
21 Goossaert/Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 400.
22 Goossaert/Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 13.
23 Roetz, *The Influence of Foreign Knowledge on Eighteenth Century European Secularism*, p. 29.
24 Lǐ, *Bèi shìsú lǐxìng lìyòng de shénlíngmen*, p. 255.
25 Lǐ, *Bèi shìsú lǐxìng lìyòng de shénlíngmen*, p. 255.

of the four concepts within the Chinese context: the terms thus "emerge historically together, imply one another, and function as nodes within a shifting field of power."[26]

The second core theme, paradox, pertains to the assertion that the very concept of secularity within the Chinese context is inherently paradoxical. One of the most prominent examples of this can be found in the work of Ji who seeks to draw attention to the paradox of modern Chinese secularisation: namely "that secularization in China, understood as a state policy to restrain religion, may also produce what is, in essence, contrary to its aim: that is to say, some constructive consequences for religion."[27] Similarly, Palmer and Winiger identify a paradox in that "despite the surprising persistence, indeed increase, of religious activity throughout its process of modernization, China in many ways remains one of the most thoroughly secularized societies on Earth."[28] They assert that the intricate Chinese configurations of the sacred, the profane, the enchanted, and the secular "defy the simple binary distinctions used in the secularization debate."[29]

The final core theme, the noted difference between the Chinese and Western context, focusses on how the very study and concept of secularisation in the context of China differs from the Western context. When one employs the term "secular" within the Western context, one could argue that the implied or assumed opposite of this term is "religion." However, Laliberté writes that attempting to find the opposite of the various terms for the secular in Mandarin

> does not necessarily call for a concept of religion as a distinct social sphere [...] even if Chinese have developed elaborate rituals, read scriptures, believe in life after death, propitiate gods, ghosts, and ancestors for favors, fear the consequences of immoral behavior or lack of filial piety to one's parents, and go to place of worships.[30]

Indeed, within the context of China, some have noted secularity and simultaneous belief in what would in a Western context be deemed religion: Chéng, simultaneously claiming that the Chinese are deeply secular while also believing in a plethora of gods, Buddhas, and ancestor spirits, argues that "as for the

26 Van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia*, p. 9.

27 Ji, *Secularization as Religious Restructuring*, p. 233.

28 Palmer/Winiger, *Secularization, Sacralization, and Subject Formation in Modern China*, p. 100 et seq.

29 Palmer/Winiger, *Secularization, Sacralization, and Subject Formation in Modern China*, p. 101.

30 Laliberté, *China in a Secular Age*, p. 14.

attitude towards gods, the attitude of the Chinese secular people is first of all the indifference of 'respecting them at a distance'."[31] Some have even argued that the very debate pertaining to secularity in China is at its very core a response to Western influence: Szonyi, for one, perceives the history of Chinese religion within the context of secularisation as neither "a unique phenomenon nor as a case study of the universal processes of modernity, but rather as one example of how states and religions around the world have responded to the imposition of the hegemonic master narrative of western modernity."[32]

This paper intends to add an intimate ethnographic lens to these aforementioned studies. Instead of broadly examining Chinese secularity, this paper will examine the concept from the level of the Chinese immigrant household.

3 Chinese Irreligiosity

As this paper is a study of Chinese secularity within the context of immigration, it is necessary to acknowledge former studies pertaining to Chinese irreligiosity. The Chinese population both in China and within the context of immigrants to Europe and the United States are often predominantly regarded as irreligious. This is to the extent that Palmer and Winiger write that "the classical secularization theory [is] often assumed by Chinese scholars."[33] There are a plethora of studies that claim to confirm this irreligiosity: four surveys conducted respectively in 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2011 as part of the Chinese General Social Survey found that, an average of 87 percent of Chinese mainland adults considered themselves to be irreligious.[34] *The Washington Post* writes that "China tops the list of the world's least religious nations by far [... as] decades of Communist rule have installed a widespread atheistic materialism."[35] Regarding the international context specifically, the Pew Research Center found that China is "the primary country of origin for migrants who are religiously unaffiliated."[36]

Some scholars have tried to explain this identified irreligiosity. Much of this scholarship directly contrasts China to a perceived Western world. Liú, for

31 Chéng, *Shì bǐjiào jīdūjiào de dú yī shén chóngbài hé zhōngguó shìsú mínzhòng de duō shén chóngbài*, p. 12.

32 Szonyi, *Secularization Theories and the Study of Chinese Religions*, p. 323.

33 Palmer/Winiger, *Secularization, Sacralization, and Subject Formation in Modern China*, p. 84.

34 Luo/Chen, *The Salience of Religion Under an Atheist State*, p. 856.

35 Noack, *These are the world's least religious countries*.

36 Pew Research Center, *Faith on the Move*.

example, argues that in marked contrast to moral construction in the West, "in the thousands of years of Chinese society, moral construction and governance did not rely on religion, but had a very reasonable secular moral system, such as filial piety with family as the core."[37] Similarly, Liáng simply states that today "China has replaced religion with morality."[38] Guì makes the case that aside from traditional family ethics and social norms, the significance of religion in China has been severely weakened and belief in the supernatural has all but disappeared.[39]

Finally, Yang argues that Chinese (particularly those from an educated background) actively deny the existence of Chinese religion for three reasons:

1) A history of Western missionary contempt for Chinese superstition and idol worship
2) A sense of superiority of science and modern rationality
3) Social evolutionist doctrines that place Western secular civilisation as the teleological end point.[40]

This paper intends to move against this body of scholarship, following instead in line with the studies discussed in the following section that hold that the religious context of China is more nuanced than sweeping studies that claim irreligiosity might lead one to believe.

4 Chinese Popular Religion

Yang has rightly noted that many Chinese people adhere to an assortment of personalised eclectic practices without identifying themselves with any particular religion.[41] These practices can collectively be referred to as "Chinese Popular Religion,"[42] a classification that is simultaneously separate from while also intricately echoing the Three Teachings (*sānjiào* 三教): namely, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. One could argue that the nature of

37 Liú, *Zhōngguó xūyào de shì shìsú dàodé, bùshì zōngjiào*, p. 391.

38 Liáng, *Zhōngguó wénhuà yàoyì*, p. 112.

39 Guì, *Shèng fán yītǐ: Lǐ yǔ shēngmìng jiàzhí*, p. 195.

40 Yang, *Introduction*, p. 2.

41 Yang, *Religious Diversity among the Chinese in America*, p. 71.

42 A term that is inherently nuanced. Poon notes that it is "coined by scholars in recent decades to categorize diverse religious cultures with no systematized beliefs and no sense of a religious entity, or any agreed upon collective name among practitioners and believers." Moreover, Goossaert writes that it is "best analyzed as a pluralistic religious system, characterized by many ritual and theological continuities as well as many distinctions, and sometimes tensions, between groups and practices based on locality, social class, economic status, ethnicity, or other particularistic identities."

Chinese Popular Religion has led to a number of scholarly misunderstandings. Woo, for example, criticising the 2001 Statistics Canada census that found that the Chinese population was predominantly irreligious, rightly notes that the inaccuracy of the data "comes from an understanding and definition of religion that begins with and rests on western notions of doctrinal primacy and communal and institutional affiliations [...] [and] much of Chinese religiosity is non-textual, individual, familial, communal, broadly non-institutional, synthetic and syncretic."[43] This section will briefly elucidate some of the main scholarly themes pertaining to Chinese Popular Religion in order to better analyse the religious beliefs and practices (or lack thereof) of Chinese families within the context of immigration. It should be acknowledged from the outset, however, that although Chinese Popular Religion is rarely addressed within the context of immigration, Yang has argued that Chinese immigrant children often "find it hard to maintain the unstructured beliefs and practices of their parents."[44]

One of the most prolific scholars on Chinese Popular Religion is Chau. He has argued that at the heart of popular belief in China is "magical efficacy [...] [which is] conceived of as a particular deity's miraculous response [...] to the worshiper's request for divine assistance."[45] He crucially asserts that these miraculous responses "are socially constructed: it is people and their actions that enable the establishment of human-deity relations and interactions."[46] Within this socially constructed framework, humans "do" popular religion in a plethora of ways from conventional praying and giving offerings to, for example, planting trees and watching local operas. Chau has more recently argued that Chinese Popular Religion is one of the most crucial arenas in which *guānxì*[47] is played out "not just between people in socio-political life [...] but also between people and spirits, between people and sites of worship and spiritual empowerment, among religious co-practitioners [...] [and] between deities."[48] This noticeably broad thematic flexibility is central to scholarly discourse pertaining to Chinese Popular Religion. Goossaert and Palmer regard "religious practices, networks, and institutions as part of a broader, open "social ecology" in which [...] religious elements are in perpetual relation with other elements, and in which the components and boundaries of the religious field are

43 Woo, *Chinese Popular Religion in Diaspora*, p. 152.
44 Yang, *Religious Diversity Among the Chinese in America*, p. 80.
45 Chau, *Miraculous Response*, p. 2.
46 Chau, *Miraculous Response*, p. 2.
47 This term has a somewhat large semantic variety but is usually taken to mean connections; relations; relationships.
48 Chau, *Religion in China*, p. 4.

constantly contested."[49] They define Chinese Popular Religion as "a coherent system (but a system with several hierarchies) [...] [in which] all communities and religious specialists ... share common cosmological notions, even though these notions are interpreted in many different ways."[50]

It is also worth noting that much of the scholarship pertaining to Chinese Popular Religion relates to the relationship between the government and religion. Wang, for example, draws attention to how popular religion is often overtly distinguished from institutionalised religion, writing that the government "insists on the difference between 'religion' and 'folk belief' and has not removed the discourse of 'superstition' from official proclamations, indicating the lingering influence of twentieth-century secular nationalism."[51] Similarly, Nedostup, focussing particularly on the Nanjing Decade (1927–37), examines "the modern recategorization of religious practices and people according to the assumptions of secular nationalism."[52] Seeking to offer an alternative to the narrative of "antisuperstition repression and resistance"[53] herein the assertion, as with Wang, is that despite the secularising initiative of the government, the masses were able to essentially rally under community religious practice which remained embedded in daily life. Laliberté also follows this narrative, noting how although state religion fell apart in the Republican period, "the imagery, the concepts, and many of the beliefs inherent in the ancient forms of religiosity remain a central feature of popular and communal religions to this day."[54]

In light of prior scholarship as well as my own ethnographic findings, I believe that Chinese Popular Religion can be broadly defined by three interconnected categories:

1) Gods (*tiānshén* 天神), Ancestors (*zǔxiān* 祖先), and Ghosts (*guǐ* 鬼). Gods and ancestors are subject of commemoration. There are a plethora of gods, some widely known while others known only in specific locations. Ancestors, although not themselves deities, are equally worthy of religious obligation. When a person dies, they require a surviving relative (especially a son) to take care from them in death. In return, they can bestow various boons to the living. One can become a ghost in death for

49 Goossaert/Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 13.
50 Goossaert/Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*, p. 20.
51 Wang, *"Folk Belief"*, p. 164.
52 Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, p. 3.
53 Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes*, p. 111.
54 Laliberté, *China in a Secular Age*, p. 4.

many reasons such as dying without offspring. Ghosts have the power to cause varying problems for the living.

2) Bài 拜 and Lǐ 理. Both terms have a large semantic variety. Bài can mean "to pray," "to pay respect," "to worship," "to visit," and "to salute." Lǐ can mean, among others, "inner essence," "intrinsic order," "reason," "logic," "truth," "to pay attention to," and "put in order." In the context of Chinese Popular Religion, both terms constitute the essential embodiment of religious belief through a bodily action, or, in Peng's words, "doing religion that might be filtered out by etic concepts and categories."[55] In a practical sense, it can constitute giving various forms of offerings, ritual cleaning, evocation, and showing reverence.[56]

3) Bào 報 and yīng 应. These terms also have a large degree of semantic variety. Bào can mean: "to report," "to announce," "to inform," "to respond," "to repay," "to retaliate," and "to retribute." Yīng can mean "to answer," "to respond," "to comply with," and "to deal or cope with." Within the context of Chinese Popular religion, the terms encapsulate the concept of reciprocity, or, more specifically, the necessary reciprocal obligation within this universe. One can find a clear example of this in the concept of filiality (*xiào* 孝): "children are expected to repay their eternal debt to their parents by caring for them in old age and then later, via bài, in death."[57]

This study is therefore grounded in the aforementioned studies pertaining to popular religion. It also utilises the working definition of religion as coined by Yang. I have opted to use this definition on the simple grounds that from an ethnographic standpoint that accounts for both Chinese religion in the PRC as well as Chinese immigrant religiosity, Yang continues to shape the field. He argues that religion includes four elements:[58]

1) A belief in the supernatural.
2) A set of beliefs regarding life and the world.
3) A set of ritual practices.
4) A distinct social organisation or moral community.[59]

55 Peng, *Religion and Religious Practices in Rural China*, p. xxii.

56 Chadwin, *Speaking to My Ancestors*, p. 180.

57 Chadwin, "Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion", p. 4.

58 It should be acknowledged that this is not a comprehensive definition of religion but is instead a multidimensional categorisation that suits the context of this paper (namely an ethnographic study of Chinese Popular Religion).

59 Yang, *Atlas of Religion in China*, p. 1.

5 Methodology

This study utilises ethnography in order to best look "within the Chinese household instead of arbitrarily employing cross-culture comparisons."[60] The fieldwork itself took place over a period of two months: from May 03, 2022 to June 30, 2022. The data collection consisted of both semi-structured interviews (which were carried out in the interviewees' language of choice: usually Mandarin in the case of the parents and English in the case of the children) and participant observation carried out in the family homes. Interviews typically lasted between one and two hours. Herein, I utilised Harvey's concept of "guesthood"[61] wherein meetings with interviewees are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed."[62]

Unlike, Qingling Yang who found that religion was a difficult topic to discuss with Chinese immigrants – "They were reluctant to engage into further discussion on religion because they intended to protect themselves from any possible prosecution"[63] – I did not find this to be the case at all: every interviewee was more than happy to discuss religion and their own beliefs.

The sample itself consisted of twenty ethnic Hàn 汉[64] households in Edinburgh. By "Chinese", this study specifically refers to those from the PRC.

The overall sample constituted 20 mothers, 19 fathers, and 22 children.[65] Utilising the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, I determine "children" to mean individuals under the age of eighteen.[66] All of the children interviewed were over the age of 10, with the youngest being 11 and the oldest being 17. Each family were first generation migrants with the most

60 Wang/Chang, *Parenting and Child Socialization in Contemporary China*, p. 60.

61 See, for example, Harvey, *Food Sex and Strangers*, p. 94.

62 Arthur, *Contemporary Religions in China*, p. 16.

63 Qingling Yang, *Parenting Between Cultures*, p. 106.

64 China's majority ethnic group.

65 Given that many of my interviewees were children I adopted BERA's guidelines to ensure that my project and subsequent data were 'ethically acceptable.' In my capacity as researcher, I did all in my power to ensure that the participants I interviewed were protected from any manner of harm at every stage of planning and execution of the project. I therefore thoroughly briefed each participant (including the guardians) about my project, provided an ongoing option to opt out at any moment, and ensured that I acquired informed consent. Names of all participants (including the parents) are anonymised and no residential addresses are disclosed. I have assigned pseudonyms that reflect both gender and ethnic background to each participant. I do reveal the age of each child participant.

66 U.N. General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

established family having migrated 15 years ago and the most recent migrants having migrated 6 years ago. Eight families came from rural areas (one from Sìchuān, Hénán, Guǎngdōng, and two from Héběi, Shāndōng, and Zhèjiāng respectively) while the remaining twelve all came from large urban cities: two from Běijīng, four from Shànghǎi, one from Guǎngzhōu, one from Shēnzhèn, two from Chéngdū, one from Harbin (Hā'ěrbīn), and one from Hángzhōu.

6 Discussion of Fieldwork Findings

This paper will now turn to discussing the fieldwork findings. I have opted to divide these findings between the parents and the children.

6.1 *Parents*

Absolutely every parent self-identified as irreligious. Indeed, in line with prior research, many even lauded the irreligiosity of the Chinese people. Mrs Hóu, for example, told me "No Chinese people believe in religion anymore. We no longer need it."[67] Unsurprisingly, this self-identification of irreligiosity was reflected in the parents' attitudes towards the term "secular." Although only two parents used the term without my being the one to bring it up, when asked directly, absolutely every parent regarded their own beliefs and practices as wholly secular. Mr Hǎo stated:

> The entire nation of China is secular. Everything myself and my family believe in is secular.[68]

All but four parents made an active distinction between their own secular beliefs and what they perceived as the predominantly religious Scottish population. Mrs Hán encapsulated this sentiment thus:

> We always knew it would be difficult for our family moving from China to Scotland because while everyone in Scotland is religious, nobody in China believes in religion. I was worried that my children would not fit in at school because they do not know anything about Christianity.

Similarly, Mr Kāng simply stated that "China is secular, Scotland is religious."[69]

67 所有中国人都不相信任何宗教。宗教是不需要的。
68 整个中国民族都是世俗的。我和我家人所相信的都是世俗的。
69 中国是世俗的，苏格兰是宗教的。

However, although this fits neatly within the scholarship that claims that the Chinese are predominantly irreligious, the topic of Chinese Popular Religion complicated matters. Despite every single parent reporting irreligiosity, it was clear that every single parent was engaged in the practice of Chinese Popular Religion. Each household had some form of a shrine, ranging from small tables in the corner of a room, to entire rooms. Moreover, each parent openly spoke to me about their various beliefs and practices. Although none would refer to these beliefs and practices as religion, the dedication was pronounced. Every parent engaged in ancestor commemoration and all reported (to varying degrees of frequency) praying to a wide variety of gods. Moreover, this religious belief punctuated the daily lives of each parent to an exceptionally high degree. An illustrative example of this was when Mr Zhāng was complaining to Mrs Zhāng about his bad back. He claimed that he did not know why it was hurting him so much. Later on, Mrs Zhāng called Mr Zhāng into their ancestor room and told Mr Zhāng that his back was hurting because the last offering he had given to his late grandparents was chocolate. Mrs Zhāng acted as if the reason was blatantly obvious:

> Of course you have a bad back, you stupid old fool! Your Grandfather hated chocolate![70]

She then explained to me that Mr Zhāng's grandfather had given Mr Zhāng a bad back as an expression of dissatisfaction with the offering. Mr Zhāng did not question this reason for a second and instead acted as if he had simply made a foolish mistake. That night, he gave a new offering of tea. However, when I asked whether the belief in ancestors was religious or secular, they thought my question to be extremely odd. Mrs Zhāng replied:

> Secular, of course! We have a duty to our ancestors but that has nothing to do with religion. We are not Christians![71]

Thus, one finds a paradox that reflects the findings of Palmer and Winiger.[72] Despite adamantly reporting secularity, the lives of the parents were very much governed by their popular religious beliefs. It is therefore tempting to claim

70 你的背当然不好，你这个老笨蛋！你的爷爷是讨厌巧克力的！

71 当然是世俗！我们对祖先有责任，但是这个跟宗教没关系。我们不是基督教的！

72 Palmer/Winiger, *Secularization, Sacralization, and Subject Formation in Modern China*, p. 100.

that the reason for this apparent contradiction is simply one of semantics: that the terms "religion" or "secular" simply have different meanings in Chinese. The term religion (*zōngjiào* 宗教) is a somewhat recent term in Mandarin and is only really used within the context of specific religious traditions (*bùtóng jiàotiáo* 不同教条). Therefore, as long as a Chinese person does not adhere to one specific religious tradition, it makes sense that they would not identify as religious. To illustrate this, Mrs Wú after having made an offering to Guānyīn,[73] explained:

> My sister is a Buddhist but I am not. I do not believe in religion at all.[74]

Even though Mrs Wú genuinely believed that Guānyīn is a physically present god that one can pray to, this belief was not in any way regarded as religious.

One could therefore argue that this semantic difference between English and Chinese is the reason for this apparent contradiction. The self-proclaimed secular identity of all parents also extended to fully rejecting any sense of "spirituality" (*jīngshén* 精神) and "superstition" (*míxìn* 迷信): all parents adamantly claimed that on top of being irreligious, they also were in no way spiritual or superstitious.

However, one could also argue that the full picture is more nuanced. Not only did some parents genuinely believe that their beliefs and practices were secular, they also believed that it was their logical attitude towards their beliefs, in contrast to Christians, that made them secular. In a very revealing interview, Mr Hóu explained:

> If you do not understand Chinese culture, then commemorating ancestors or praying to Confucius must look like religion. But if you knew Chinese culture then you would be able to see that this is not religion at all. When Chinese people pray, they do it with both their mind and their heart. For example, my cousin really really wanted a son. He tried praying and offering to our local village god but his wife just never got pregnant. He therefore saw that his prayers were not working. So instead, he started praying and offering to Guānyīn. Suddenly his wife became pregnant and they soon had a son. This is the difference between Chinese people and British people. Scottish people only pray with their heart. It is so obvious to us that the Christian God does not answer most prayers. A Chinese

73 The bodhisattva of compassion in the Buddhist tradition.

74 我的姐姐相信佛教，但我不信。我一点都不相信宗教。

> person would be able to see that praying is not working and would try another god.

When asked to elaborate on what religion actually is, Mr Hóu told me:

> Religion is when you only pray with your heart. No matter how many times your prayers fail, you keep praying with your heart because you have faith.[75]

His wife, Mrs Hóu interjected here:

> That's right. Religion is when you believe something is right without question. The secular beliefs of the Chinese mean that we only believe what we know is a fact.[76]

This would suggest that reducing this subject to semantics is not giving the subject enough credit. Herein, one finds evidence that within the Chinese context, religion is based on unwavering faith, whereas Chinese Popular Religion, due to its utilitarian nature, is regarded as secular. A similar case was found with the Féng family. Mrs Féng, whose daughter was currently studying for GCSE exams, told me:

> I have prayed to Cáishén[77] for what feels like my whole life. My family has had good luck and I know that I can thank Cáishén for this. But last year, my daughter started to study for her GCSE's. I know that she is smart but I was shocked when I saw what her predicted grades were. They were terrible! I therefore stopped praying to Cáishén and started praying to Confucius. Now her target grades are much better!

When asked to elaborate on her reason for turning to Confucius, she said:

> It just makes sense. Cáishén is very good at bringing luck and wealth, but what does he know about studying? I had never before prayed to

75 用你的心来祈祷，这就是宗教。不管你的祷告失败了多少次，你仍然用你的心祷告因为你有信心。

76 是的。宗教就是当你毫无疑问地相信某事是正确的。中国人民的世俗信仰意味着我们仅仅相信我们知道是事实的事。

77 财神: a god of wealth who is often depicted atop a black tiger and holding a golden staff.

> Confucius but I knew that praying to him just made more sense. Just look at the results!

Thus, one finds that the parents did not perceive a contradiction. Mr Liào explained the relationship between his beliefs and religion thus:

> Commemorating my ancestors is not religion. I could even go to the church down the road, pray, and it would still not be religion. The Christian God is probably very powerful. He must be when you look at how many people pray to him. But he is ultimately just one god. My beliefs are secular because I use reason and then *choose* if and who to pray to.

When asked to explain why commemorating his ancestors was not religion, he responded:

> My ancestors are not all-powerful beings that I put my faith in. I mean, I remember my Grandfather and he was anything but a god. He was drunk half the time and very forgetful! A very careless man! But it is my duty to commemorate him and everyone must always perform their duties!!

Similarly, Mr Rèn also added something of a worldly dimension to the debate:

> Of course commemorating my ancestors is not religious. This is my Grandmother and Grandfather we are talking about, not some god with a white beard in the sky.[78]

A semantic problem would imply that there is something of a misunderstanding at play. Although it is certainly the case that religion and secular do not adequately translate into the Chinese context, I would argue that the data presented here suggests that Chinese parents are actually more reflective of the relationship between their own beliefs about religion and secularity than those who misunderstand terms would suggest.

In summary, these parents all possessed strong Chinese Popular Religious beliefs but perceived themselves to be secular families living in a predominantly religious culture (namely Scotland).

78 当然敬祖不是宗教的。他们是我爷爷奶奶，不是住在天上长着白胡子的神。

6.2 *Children*

The children of this study painted a somewhat different picture to that of their parents. 14 reported irreligiosity whereas 8 were unsure, responding with phrases such as "I don't know" to the question of whether or not they are religious. Unlike their parents, the children expressed a far greater sense of doubt pertaining to whether or not they are religious. Hán Bóyǎn (male; 15) looked confused when I inquired about his religious identity:

> I don't think that I believe in religion but I'm not very sure.

When I asked him to elaborate, he told me:

> I know that I am not a Christian or anything like that. But we learn about religion in school and I think it's all a bit confusing. Mum makes me offer to our ancestors and I think that that is a little bit like religion. To be honest, I don't really think about it.

Similarly, Hóu Yǎchún (female; 17) demonstrated an impressive degree of reflection of her own identity:

> No I am not religious but I think you would probably tell me that me and my family are religious. We pray just like religious people do and I have a friend who pointed at our family shrine and said 'is that like a religious thing, or something?' So no, I don't think that me and my family are religious but I can see why you might think that we are.

When I asked her why she self-identified as irreligious as opposed to religious, she told me:

> I don't think that I am religious because I don't believe in one religion. I have a friend in class who is a Christian and she can really easily tell me 'I am a Christian and I believe in Christianity.' What should I say? I am religious and I pray to these people – that's right, people – that nobody else in the world prays to? My family has all these beliefs and practices that look religious but I wouldn't call it religious because there isn't a specific religion that these things belong to.

Thus, I found that all 22 of the children very much adhered to Chinese Popular Religion but only the minority (7 out of 22) shared the certainty of their

parents in that they firmly regarded their beliefs and practices as irreligious and saw no uncertainty in the matter. Indeed, the majority (15 of 22) saw a difference between their own beliefs and that of their parents. Hé Zhīhuá (female; 14) explained:

> Mum and Dad would totally tell you that we don't believe in religion. They would probably tell you that no one in China believes in religion. Sure, I also would say that I am not religious, but I don't think it's as simple as my parents think it is, you know? I'm like the only person in my whole class who prays to anything. It's not like I'm praying to Jesus but I know how strange it sounds being like 'I pray but I'm not religious.'

This acceptance of nuance unique to the children also extended to discussions of the secular.[79] Jiǎ Mànyín (male; 15), for example, told me:

> Yes we are secular because we don't believe in any religion. But I think I am less secular than my classmates at school. They don't pray to anyone and me and my family sometimes pray to our ancestors. I think that probably makes us a little bit less secular.

Rèn Jìmíng (male; 14) also told me:

> We are probably somewhere in the middle. It's not like you can learn about our religion in RE. We don't exactly *have* a religion. But I'm not stupid. I know what it looks like when me and my parents give offerings. So we're not religious but were also not not religious, if that makes sense. [He paused at this point before adding] This really doesn't make sense but it's how we are.

These children also rejected the notion that they believed in folk religion. Bái Mànyín (female; 16) told me:

> I know we commemorate our ancestors and all that, but it's not folk religion. That makes it sound like we are people from the country who need to pray to gods to make it rain. We only commemorate our ancestors because it is something that we have to do.

79 It should be noted that I had to define the term secular to all but four of the children.

Similarly, although none of the 22 children regarded themselves as spiritual, a surprising 16 of the 22 regarded their own beliefs as well as those of their parents as superstitious. Sū Yǎchún (female; 16) revealed:

> My parents don't really understand irony. They think that all of the people in my class are superstitious because they have religious education in school. When I try to tell them that nobody here cares about religion they won't hear it. Then mum will turn around and give an offering to Guānyīn so that I will do well at school. But that's not superstitious. That's apparently just smart.

Péng Yǎchún (female; 15) echoed this sentiment:

> Oh my god, my family is totally superstitious but mum and dad would get super angry if they heard me say it! Like, a few weeks ago there was a parents evening at school and mum was super worried about my grades. She prayed and prayed to like six different gods and then thanked *them* instead of me when my teachers told her that I was doing really well! That is totally superstitious!

It is clear that the migration context is key to the difference between the children and their parents. Whereas the parents of this study have maintained a Chinese perception of religion and the secular, their children had adopted a more international outlook: although the children very much retained a strong sense of Chinese Popular Religious identity, the process of acclimatising to Edinburgh society had given them more of a reflective outlook on their own religious identity. Kāng Yǎchún (male; 17) stated:

> When me and my parents first moved here, they kept telling me that I would need to be careful because we are moving to a Christian country. They would tell me that because we are Chinese, we haven't believed in religion for centuries so I will need to be respectful of all of my Christian classmates. But now that I am here, I can see that it was all bullshit. Hardly anyone here is a Christian and *we* are the ones who look religious to everyone else. I know that there are cultural differences and all that, but my parents were just wrong about this one. What's crazy is that they still both think that everyone here, unlike us, is religious.

Similarly, Céng Hónghán (male; 16) told me:

> My parents still think that we came from this totally secular society and that religion is like totally dead in China. It's not like I want to tell you that I am religious or anything, but I can totally see that Scotland is *way* more secular than China. I mean, I am pretty sure that my family prayed more this week than most of my classmates' families prayed in their lives.

Thus, one finds that the children in this study, like their parents, very much adhered to Chinese Popular Religion but, unlike their parents, saw their own religious identity with uncertainty.

7 Conclusion

Although the sample size was small, this study has demonstrated the complicated relationship between religion and secularity within an international Chinese context.

The most obvious conclusion of this paper is that in stark contrast to the predominant view that the Chinese are irreligious, the families in this study demonstrated deep religious convictions albeit in a Chinese manner: they themselves genuinely regarded themselves to be irreligious despite very much adhering to what those in a Western context would regard as religious. I believe that there is a strong case to be made for each of Yang's aforementioned criteria being met:

1) A belief in the supernatural: each parent and child readily reported making contact in various ways with gods and ancestors.
2) A set of beliefs regarding life and the world: each parent and child believed that they lived in a hierarchal universe in which they themselves had various obligations to fulfil.
3) A set of ritual practices: although the form and frequency varied, ritual observation was readily observable in every household in this study.
4) A distinct social organisation or moral community: this was observed in the family units. Each parent believed they had a moral obligation to their child/ children and likewise the children were aware of their moral obligations to their parents.

I thus found that even in an international context, the families still perceived themselves to exist in the same moral cosmos populated with gods and ancestors and governed by reciprocity. Indeed, Yǎchún (female; 16) encapsulated this definition:

> Everything about what we believe and do is superstitious! We pray to ancestors, we pray to gods, we give offerings when stupid hot water doesn't work on a sore throat! It annoys me that my parents can't see the superstition but it's not like I don't believe in all of this as well. If I'm being really honest with you, yes I believe that I can communicate with my ancestors and yes I believe that when something is bothering me, they can usually help.

Lǐ is right in highlighting the secular logic Chinese people apply to daily religious belief and practice insofar as they themselves very much regard these beliefs and practices as secular. However, to claim that "they treat supernatural gods the same way they treat mundane things"[80] is, I believe, an injustice to the level of importance these Chinese families placed on their beliefs. I therefore also take fault with Wang claiming that religious affairs "were never so influential"[81] to the Chinese. Religious affairs (albeit popular religious affairs) were of enormous importance to the parents and children in this study even though they would not regard their beliefs and practices as religion. However, although this conclusion has worth insofar as it has stemmed from a rare insight into Chinese immigrant family life, it will come as little surprise to those well versed in the intricate nature of Chinese Popular Religion. The key contribution of this paper lies instead in the identification of a marked generational difference between the parents and the children of this study. Whereas the parents fully perceived themselves to be irreligious and secular, their children, for the most part, were less certain, readily acknowledging the complicated relationship between religion and the secular. Indeed, many of the responses from the parents echoed Yang's description of being questioned by an academic from the PRC as to why she was studying religion in China when "it has never been very important in China and the Chinese people have always been pragmatic and secular."[82] Moreover, whereas the children were somewhat reluctant to provide concrete answers pertaining to definitions of the secular, their parents comfortably fell into Wohlrab-Sahr and Burchardt's third and fourth multiple secularities categories. Indeed, I believe that it is significant that although Goossaert and Palmer's "religious question"[83] is still very much alive, the fact that the children were willing to directly engage with this question in a manner that has been heavily informed by their immigration

80 Lǐ, *Bèi shìsú lǐxìng liyòng de shénlíngmen*, p. 255.
81 Wang, *Secular China*, p. 126.
82 Yang, *Chinese Religiosities*, p. 1.
83 Goossaert/Palmer, *The Religious Question in Modern China*.

context, adds an interesting new dimension to the issue. The reason for the generational difference was due to the level of migration assimilation. While the parents still held a Chinese view of religion and secularity, their children were in-between this Chinese worldview and that of their new Edinburgh home. Thus, the majority of children, after comparing themselves to their Scottish peers, were able to see how their own beliefs and practices could be regarded as religious despite themselves not seeing it as such. Herein, one finds something of an echo of Appadurai's "globally variable synaesthesia,"[84] a phrase which Appadurai employs to encapsulate "the finer pragmatic details of the difficulties of crosscultural global communication."[85] Identifying the creation of "ever new terminological kaleidoscopes,"[86] Appadurai goes as far as to claim that "the very relationship of reading to hearing and seeing may vary in important ways that determine the morphology of these different ideoscapes as they shape themselves in different national and transnational contexts."[87] The children of this study were noticeably involved in the creation of their own terminological kaleidoscopes pertaining to their developing understandings of religion and the secular- understandings that were informed by *both* the Chinese and Scottish ideoscapes. Whereas the parents espoused typical Chinese secular rhetoric founded in rationality, the children (due to their developing religious ideoscapes) not only did not share the unshifting conviction of their parents and instead took a more nuanced approach to religion and the secular, but were (in the case of more than half) willing to regarded their own beliefs as well as those of their parents as superstitious.

The lived religious landscape of Chinese immigrants remains an understudied field and studies that account for Chinese childhood religion are especially rare. Although further research is certainly warranted (especially given the limited sample size of this study), the findings of this paper will hopefully generate further dialogue.

Bio

Joseph Chadwin in a current FWF Fellow at the University of Vienna. Particularly favouring ethnographic methodologies, his research interests include

84 Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, p. 10.
85 Threadgold, *Lawyers Reading Law/ Lore as Popular Culture*, p. 31.
86 Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, p. 10.
87 Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, p. 10.

Chinese religion, childhood and adolescent religion, Buddhism, Hinduism, religious identity, religion and migration, and religion and education.

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An Ethnographic Study of How Chinese University Students in Vienna Observed Spring Festival during Covid-19

Joseph Chadwin

1. Introduction

Spring Festival (*Chūnjié*) is by far "the most important annual festival for Chinese people" (Wáng and Xuān 2013: 160).[1] Lǐ is therefore extremely apt in writing that "the shadow of the Spring Festival follows international [Chinese] students all over the world" (Lǐ 2019: 2).[2] However, given the apparent importance of Spring Festival and the ever increasing scholarship pertaining to student religiosity, it is somewhat surprising to find that there are little to no dedicated studies of how Chinese international students celebrate (or choose not to celebrate) the festival. Indeed, given that, in their study of religiosity among university students, Filsinger, Faulkner, and Warland argued in 1979 that "there now exists an extensive literature reporting both theoretical and empirical results of efforts to understand the complex nature of religiosity" (Filsinger, Faulkner, and Warland 1979: 136), it is surprising to find that in 2021 very little effort has been made to understand the religious experience of Chinese students. Although it should certainly be acknowledged that there exist several studies—often relating to the wider academic examination of Chinese immigrants converting to Christianity upon migration[3]—regarding Chinese international students converting to Christianity upon enrolling in Western universities (Chen 2008; Hall 2006; Wang and Yang 2006; Yang 1999), two problems are apparent: Chinese students in the West who convert to Christianity represent a minority within the overall population of Chinese international students, and this discussion often takes place within

1 *Chūnjié shì zhōngguó rén yī nián zhōng zuì zhòngyào de jiérì.* 春节是中国人一年中最重要的节日。

2 *Chūnjié de yǐng zǐ gēnzhe liúxuéshēng zǒu dào shìjiè gèdì.* 春节的影子跟着留学生走到世界各地。This and each subsequent translation are my own.

3 Fenggang Yang, for example, has long been a pioneer in this field (see Yang and Tamney 2006).

an evangelising narrative.[4] This article intends to provide much needed data pertaining to the religiosity of Chinese students. More specifically, it intends to examine how Chinese students in Vienna observed Spring Festival in 2021. Writing of the difficulties international students are often faced with, Lin (2012: 336) argues that "international students' awareness of the local culture and societal norms endlessly interact with their old frames of reference." Spring Festival arguably constitutes the strongest "reference" point for Chinese students studying abroad. An in-depth examination of how a small sample of Chinese students in Vienna utilise (or indeed choose not to utilise) this reference point will bring us a step closer to understanding the Chinese religious experience in an international context. It should be acknowledged from the outset that the case study presented does not constitute a normal Spring Festival: compared to past years, the restrictions brought about by Covid-19 meant that the 2021 Spring Festival in Vienna was quite the anomaly. Thus, this article demonstrates how Chinese international students in Vienna responded to the unusual circumstances. I will argue that this response had two different forms. The first manifestation is that the religious beliefs of students were unaltered but they made the active decision to be inactive during the festival. I refer to these students as "passive observers." The second response students had was to be proactive in instigating their own private expressions of religiosity. I refer to these students as "active observers."

2. Student Religiosity

The period of late adolescence and young adulthood that encapsulates the university years is often characterised as a time of movement towards greater independence and a more clearly articulated personal philosophy (Pargament et al. 1984: 266). Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003: 726) were right in stating that the university period is "a critical time when students search for meaning in life and examine their spiritual/religious beliefs and values." Although scholars often disagree as to whether the university experience increases or decreases religiosity, it is clear that they agree that attending university has a large effect on the religious beliefs of students. This section shall briefly outline some of the main themes of scholarship pertaining to student religiosity.

4 For example, in her study of Chinese students' attraction to Christianity, Elisabeth den Boer readily admits that her role as a researcher sometimes led her to adopt the role of a "spiritual leader" (den Boer 2007: 27).

2.1. The University Experience Decreases Student Religiosity

Although recently it is often regarded as something of a dated argument, much of the respective scholarship asserts that the university experience decreases religiosity among students. For example, Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003: 724) note that "most of the available evidence points to religious decline and enhanced secularization among students during college." They elaborate that "most of the literature to date suggests that college attendance does tend to weaken students' religious attitudes and behaviours as a result of distance from family members, certain institutional environments, and interactions with nonreligious peers and faculty" (ibid.: 726). Feldman (1970: 123) notes how a large number of studies argue that university students "come to attach less importance to religious values, become more sceptical about God, the church, and religious activities, and become less religiously orthodox and fundamentalistic." Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977: 109) famously wrote that university life is "a breeding ground for apostasy." In his study of 311 freshmen and 146 seniors (students in their third or fourth year), Hunsberger (1978: 160) found that the university experience had a liberalising effect upon students that made them attend church less frequently: seniors reported attending church less frequently and having a less orthodox belief in the Bible. Moreover, he claimed that students were increasingly experiencing greater doubt concerning the religious beliefs taught to them (ibid.: 161). Katz (1967: 153) found a "sharp decrease in conventional religious attitudes of university students." Brinkerhoff (1993: 235) writes that religious disaffiliation is particularly common among young adults. A more recent study can be found in Smith (2001: 96) who writes that "I have never encountered students who did not think that they had a spiritual side to their nature, but organized, institutionalized spirituality (which is what religion comes down to) is not well regarded on campus." Hunter (1983: 132) even goes as far as making the sweeping statement that it is "a well-established fact that education, even Christian education, secularizes."

Roozen (1980: 443) identifies a mass religious "dropout rate" among university students "due primarily to the lessening of parental influence characteristic of this stage in the life cycle and a generalized feeling that the church has little of interest or relevance to offer." Although not arguing that university necessarily decreases student religiosity, Mayrl and Oeur (2009: 270–271) note the disruptive effect of university: "[T]he transplanting of students from their teenage congregation to the college setting likely will have disruptive and transformative effects upon the role models available to students, the type of social capital generated, and the extent to which network closure is relevant."

Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler (2007: 1686) note a potential danger to a student's religiosity upon matriculation: that of weak religious socialisation. They assert that if parents do not "actively affirm and transmit the oral and written traditions of a religion, their failure to 'teach the language' results in young adults who cannot 'speak the language' and who are at elevated risk of shedding their religious value system altogether." They therefore reckon that "once adolescents leave the structures (i.e., families) that have patterned their religious lives, religiosity may simply be left behind as well" (ibid.). Welch and Barrish (1982: 365) also argue that since few of the students included in their sample were married or had children, they were not motivated to "participate in the life of a congregation to obtain guidance in family interactions."

2.2. The University Experience Increases Student Religiosity

Many modern studies of student religiosity have argued that university tends to cause students to become more religious. This assertion even extends beyond that of academia: the *New York Times* reported in 2007 that "there is probably more active religious life [on campus] now than there has been in 100 years" (Finder 2007). Possibly the most famous study to date is that carried out by the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI). Based on survey data obtained from 112,232 students attending a national sample of 236 colleges and universities, their 2004 study of the spiritual life of university students revealed that:

> Today's college students have very high levels of spiritual interest and involvement […]. They espouse many spiritual and religious values and virtues […]. Four in five indicate "having an interest in spirituality" and "believing in the sacredness of life," and nearly two-thirds say that "my spirituality is a source of joy" […]. About four in five report that they attended religious services in the past year and that they discussed religion/spirituality with friends and family. More than three-fourths believe in God, and more than two in three say that their religious/spiritual beliefs "provide me with strength, support, and guidance" (HERI 2004: 3–4).

Some studies opt to examine student "spirituality" instead of (or alongside) religiosity. For example, in their study of the "spiritual life" of university students, Astin and Astin (2010: 3) found that "many students are […] actively engaged in a spiritual quest [… and] four in five students tell us that they 'have an interest in spirituality'." Similarly, Cherry, DeBerg, and Por-

terfield (2001: 276) argue that undergraduates can often be classified as "spiritual seekers rather than religious dwellers" who construct "their spirituality without much regard to the boundaries dividing religious denominations, traditions, or organizations." Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno (2003: 736) make an active distinction between religiosity and spirituality among students, arguing that whereas the former tends to decline following matriculation, "they became more committed to integrating spirituality into their lives."

2.3. The University Experience Has No Effect on Student Religiosity

Some scholars argue that the religiosity of students does not change during the course of university. For example, Mayrl and Oeur (2009: 263) maintain that arguments suggesting that student religiosity increases or decreases during university should be disregarded, as the representation of "a lot" or "a little" religion among university students "largely depends on the frame of reference." They instead argue that

> [i]n many respects, interest in religion and spirituality among college students appears broad, but not necessarily deep. The more time and investment religion requires of them, the less likely students are to engage; hence, students are more likely to believe in God and to pray occasionally than they are to attend services or participate in campus religious organizations (ibid.).

They thus conclude that, although students have extensive religious and spiritual commitments, for many of them these commitments are not a priority during university: religious practice declines during university, while religious beliefs are maintained (ibid.: 272).

Hurtado et al. (2007: 25) found that the areas in which the majority of students noted "no change" included their "religious beliefs and convictions": fifty-six per cent of final year students in their study reported "no change" in their religious beliefs and convictions since the beginning of university. They note that a more recent line of inquiry is whether the religious commitments are ignored or reconstituted during the college years (ibid.: 265). Similarly, Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler (2007: 1683) write that, although student life at university is marked by a clear decline in outward religious expression and dropping out of organised religion altogether,[5] the overwhelming majority

5 A phenomenon that they claim "no religious group is immune to" (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1667).

maintain at least a "static level" of personal religiosity at university: "for most, it seems religious belief systems go largely untouched for the duration of their education."

Clydesdale (2007: 50) argues that university students simply do not tend to concern themselves with matters of religion and spirituality. He holds that "religious and spiritual identities are peripheral to [their] quest and stowed in an identity lockbox for a later point in the life cycle."

2.4. The Effect of Religion on Student Mental Health

One of the more recent common lines of inquiry into student religiosity pertains to the effect of religion on the mental health of students. To this end, Pargament et al. (1984: 266) argue that religion serves a variety of functions for university students, each one of great benefit to mental health: "[I]t provides personal support, social support, social gain, and/or satisfies a sense of obligation." Phillips and Henderson (2006: 166) argue that evidence suggests that religious people have lower rates of depression than non-religious people. While readily acknowledging that the relationship between religiosity and mental health is difficult to measure and interpret, they assert that "there is a clear link between self-reported religiousness and symptoms of depression, with those students who profess some level of religiousness having fewer symptoms than those who claim none" (ibid.: 169). They identify three components that define the relationship between religion and mental health:

1. Religious participation offers people opportunities for regular social interaction with others who share their beliefs and values. These social networks supply companionship and comfort during stressful times.
2. Religion helps people make sense of undesirable life events and conditions, and helps them cope with personal setbacks such as grief and health problems.
3. Religion promotes healthy lifestyles. Studies show that religious participation decreases the likelihood that one will abuse alcohol or drugs, two key factors associated with mental health problems (ibid.: 166).

Much of this scholarship surrounding religiosity and student mental health focuses on the social aspect of university religious life. For example, in their survey of 2,000 students, Pargament et al. (1984: 278) found that students most frequently cited the importance of being part of a community of believers and of responding to people in physical or emotional need: they "feel a need to be part of a group or community." Bryant (2007: 3) writes that

religious participation on campus is itself a form of social integration: "[F]aith communities are instrumental in the formation of friendships and intimacy with other people, and these supportive networks, in turn, provide a wide range of psychological and spiritual benefits." Mayrl and Oeur (2009: 267) note that Bryant's hypothesis is supported by qualitative studies "which have shown that participation in religious communities provides an important source of support during times of stress and distress." In her survey of 3,680 students across fifty four-year colleges and universities in the US, Bryant found that the first year of university saw a ten percentage-point increase in frequent depression among both religious group participants and non-participants. She concluded that "the only reason participating in religious groups does not boast a stronger negative correlation with emotional well-being is because these students tend to develop friendship networks that are ultimately beneficial for them" (Bryant 2007: 12).

2.5. The Limitations of Investigations into Student Religiosity

Despite the growth in studies pertaining to student religiosity, it is clear that the field is somewhat rife with problems. Some scholars have thus noted the limitations and problems of measuring student religiosity. For example, Mayrl and Oeur (2009: 260) argue that "most of the voluminous literature on religion and higher education has been normative or theoretical in character, filled with grand claims noticeably lacking in empirical justification." This study certainly makes no such "grand claims." Given the small scale of my sample size, this study does not claim to offer anything sweeping but instead gives an in-depth look into Chinese student religiosity in Vienna.

Much of the scholarship surrounding student religiosity relies upon survey data. Some scholars have rightly noted the problems that come with this methodology. For instance, Clydesdale (2007: 49) writes that "analysis of a static questionnaire gives little basis to conclude, as HERI does," that students are actively engaged in a spiritual quest. Bender (2007: 2) wrote that studies (particularly those that utilise survey analyses) pertaining to student religiosity "at best capture only a narrow range of students' religious and spiritual practices, narratives, identities, and meaningful affiliations." He later rightly noted that "most survey analyses focus on the most general and indistinct religious and spiritual questions rather than asking about specific rituals or practices, or using language that might be more specific rather than universal" (ibid.: 8). Despite its undeniably impressive scope, the HERI's measurement of student religiosity comes from a questionnaire in which stu-

dents have a list of twenty-one options to the prompt "current religious preference" (Stolzenberg et al. 2019: 158).[6] A short glance at this list of options reveals a very Western view of religion, one in which a Chinese student is likely to choose the option "Atheist" despite readily engaging in religious practice that does not neatly fall within the "World Religions" discourse (namely Chinese Popular Religion). Thus, despite their acknowledgement that "students coming to campuses today are a diverse group ethnically, socio-economically, religiously, and politically" (HERI 2004: 22), it is somewhat easy to claim that HERI fails to account for religious practices that fall outside of the narrow and dated vision of the World Religions discourse. This problem can be found in many studies that utilise questionnaires to measure student religiosity. Höllinger and Smith, for example, although developing a scale that allows for a number of Chinese religious practices—which they refer to as "Asian techniques (Yoga, Tai Chi, etc.), meditation" (Höllinger and Smith 2002: 234)—regard the practices as "New Age." Furthermore, Mayrl and Oeur (2009: 264) note that research has not provided a compelling answer to the question of how the college experience "affects the *content* of religious beliefs"—a problem that is very difficult to address with questionnaires. They go on to suggest that it is wholly possible that qualitative studies that have found an increase in student religiosity have focused inordinately on those predisposed to transformation, whereas large-scale surveys fail to notice subtle differences in belief over time. Their proposed solution is to call for detailed, multimethod approaches that explore, among other things, the content of student beliefs: "[G]ood interview-based studies will be essential to determine which specific questions to ask of students […] the payoff in attending to such nuanced measures would undoubtedly be the identification of a more complex and interesting pattern of beliefs and practices among college students" (ibid.: 269). It is for this reason that I have opted to utilise in-depth interviews. I believe that survey studies are at best sweeping and at worst highly problematic as they fail to account for beliefs (lived Chinese popular religion) that do not neatly fall within generic "Western" categorisations of religions.

Another common problem with student religiosity surveys is the quality of data they produce. Discussing the limitations of her study into the effects of involvement in campus religious communities on student adjustment and

6 Agnostic, Atheist, Baptist, Buddhist, Church of Christ, Eastern Orthodox, Episcopalian, Hindu, Jewish, LDS (Mormon), Lutheran, Methodist, Muslim, Presbyterian, Quaker, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, United Church of Christ/Congregational, Other Christian, Other religion(s)/belief(s), None.

development, Bryant (2007: 15) noted that student responses to her questionnaire "gave no indication of the quality of their [religious] experience or the religious tradition central to that experience." Alongside Choi and Yasuno, she also warned that surveys designed to measure religious and spiritual constructs should consider how respondents interpret these ideas: "[C]are should be taken to design items that translate the terms into meaningful ideas" (Bryant, Choi, and Yasuno 2003: 740). They concluded that "greater clarity in survey questions would enable participants to evaluate themselves with more accuracy and lead to less overlap between religiousness and spiritual self-identification" (ibid.). Unfortunately, very few studies dealing with Chinese student religiosity have had this degree of reflection. Indeed, those who include Chinese students in their sample often fail to realise the implication of the term "religion" in a Chinese context (a problem that I shall address in this article). Mayrl and Oeur (2009) noted that no research to date has convincingly demonstrated that students have greater emotional well-being because they have failed to show that it was religiosity causing those positive outcomes. It is for this reason that I opt for interviews. It is often necessary to have one's interviewee elaborate to either clarify a point or to develop a new interesting idea.

Some scholars note problems with the wording of questions. Bluntly but rightly, Clydesdale argues that:

> Asking incoming American college freshmen whether they "have an interest in spirituality" is like asking a soldier in a trench whether he has an interest in world peace or an arguing spouse whether she has an interest in honest and loving communication. To learn that most would agree should not surprise us in the slightest (Clydesdale 2007: 49).

Another problem that has been identified is one of scope. Feldman (1969: 56) has argued that universities and the students within are too diverse to make claims about the effect the university has on the religiosity of students: "[N]o generalizations could be expected to apply equally to all colleges, nor, a *fortiori*, to all individual students." I have attempted to navigate this problem by removing myself from a position of assumptions. Scholars are too often quick to assume that Chinese students are irreligious (indeed surveys often reveal this to be the case) but I find it important to remove myself from this assumption and place the entire knowledge in the hands of my interviewees: I do not seek to tell them whether or not they practice religion; I simply seek to hear exactly how they observe Spring Festival and from there draw conclusions.

It is also often the case that international students are misrepresented in studies of student religiosity. Lee, Matzkin, and Arthur (2004), who utilised

a survey sample of 988 out of 2,000 randomly selected students, acknowledged that a major problem of their study could be found in the underrepresentation of Eastern religions: Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, and Muslim students were problematically aggregated into one group called "Eastern Religion."[7] It is for this reason that I believe that more studies like the one presented in this article are necessary: dedicated studies that examine specific segments of the student population are the only means of safely ensuring data of good quality.

3. Spring Festival

The importance of Spring Festival to Chinese students (and to the Chinese population as a whole) cannot be underestimated. Today it stands as the most common ritual occasion in which Chinese people participate (Feuchtwang 2001: 27). This section will briefly outline what this festival constitutes, the scholarship outlining its importance, and scholarly observations of the festival in an international context.

3.1. What is the Spring Festival?

Spring Festival (also referred to as "Chinese New Year" or "Lunar New Year") is an annual celebration to mark the beginning of a new year in the Chinese lunisolar calendar. As the timing is determined by the lunar calendar, the precise dates of the festival vary: it occurs during late January to early February, beginning with the eve of the lunar new year and then lasting fifteen days. Although there are many different ways of observing the festival—to name only the two most obvious, regional and ethnic variations—there are a number of frequent means of observation. Debatably the most obvious manifestation of Spring Festival can be found in the coming together of families. Traditionally, one is expected to return to their hometown and celebrate the festival with their relatives: the occasion is primarily a social one. It is also common to clean one's residence, purchase new clothes, cut one's hair, and decorate one's residence with, to name but one example among many, the character *fú* (a character which is believed to bring about good fortune if displayed during the Spring Festival). Crucially, the Spring Festival is the most obviously outward expression of Chinese popular religion. As elaborated in

7 There was no mention of Chinese popular religion.

my *"Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion": An Ethnographic Study of the Lived Religious Experience of Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna* in this volume, I use Chinese Popular Religion to denote the Chinese religious dimension of family life: rituals conducted at, for example, festivals, weddings, or funerals that grant meaning to family members and their ancestors. Thus, an extremely common observation of Spring Festival is ancestor commemoration. Many people also engage in various practices pertaining to various gods during the festival. An obvious example of this can be seen in the belief held by many that one's home should be cleaned in order to appease Zào Jūn (a domestic god who protects the house and family). Although one could readily argue that Spring Festival is a secular holiday, this article intends to demonstrate that the occasion is a deeply religious one.

3.2. The Importance of Spring Festival

Goossaert, Kiely, and Lagerwey (2015: 24) note that the core notion governing family life in China is the moral debt of children—above all sons—to parents: this debt is particularly visible during Spring Festival. The majority of Chinese scholarship pertaining to student observation of Spring Festival argue that university students are increasingly apathetic towards Spring Festival. Cáo and Zhāng (2010: 178) lament that Chinese university students are more interested in Christmas than Spring Festival: "Spring Festival is an ancient festival in our country, and it is also the most important festival of the year, but the response is not very strong among contemporary university students."[8] They list four reasons for this:

1. The diversification of culture.[9]
2. The development of the market economy and the spread of the internet.[10]
3. The cultural heritage of university students is no longer perceived to be "enough."[11]
4. Lack of education.[12]

8 *Chūnjié shì wǒguó yīgè gǔlǎo de jiérì, yěshì quán nián zuì zhòngyào de yīgè jiérì, kě zài dāngdài dàxuéshēng zhōng fǎnxiǎng bìng bù zě me qiánglìè.* 春节是我国一个古老的节日、也是全年最重要的一个节日、可在当代大学生中反响并不怎么强烈。

9 *Wénhuà de fā zhǎn duōyuán huà.* 文化的发展多元化。

10 *Chǎng jīngjì de fā zhǎn hé wǎngluò de pǔjí.* 场经济的发展和网络的普及。

11 *Dàxuéshēng zìshēn de wénhuà dǐyùn bùgòu.* 大学生自身的文化底蕴不够。

12 *Xuéxiào jiàoyù de quēshī.* 学校教育的缺失。

Péng, Chén, and Guō's (2016: 171) Spring Festival Survey of first-year students at the Beijing Youth Politics College concluded that most college students regarded Spring Festival as less important since starting university. It should be noted that the scholarly emphasis herein is on the secular observation of Spring Festival. Indeed, the scholarly assumption largely remains that representations of "being religious" are more likely to be associated with non-Hàn ethnic minority groups and foreign nations (Zhao 2017: 640). To this end, Wáng and Xuān (2013: 159) have noted the commonly identified distinction between the Chinese observation of Spring Festival and the Western observation of Christmas: "Chinese traditional festival culture emphasizes patriarchal ethics and advocates the establishment of interpersonal relationship structure [… the Western context emphasises] the characteristics of French festival culture and religion."[13]

Some Chinese scholarship argues that although students acknowledge the importance of Spring Festival, they have limited *understanding* of the festival itself. Ōu Xiǎojìng, for example, surveying 533 students across five universities in Ānhuī province, concluded that Chinese university students "have a strong perceptual understanding of the Spring Festival culture and a weak rational understanding; [… they] are in a state of knowing what is happening but not knowing why" (Ōu 2017: 55).[14]

Another popular theme among Chinese scholars is that Spring Festival is (or at least should be) a vehicle for the socialist values of the People's Republic of China (PRC). For example, Ōu (2017: 55) writes that "the Spring Festival culture is an effective carrier for practicing and inheriting core values."[15] More recently, Ōu alongside Sū have argued that Spring Festival should enhance the national identity of college students (Sū and Ōu 2018: 100).[16] Lǐ (2012: 14) similarly argues that Spring Festival should be used as a means of teaching university students ideological and political education.

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13 *Zhōngguó chuántǒng de jiérì wénhuà zhòng zōngfǎ lúnlǐ, chóngshàng rénjì guānxì jiégòu jiàshè* [...] *Wénhuà yǔ zōngjiào xīxīxiāngguān de tèdiǎn.* 中国传统的节日文化重宗法伦理、崇尚人际关系结构架设 [...] 文化与宗教息息 相关的特点。

14 *Tōngguò wènjuàn diàochá jiéguǒ fāxiàn, dàxuéshēng duì chūnjié wénhuà cúnzài gǎnxìng rènshí jiào qiáng, lǐxìng rènshí piān ruò;* […] *Chǔyú yī zhǒng zhī qí rán què bùzhī suǒyǐrán de húnrán zhuàngtài.* 通过问卷调查结果发现、大学生对春节文化存在感性认识较强、理性认识偏弱；[…] 处于一种知其然却不知所以然的浑然状态。

15 *Chūnjié wénhuà shì jiàn xíng yǔ chuánchéng héxīn jiàzhíguān de yǒuxiào zàitǐ.* 春节文化是践行与传承核心价值观的有效载体。

16 *Tíshēng dàxuéshēng de guójiā rèntóng gǎn.* 提升大学生的国家认同感。

3.3. Spring Festival in an International Context

The religious experience of international students is a severely understudied field. Wáng and Xuān (2013: 158) lament the fact that there are so few studies on the development of the Spring Festival culture in Europe.[17] Thus, despite the vast number of Chinese students studying abroad, there is little to no scholarship pertaining to their religious experience at university. Tan (2015: xxx) has argued that religious affiliation (that included the nigh impossible to define Chinese popular religion) and the conduct of religious rituals had played important roles in making new homes and in expressing Chinese identities outside mainland China: it is crucial in "matters related to finding supernatural support and re-establishing tradition and cultural identity and in finding acceptance and integration into the mainstream non-Chinese societies." Given the religious and ritual importance of Spring Festival, it is unsurprising that the festival is observed by Chinese students studying abroad. Although the scholarship pertaining to this is extremely limited, one can find a number of references to the difficulties experienced by students. Feuchtwang (2001: 27) writes that those who are unable to return home to their families for Spring Festival "would regret their absence poignantly." Similarly, Yáo and Xiè (2015: 48) write that "during Spring Festival, I can feel the homesickness of overseas students even more."[18]

Zhāng (2013: 186) writes that although overseas Chinese communities have been divided by geography and kinship divisions, Spring Festival unites all Chinese people.[19] The most common theme that emerges out of the scholarship investigating student observation of Spring Festival in an international context is the importance of community. Indeed, scholarship often focuses on how student community practices are the predominant means of how Chinese international students combat homesickness and celebrate the festival itself. Yuè (2015: 206), for example, claims that "in order to relieve homesickness, many [Chinese] students studying in the United States organise a

17 *Mùqián, yǒuguān chūnjié wénhuà zài ōuzhōu fāzhǎn qíngkuàng fāngmiàn de yánjiū hái xiāngduì jiào shǎo.* 目前、有关春节文化在欧洲发展情况方面的研究还相对较少。

18 *Zài chūnjié, wǒ gèng néng gǎnshòu dào liúxuéshēng de xiāngchóu.* 在春节、我更能感受到留学生的乡愁。

19 *Duìyú zhèxiē huárén shè qún ér yán, yíjū hǎiwài, dìyuán, xiěyuán děng duōchóng guānxì zài huárén qúntǐ nèibù xíngchéngle fēngé, dàn chūnjié qìngdiǎn què shì duì bǐcǐ guānxì dí quèdìng, jí duì bǐcǐ zhī jiān dìyuán, xiěyuán nǎizhì duōchóng shēnfèn rèntóng dí quèrèn.* 对于这些华人社群而言、移居海外、地缘、 血缘等多重关系在华人群体内部形成了分隔、但春节庆典却是对彼此关系的确定、即对彼此之间地缘、血缘乃至多重身份认同的确认。

dinner party during the Spring Festival."[20] Yáo and Xiè (2015: 48) similarly describe how a group of Chinese university students were able to overcome the intense homesickness during Spring Festival by celebrating together.

With the increasing number of students studying in Europe, international student federations commonly hold Spring Festival celebrations (Zhāng 2013: 184).[21] In 2020, *The Times Higher Education* published an insightful article with seven accounts from Chinese university students studying abroad. A student named Zhao stated that

> [b]eing a Chinese international student in a foreign country is always hard during Chinese New Year because we are used to celebrating with our family. Luckily, my university is going above and beyond to create a sense of community and to make the campus feel like home for us international students. Some student organisations and clubs are also running their own events. I always love attending these with friends because they make me think of home and remind me that although I am miles away from my home country and my parents, I am surrounded by wonderful people who can celebrate this tradition and welcome the start of a new year with me (Qiu et al. 2020).

Similarly, Li describes that although being in the United Kingdom during Spring Festival "always makes me feel homesick […]. I always have friends celebrating with me. The core of the Chinese New Year celebration is to spend time with family, and the friends I have made here have become like family" (ibid.). Chen echoes this sentiment, writing that despite being sad about being abroad for Spring Festival, he is able to celebrate with his friends. He also notes that "it is also a chance to experience how Chinese people from other areas celebrate this important event and to spend time with the Chinese community at my university" (ibid.).

Wáng and Xuān (2013: 160–165) write that Spring Festival in Europe manifests in four different forms:

1. Official activities and overseas tour performances organised by Chinese representative offices.
2. Celebrations organised by official European organisations.
3. Activities organised by non-governmental organisations.
4. Family and personal celebrations.

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20 *Wèile páijiě xiāngchóu, bù shǎo liúměi shēng dūhuì zài chūnjié zǔzhī jùcān huì.* 为了排解乡愁、不少留美生都会在春节组织聚餐会。

21 *Suízhe lǚ ōu liúxuéshēng de rìyì zēngduō, chūnjié qíjiān, gèguó liúxuéshēng liánhé huì yì huì jǔbàn chūnjié qìngdiǎn*. 随着旅欧留学生的日益增多、春节期间、各国留学生联合会亦会举办春节庆典。

It should be apparent that each of these forms are highly social occasions that were impossible this year.

The city of Vienna has a long history of Chinese New Year celebrations. Wáng and Xuān even reference the 2013 speech about the valuable contribution of Chinese immigrants to Austria made by Sebastian Kurz (b. 1986; the current Chancellor of Austria who at the time served as state sectary of the Interior Ministry for integration) during Spring Festival (ibid.: 162). It should certainly be acknowledged that prior to 2021, Chinese students in Vienna had multiple Spring Festival avenues available to them. 2020, for example, saw a "'China meets Austria' festival of culture arranged by the Organisation for the Promotion of Austro-Chinese Relations, the Confucius Institute at the University of Vienna, and Uniart Media Vienna" (Musik & Theater 2020). The remainder of this article will examine how a selection of Chinese students in Vienna responded to these avenues no longer being available to them.

4. Methodology

Wáng and Xuān (2013: 171) write that not only very few scholars have investigated Spring Festival in Europe, but that the field is severely lacking case studies that are grounded in ethnographic fieldwork.[22] Although the sample this study is built upon is relatively small, especially when compared to student survey studies, it constitutes exactly what Wáng and Xuān claim is lacking: a case study of student experience of Spring Festival that is grounded in ethnographic methodology.

Conducting ethnographic research since the advent of Covid-19 has been something of a trying experience. Given that this study took place in February 2021, visiting these students in their usual place of residence was sadly impossible given that I wanted this study to remain ethically sound. I therefore conducted all of my interviews at an outdoors location (that varied depending on where the student lived) and wore a face mask for the entirety of the interview. Were this a study of a "usual" Spring Festival in Vienna, I would

22 *Ōuzhōu chūnjié wénhuà yě quèshí shì zhídé jiā dà lìdù hé jìnyībù yánjiū de kètí. Xiàn yǒu de yánjiū bùjǐn shùliàng jiào shǎo, fùgàimiàn bù guǎng, érqiě yóuqí quēshǎo jīyú rénlèi xué mínsú xué tiányě diàochá jīchǔ zhī shàng de shízhèng xìng ànlì yánjiū*. 欧洲春节文化也确 实是值得加大力度和进一步研究 的课题 。 现有 的 研究不仅数量较少、覆盖面不广、而且尤其缺少基于人类学民俗学 田 野调查基础 之上 的实证性案例研究。

have most certainly visited the student's place of residence and observed their respective Spring Festival practices (or lack thereof).

The fieldwork itself took place during the entire month of February 2021. I carried out semi-structured interviews that lasted, on average, one hour. During the interviews, I utilised Graham Harvey's concept of "guesthood" (Harvey 2005: 227–228; 2013: 94) wherein meetings with interviewees are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed" (Arthur 2019: 16).

The interviewees were students studying at the University of Vienna. As of 2020, there are eighty-three Chinese students actively studying at the university.[23] This constitutes 0.2 per cent of the overall student population at the university. This somewhat sizable portion of the international student body reflects the overall European trend. An ever increasing number of Chinese students are opting to study in Europe: the United Kingdom hosts the largest number with over 107,000; Germany has over 30,000; France with approximately 24,000; Italy with 15,000; while smaller countries such as Austria, Sweden, Ireland, Hungary, and Switzerland now housing over 2,000 students (Stig 2021). All are ethnic Hàn and come from an affluent background. The genders were divided equally and, with the exception of one, each comes from large urban areas. Their names have been changed by assigning pseudonyms that reflect their gender. When quoted, I list the sex as well as how long they have been a student in Vienna.

5. Discussion of Fieldwork Findings

The first and most obvious observation was the response to the question "Do you practice religion?"[24] Of the twenty-two students only one gave an affirmative response. Indeed, one student told me "I think that the vast majority of the Chinese population does not believe in religion."[25] Only one student regarded their beliefs as religious: namely the one student who self-identifies as Christian. The responses to the question "Are you spiritual? / What do you

23 Namely students accumulating at least sixteen European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits. For a broader context of the overall Chinese population in Austria, see the first page of *Chinese Buddhism in Austria* in this volume.

24 *Nǐ xìnyǎng zōngjiào ma?* 你信仰宗教吗？

25 *Wǒ juédé dà duōshù zhōngguó rén méiyǒu zōngjiào xìnyǎng.* 我觉得大多数中国人没有宗教信仰。

believe?" was also revealing:[26] seventeen claimed that they were not, one claimed that they were (the same student who self-identified as being religious), and three claimed that they did not know. Sixteen told me (without my directly asking) that they self-identify as "atheist" (*wúshénlùn*). Herein, I believe the limitations of student surveys are apparent: had these students filled out a typical questionnaire designed to measure religious belief among students, twenty-one (or ninety-five per cent) would have responded with "no" and thus given what I intend to demonstrate as an inaccurate response. All twenty-two students I interviewed believed that their ancestors play an active role in their lives. All stated that they have in the past and will in the future again engage in some manifestation of ancestor commemoration. However, only one of the students regarded these beliefs or such practices as "religion." Therefore, in a survey, all but one would, believing that they were being honest, identify as irreligious. Even surveys that offer a selection of choices or, for example, an "other, please indicate…" option, would still lead to these students opting for the irreligious options. I would therefore argue that although survey studies are impressive in their scope and most certainly serve a purpose, in the case of attempting to ascertain the religiosity of Chinese students, they are deeply problematic. Hence, I believe that in-depth interviews are required to fully examine the religiosity of Chinese students. Indeed, I fully agree with Yao who, while conducting fieldwork pertaining to religious experience in contemporary China, wrote that "when we asked further questions about religious beliefs and practices it became clear that the Han Chinese are more religious or spiritual than they initially said, albeit in a subtle and complicated way" (Yao 2006: 46).

5.1. Passive Observers

Nearly half of the interviewees fell into this category (ten out of twenty-two). By "passive observer" I mean that these students took a passive role during Spring Festival: they did not make any assertive effort to observe the festival. All ten of these students acknowledged the importance of Spring Festival—

26 *Nǐ yǒu shé me xiāngxìn?* 你有什么相信？ It should be acknowledged that I have purposefully opted not to utilise the term *jīngshén* to denote "spiritual" despite it being the usual translation of the term. However, in my experience, *jīngshén* is used in the Chinese context as being in contrast to materiality. The term "spiritual" simply does not have the same connotations that one associates it with in a Western context. I therefore believe the broader question "*Nǐ yǒu shé me xiāngxìn?*" is more useful in a fieldwork setting.

one told me that "Spring Festival is incredibly important!"[27]—and all expressed regret that they could not be with their families. However, not one of them did anything to observe the festival. Hán Bóyǎn (male; second year) summarised his reasons thus:

> Every Spring Festival, we [he and his family] clean the house, visit the graves of my ancestors, and visit our friends and relatives. Spring Festival is different in Vienna. Last year I celebrated with my Chinese friends but we couldn't do that this year.[28]

Thus one can note the social importance of Spring Festival. Hán Bóyǎn already identified a difference between celebrating Spring Festival in China and celebrating it in Austria—he and his friends were unable to pay their respect at the graves of their ancestors and visit their family and friends in China, but they were nevertheless able to observe the festival by coming together as a community. The implication being that observing Spring Festival is impossible without its community aspect. This notion is deeply supported by Huáng Jìmíng (male; third year) who, in a most revealing interview, told me that "Spring Festival is not Spring Festival if you cannot see your friends and family. It is simply impossible for me to celebrate by myself."[29] Of the ten passive observers, all but one shared this sentiment. However, although I do believe that one can conclude from this that students deeply believe in the community aspect of Spring Festival to the extent that if a community was unavailable to them they would not observe the festival, this is not a surprising conclusion. I believe that a more interesting discussion can be found in the religious motivation (or rather lack thereof) of these students.

Although they certainly would not use the term "religious," each one of these ten students were aware of their religious role during Spring Festival: they all believed that they should remain passive. This manifested in two ways: those to whom their role was second nature and those to whom it was an active duty.

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27 *Chūnjié fēicháng zhòngyào!* 春节非常重要！

28 *Měinián chūnjié wǒmen dōu bǎ jiālǐ dǎsǎo gānjìng, qù sǎomù, qù qīnqī péngyǒu jiā bàinián. Zài wéi'ěr nà de chūnjié bù tài yīyàng. Qùnián wǒ gēn zhōngguó péngyǒu yīqǐguòle chūnjié, dànshì jīnnián méiyǒu.* 每年春节我们都把家里打扫干净、去扫墓、去亲戚朋友家拜年。在维尔纳的春节不太一样。去年我跟中国朋友一起过了春节、但是今年没有。

29 *Rúguǒ bùnéng gēn qīnqī péngyǒu zài yīqǐ chūnjié bù zài shì chūnjié. Wǒ zìjǐ yīgè rén shì bù huì qìngzhù de.* 如果不能跟亲戚朋友在一起春节不再是春节。我自己一个人是不会庆祝的。

Those to whom their religious role during Spring Festival was second nature had never before actively considered their role. Four of the ten students fell into this category. They each believed that the various Spring Festival rites enacted by their respective families were of enormous importance but knew that it was not their place to enact these rites. Indeed, my very question of whether or not they enacted any of these rites themselves was seen to be an incredibly strange line of inquiry. Hóu Yǎchún (female; second year), for example, looked visibly perplexed by my question, eventually telling me that she had never thought about it before but "I think that it is not my duty to commemorate my ancestors in Vienna, so I have never done it."[30] Hé Zhīhuá (female; third year) thought that my question was strange for a different reason: "It is very important to offer to my ancestors! But my ancestors are in China and I am in Austria."[31] This statement is interesting for two reasons: it demonstrates the importance Chinese students place on ancestor commemoration[32] and it reveals a geographic component to said commemoration.

The six students who believe that their passive role was essentially their duty were a lot more convinced by their responses than the aforementioned four. Core to these students was the term "duty" (*zhízé*). Jiǎ Mànyín (male; first year), a very shy student, informed me: "When I was taking the College entrance examination [in the PRC], my mother would go to Yōnghé Gōng every day to pray for me.[33] She told me that it was her duty as a parent. My duty is to study so that I can one day pay my parents back."[34]

Herein one finds a double duty: Jiǎ Mànyín has a religious obligation to his parents grounded in filiality (*xiào*), and his parents, in turn, have a religious obligation to support him. The manifestation of the latter, in this case, happens to be praying at a temple in Běijīng. It was because of his awareness of his "duty" that Jiǎ Mànyín did not formally conduct any rituals this Spring Festival. Indeed, conducting Spring Festival rituals is simply not a part of his duty. This sentiment was echoed by Sū Yǎchún (female; fourth year): "I want to make my parents happy. I think that the best way for me to do that is study

30 *Wǒ xiǎng wǒ shēn zài wéiyěnà jì bài zǔxiān bùshì wǒ de zhízé, suǒyǐ cónglái méiyǒu zuòguò.* 我想我身在维也纳祭拜祖先不是我的职责、所以从来没有做过。

31 *Jì bài zǔxiān fēicháng zhòngyào, dànshì wǒ rén zài àodìlì ér zǔxiān zài zhōngguó.* 祭拜祖先非常重要、但是我人在奥地利而祖先在中国。

32 All twenty-two students I interviewed practiced some form of ancestor commemoration.

33 The Yonghe Temple in Beijing that is often referred to (in English) as the Lama Temple.

34 *Wǒ gāokǎo de shíhòu, māmā měitiān dū qù yōnghé gōng qídǎo, tā shuō zhè shì tā de zhízé, ér wǒ de zhízé shì hǎo hào xuéxí yǐhòu huíbào fùmǔ.* 我高考的时候、妈妈每天都去雍和宫祈祷、她说这是她的职责、而我的职责是好好学习以后回报父母。

hard every day. Of course I miss them but I also know that I am here to study."[35] Finally, Péng Yǎchún (female; second year) told me: "Every year we [she and her parents] visit my grandparents. We all go together to the village temple to pray. I obviously cannot do that this year but my parents told me that they will pray for me."[36] Thus what I found is the idea that students sometimes do not feel the need or compulsion to observe Spring Festival by performing various rituals because they are well aware the rituals that need to be enacted *are* being enacted by their parents.

It is tempting to conclude that without the social pressure (and physical presence) of their parents, university has a secularising effect on these students. Indeed, one might be prone to argue that these students appear to be in line with the aforementioned theories because they seem to hold the opinion that the religious practices of Spring Festival have, as Roozen put it, "little of interest or relevance to offer" (Roozen 1980: 443). However, the evidence presented shows that these students do believe that the rituals have much to offer, and their beliefs remain untouched—which is in line with aforementioned theorists who propose that university has no effect on student religiosity.

It is equally tempting to suggest that, in line with Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler (2007: 1686), passive observers are passive in their lack of observation of Spring Festival because they have not been taught "the language" of religion. Indeed, the very fact that four of these passive students were perplexed by my asking whether or not they conducted any Spring Festival rituals might lead one to believe that they simply did not know how to perform these rituals. However, I believe that the data more so suggests that these students were passive because they believed that it was not their place to conduct these rituals. I would even argue that they were, in their own way, very much "speaking the language" of religion when they explained that their current duty was to study as hard as they can so that they could one day pay their parents back.

35 *Wǒ juédé ràng fùmǔ kāixīn de zuì hǎo de bànfǎ jiùshì měitiān hǎo hào xuéxí. Wǒ dāngrán hěn xiǎng tāmen, dànshì wǒ zhīdào wǒ shì lái xuéxí de.* 我觉得让父母开心的最好的办法就是每天好好学习。我当然很想他们、但是我知道我是来学习的。

36 *Měinián wǒmen dōu qù kàn yéyé nǎinai, qù cūnlǐ de miào qífú. Jīnnián kěndìng shì bùnéng qùle, fùmǔ gàosù wǒ tāmen huì wèi wǒ qífú de.* 每年我们都去看爷爷奶奶、去村里的庙祈福。今年肯定是不能去了、父母告诉我他们会为我祈福的。

5.2. Active Observers

The very slight majority of students fell into this category (twelve out of twenty-two). These students made active efforts to observe Spring Festival in various ways. Similar to the passive students, these students also told me that under normal circumstances they would celebrate Spring Festival with their Chinese friends in Vienna. The difference lies in the fact that whereas the social distancing circumstances of 2021 led the passive students to be passive during Spring Festival, the twelve active students were all compelled to act in various ways. The manifestations of these actions varied greatly: some students only did very small acts while others did bigger ones. What is significant is that they were all compelled by the circumstances to act.

Given the aforementioned social importance of Spring Festival, it was unsurprising to find that many of the twenty-two students sampled cited feelings of loneliness during Spring Festival. What I did find surprising was that some of the active observers opted to use their religious belief to make themselves feel closer to a wider community during this year's festival. Kāng Yǎchún (male; third year), a particularly formal student, went to the trouble of printing off paper money to burn as an offering to his ancestors. When I asked him why he did this, he gave me something of a textbook explanation: "Our ancestors have left us a rich cultural heritage. It is very important that we show our ancestors respect every Spring Festival."[37] On the surface, this does not seem at all surprising: burning money for one's ancestors is a very common practice. However, it becomes surprising when one realises the reasoning behind it. Kāng Yǎchún had never before performed this practice himself. He had done it with his parents throughout the entirety of his childhood but they had always been the ones to instigate the practice every Spring Festival. Moreover, he had not enacted this ritual the past two years he had lived in Vienna (instead he had marked the occasion by meeting with friends). However, this year was different. Kāng Yǎchún made the assertive effort of printing off his own money and burning it by himself for the first time in his life. When I asked him why he did this and what made this year different, he simply replied: "I deeply miss my parents."[38] Herein, I believe that one finds the use of religious belief and practice as a comfort during difficult times. Indeed, I believe that one can find evidence for Pargament et al.'s (1984: 166) theory of religion helping people cope with difficult situations. However,

37 *Zǔxiān liú gěile wǒmen fēngfù de wénhuà yíchǎn. Duì wǒmen lái shuō měinián chūnjié jì bài zǔxiān fēicháng zhòngyào.* 祖先留给了我们丰富的文化遗产。 对我们来说每年春节祭拜祖先非常重要。

38 *Wǒ hǎo xiǎng wǒ de fùmǔ.* 我好想我的父母。

more interesting is the finding that Kāng Yǎchún's belief and practice seem to be a somewhat unique manifestation of Pargament et al.'s theory that religion provides social networks that supply companionship and comfort during stressful times (ibid.). Although Pargament et al. meant this very literally—they were speaking about the physical body of believers—Kāng Yǎchún was essentially getting in contact with his ancestors by offering to them. This subsequently made him feel closer to his parents. Féng Yǎchún (female; fourth year) also printed off her own money and burned it for her ancestors. She explicitly told me that doing so helped her to feel close to her family. Her only concern was that she might be too far away: "I hope the money reaches them!"[39]

The most common method active observers utilised in order to celebrate Spring Festival was cleaning their place of residence and/or putting up decorations. Eleven of the twelve told me that they had decorated their room or flat with Spring Festival Couplets and the Chinese character *fú* (a blessing that brings good fortune). Eight of the twelve told me that they had cleaned their place of residence. Three of those eight explicitly told me that they did this on the off chance that their ancestors (or, in one case, the kitchen god Zào Jūn) would visit, but the remaining five could not give a proper reason. Thinking that my question was extremely odd, Céng Hónghán (male; second year) told me "this is simply what we do every Spring Festival."[40]

What was most striking about the students who decorated and cleaned their place of residence was their reasoning for doing so. They were used to celebrating Spring Festival in a social manner. When this proved to be impossible, they essentially took Spring Festival into their own hands. An excellent demonstration of this notion was found in Rèn Jìmíng (male; third year), who purchased a Chinese children's book about Spring Festival from a local bookstore, entitled *Happy Chinese New Year: The Irised Kingdom* (2019). It was in this book that he learned about Nián Shòu for the first time.[41] He told me that his parents had often mentioned ghosts (*guǐ*) but he had never before heard of this monster. During Spring Festival, he brought up the subject with his parents in China. Neither of them had heard of the monster but his grandparents had. This led to his grandparents reprimanding his parents for not properly teaching him about Chinese culture. When I asked whether or not he believed in the existence of Nián Shòu he laughed and told me that he wore red (a common way of keeping Nián Shòu at bay) just in case, even

39 *Wǒ xīwàng zǔxiān néng shōu dào wǒ shāo de zhǐqián*. 我希望祖先能收到我烧的纸钱。

40 *Zhè shì wǒmen guòjié de fāngshì*. 这是我们过节的方式。

41 A monster who comes out every Spring Festival.

though "I know it's silly."[42] What I find particularly striking in this example is that Rèn Jìmíng not only made the assertive decision to educate himself about Spring Festival (albeit via a children's book), but that the information he ascertained also went on to potentially inform the practice of his parents in China. At the very least it led to Rèn Jìmíng's grandparents expressing mild irritation towards his parents. Herein, one arguably finds an example of a student who has not been taught "the language" of religion (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1686). However, whereas Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler argue that this leads to a decrease in religiosity, in the case of Rèn Jìmíng, it served as a motivating factor that led him to educate himself.

A more amusing manifestation of a student taking Spring Festival ritual into her own hands was found in the example of Bái Mànyín (female; fourth year). She desperately wanted to enact her family tradition of placing a coin inside a dumpling. She made the dumplings, hid a coin in one of them, but was then too worried that her ancestors would not approve of her simply eating them all herself. She therefore decided to try to offer them to her neighbour, who although was very thankful, politely declined taking them. This caused something of a moral crisis. Bái Mànyín took the dumplings back to her room and called her parents to ask for advice. This apparently caused quite a family debate. In the end it was decided that it would indeed be bad luck if she simply ate the dumplings herself. Her parents told her to offer the dumplings to her great-grandmother and great-grandfather. She therefore printed out a picture of her great-grandparents and offered them the dumplings. However, she then had to have an "awkward" (*bú shūfú*) conversation with her parents a couple of days later when she realised that she had no idea what to do with the food that had been offered. Not only is this another example of a student's practice informing religious practice back in China (it was clear that her parents had a lengthy debate about what to do with the dumplings), but it is also another example of a student assertively enacting her religious beliefs. Even though she was happy (albeit embarrassed) to admit that she felt somewhat uninformed, the desire to enact the rituals were very much present, and it was obvious that the religious belief was very much there. Here one arguably finds another example of a student who has not been taught "the language" of religion (Uecker, Regnerus, and Vaaler 2007: 1686). However, as with Rèn Jìmíng, Bái Mànyín was very motivated to take matters into her own hands despite her lack of religious "language."

Although for the most part, one finds evidence of students who, being unable to observe Spring Festival in the usual social way, created their own private Spring Festival rituals, two students were something of an anomaly

42 *Wǒ zhīdào zhè hěn shǎ.* 我知道这很傻。

in that they did not maintain social distance during Spring Festival. In a most revealing interview, Gōng Hónghán (male; third year) told me:

> I actually feel like this year's Spring Festival was a good one. I was able to celebrate with a very good Austrian friend. His grandmother died three years ago so we visited her grave. We cleaned the grave and then we lit incense. He gave her flowers and I gave her tea from my home town. I know it was not a usual Spring Festival but I am very happy that I was able to share my culture with a good friend.[43]

Although this experience of Spring Festival is somewhat difficult to contrast with the comparatively private experiences of the other students, what I find particularly striking in this instance was not only the obviously important social aspect of Spring Festival, but also the cultural importance: it was clearly a meaningful experience for Gōng Hónghán that he was able to share his culture and religion with an Austrian friend. Similarly, Rèn Lèxīn (female; fourth year) did not maintain social distance. This was to the extent that she celebrated Spring Festival in the usual fashion with nine of her Chinese friends. She claimed that Spring Festival was simply "too important" (*tài zhòngyào*) to neglect seeing people.

Rather strangely, the one student who self-identified as "religious" fell into the category of active observers. Máo Zhīhuá (female; fourth year) converted to Catholicism in 2018 and currently self-identifies as Christian. Despite this self-identification, for the first time in her life she chose to send money to her parents for the explicit purpose of donating to their local temple. She informed me that she was worried about Covid-19 and would regularly pray to God about it. However, on top of this, she also wanted to offer a sum of money (she did not disclose the amount) to Guānyīn, the bodhisattva of compassion in the Buddhist tradition. Her reasoning was that the past year had been particularly stressful, and she wanted to do anything in her power to help. I find it to be significant that she believed that giving money to Guānyīn was seen by her as an act that had the potential to improve the general situation. It is all the more significant when regarded in line with Yao's

43 *Wǒ zhēnxīn juédé jīnnián de chūnjié hái bùcuò, yīnwèi wǒ gēn yīgè hěn hǎo de àodàlìyǎ péngyǒuguòle nián. Tā de nǎinai sān nián qián qùshìle, wǒmen yīqǐ qù sǎole mù - dǎsǎo mùdì, shàng xiāng, fèng huā, hái gòngfèngle wǒ cóng jiāxiāng dài lái de chá. Wǒ zhīdào zhè shì yīgè bùtóng xúncháng de chūnjié, dànshì hěn gāoxìng wǒ gēn péngyǒu fēnxiǎngle wǒ de chūnjié wénhuà.* 我真心觉得今年的春节还不错、因为我跟一个很好的澳大利亚朋友过了年。他的奶奶三年前去世了、我们一起去扫了墓 - 打扫墓地、上香、奉花、还供奉了我从家乡带来的茶。我知道这是一个不同寻常的春节、但是很高兴我跟朋友分享了我的春节文化。

following argument: "While donation itself does not necessarily mean religious devotion, it does imply that those who donated were willing to support religion or to please the god/spirits worshipped, or at least were mindful of the existence of spiritual beings and sacred places" (Yao 2006: 47). Thus, I believe one finds a potential solution to the problem of data collection. Ideally, the religious views of Chinese students should be ascertained through dedicated ethnographic research (namely interviews that account for the intricate nuances of Chinese popular religion) but I am aware that this is impractical. I certainly hold that conducting further ethnographic research into Chinese student religiosity is needed, but given that surveys and questionnaires will inevitably continue to be carried out, I believe that better questions should become the standard. Simply asking "are you religious" or "to which religion do you belong" is simply inapplicable to the context of Chinese popular religion. Inquiring after practice would debatably yield more accurate results. Máo Zhīhuá would obviously self-identify as a Catholic in a questionnaire, but her Chinese popular religion practice would go unacknowledged, thus obscuring the data. The addition of questions pertaining to practice—namely inquiring whether or not the student has recently given money to a temple, if the student possesses a home shrine, or whether one engages in the practice of giving offerings—have the potential of producing more accurate results.

6. Concluding Remarks

This paper never intended to offer any sweeping statements about the student experience of Spring Festival in Vienna. Not only is the sample size too small, the 2021 Spring Festival has not been a usual one. Nevertheless, I believe that the data presented in this article lead to one significant conclusion: in contrast to the prevalent notion that Chinese students are irreligious, the students of this study demonstrated a deep and unique understanding of their own religious lifeworld. The students identified as active observers of Spring Festival proactively engaged with ritual and belief. Although they did not specify a change of intensity in their beliefs—it was not the case that they reported that, for example, their belief in their ancestors was strengthened—but each of them made a very conscious attempt to engage in ritual practice. Moreover, although the passive observers made an active decision not to engage in ritual practice, the very fact that they questioned whether they *should* practice—a question that they grappled with for the first time in their lives—is deeply significant: it reveals the extent of import these students grant to the beliefs and practices that manifest saliently in Spring Festival.

A second conclusion that can be drawn from this study pertains to the international context, which is what ties the entire student sample together. Indeed, it was precisely because of this international context that the students made the active decision to either enact ritual or avoid doing so. If the international context were to be removed—that is, had the students been in their respective hometowns for the occasion—the very question of whether they should enact Spring Festival ritual would not have occurred: they would have simply observed the festival in the same way they always had. This study has demonstrated that the religious lifeworlds of these international students are very different to that of Chinese students living in China. Indeed, the very fact that these students engaged with Spring Festival in a manner in which they have never done so before suggests that the festival itself was an outward manifestation of a "diasporic cultural enclave": something of a crystallising point in which their previously formed Chinese popular religious beliefs were expressed. Some scholars (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000) have examined the role of religion in maintaining group identity and culture. I believe this is exactly what the students of this study were doing: forming a cultural enclave in which they felt closer to their homes and families in China. I therefore believe that one can argue that these students experienced an increase in religiosity: the very establishment of cultural enclaves indicates that Chinese popular religious elements became more important to them, albeit in different ways. The very fact that these students engaged for the first time in their lives with the question of orthopraxis is crucial: regardless of whether or not the students decided it was indeed their place to conduct Spring Festival rituals, questioning if they should in the first place and also, in the case of the active observers, questing *how* they should conduct it, demonstrates an increase in religiosity.

However, I believe that this article cannot contribute to the wider discussion of whether the university experience per se increases, decreases, or does not affect student religiosity, for three reasons. First, I do not have a sufficient reference point for prior student religious engagement: that is, given that I do not possess ethnographic fieldwork data based upon these students' religious engagement (or lack thereof) prior to matriculation, no meaningful conclusion can be drawn. Second, I believe that the data presented in this study suggests that it was the international context as opposed to the university one that resulted in an increase in student religiosity. These students essentially utilised Spring Festival as a means of getting in touch with their home. Several students, for example, spoke of being "homesick" (*xiǎngjiā de*) and some even described a feeling of homesickness for China (*sīxiāng de*) when describing their reasoning behind their Spring Festival engagement. It was clear that their distance from and their perceived desire to feel closer to home is

twhat was driving their increased religiosity. In contrast, there was no evidence to suggest that being at university had any noticeable effect upon the religiosity of the students. I therefore believe that the influence of the international context cannot be overstated. Third, the overall discussion of whether the university experience increases student religiosity utterly ignores the context of Chinese popular religion. Instead, this discourse takes place within a very narrow and Christocentric perspective that has practically immovable categories that, for the most part, simply cannot be applied to a Chinese religious context. More often than not, the aforementioned studies employ a World Religions rhetoric that simply lacks the lived variety of Chinese popular religion. Thus, it is somewhat impossible to apply, for example, Clydesdale's (2007: 50) "lockbox" analogy to Chinese popular religion, because Clydesdale is speaking from the perspective of institutionalised Western religion. I would therefore argue, as I do in *"Because I am Chinese, I do not believe in religion": An Ethnographic Study of the Lived Religious Experience of Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna*, that greater caution is required when conducting research into the lived religious beliefs and experiences of Chinese students. Although large-scale surveys certainly have their value, utilising problematic terms such as "religion" in a Chinese context will inevitably lead to false data. Despite demonstrating religious commitment, all but one of the students in this study would not answer in the affirmative to the question "are you religious?" Similarly, ethnographic studies need to be mindful of how questions are phrased. Although I adamantly believe that the question of whether or not the university experience increases or decreases student religiosity is worthy of further research, I would urge for this future research to be grounded in an understanding of the manifold dimensions of religion.

List of Abbreviations

ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
HERI	Higher Education Research Institute
LDS	The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
PRC	People's Republic of China

Glossary

Ānhuī	安徽
Běijīng	北京
bú shūfú	不舒服
chūnjié	春节
fú	福
Guānyīn	观音
guǐ	鬼
Hàn	汉
jīngshén	精神
Nián Shòu	年兽
sīxiāng de	思乡的
tài zhòngyào	太重要
wúshénlùn	无神论
xiào	孝
xiǎngjiā de	想家的
Yōnghé Gōng	雍和宫
Zào Jūn	灶君
zhízé	职责

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Religiously Apathetic, Hybrid Christians, and Traditional Converts: An Ethnographic Study of How Chinese Immigrant Children in Vienna Engage with Christianity

Joseph Chadwin

1. Introduction

Lu et al. (2013: 230) write that, after immigrating, "a change of religion adds another dynamic to the challenges of assimilating into a new culture." In 2021, I undertook an ethnographic study of the lived religious experience of Chinese immigrant children living in Vienna (Chadwin 2021). In this study, I found that the parents of these children regularly made them attend formal Catholic education as a means of helping them assimilate to Austrian society. I concluded that "the Chinese children I spoke to very much used Christianity as a means of assimilating into Austrian culture without (except in one case) actually adopting Catholic beliefs" (ibid.: 25). However, given that this was a general study of childhood religiosity at large as opposed to Christianity in particular, it was clear that further research was warranted. This article will therefore examine Chinese immigrant Christianity—which, in this context, specifically refers to the Roman Catholic Church—through the lens of childhood religion. By giving voice to Chinese children—determined here as individuals under the age of eighteen, in line with the definition of "child" in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child)—two problems will be addressed: the failure to acknowledge the importance of Chinese popular religion in prior studies of Chinese immigrants converting to Christianity, and the very frequently overlooked field of the lived religious experience of immigrant children. Moreover, given that this is a study that specifically examines the lived religious experience of Chinese children, this article seeks to draw upon Chinese scholarship that remains largely untapped by Western studies of Chinese conversion.

Although understudied in the scholarly milieu (especially regarding dedicated studies on Chinese immigrant children and Christianity), one need not look far to find relevant material in popular media. For example, journalistic

media has recently given attention to the growing phenomenon of Chinese parents wanting to send their children to Christian schools in the West. For instance, Lu and Jackson (2012) note how in 2005 only sixty-five Chinese students attended private Christian high schools in the United States, but by 2011 the number had risen to 6,725.

2. Conversion

John Wesley (1703–1791) famously defined conversion as "a thorough change of heart and life from sin to holiness; a turning" (Wesley 1888: 19). The term is central to the Christian faith and permeates both scholarly and public discourses—with, unsurprisingly, countless published studies pertaining to conversion. Within this discourse, one can readily find many studies on Chinese immigrants converting to Christianity. Recently, despite the majority of Chinese immigrants reportedly remaining irreligious (although I contest this irreligiosity when examined in the light of Chinese popular religion, which I discuss in the seventh section), there is a significant rate of conversion to Christianity. Although raw statistical data is hard to find, the conversion rate of Chinese immigrants to Christianity is generally recorded to be approximately thirty-two per cent, that is, almost a third of all Chinese immigrants convert to Christianity (Liu 2012). Cao (2005: 185) writes that much of the literature on new immigrant religion "focuses on religious faiths that immigrants bring with them or inherit from their parents." This is not the case with studies about immigrant Chinese converts. Indeed, Fan and Chen (2014: 556) rightly point out that the very term "conversion" is deeply embedded in the institutionalised Christian context and may not be an appropriate approach to understand China's religious tradition shared by the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. This article seeks to amend this problem by examining conversion from the point of view of Chinese immigrants.

2.1. Defining Conversion

The English term "conversion" is "related to the Greek *epistrepho* and the Hebrew *shuv*, both of which mean to 'turn' or 'return,' through a change in direction or course of action, often of sinners in relation to God, sometimes translated as 'repent'" (Helland 2017: 34). The term is also "related to the Greek verb *metanoeo* and its noun *metanoia*, usually translated as 'repent'

and 'repentance'" (ibid.). Roberts and Yamane (2016: 214) argues that the term "refers to a process of 'turning around' or changing direction in life [… and] represents a transformation in a person's identity or self-image." Although I will be limiting the discussion of conversion to the context of Chinese immigrants, it is worth briefly examining previous studies on conversion. Rambo (1993: 16), for example, by seeking to "provide a framework for integrating research within the various disciplines, offering a deeper, more complex understanding of the multilayered processes involved in conversion," outlined a sequential stage model of conversion. These stages, which aside from the first and the last do not necessarily happen in sequence, are:

1. Context: "conversion takes place within a dynamic context" (Rambo 1993: 20). This stage constitutes the environment in which conversion occurs. He further distinguishes this stage between the "macrocontext"—"such elements as political systems, religious organizations, relevant ecological considerations, transnational corporations, and economic systems" (ibid.: 22)—and the "microcontext"—"the more immediate world of a person's family, friends, ethnic group, religious community, and neighbourhood" (ibid.).
2. Crisis: which "may be religious, political, psychological, or cultural in origin" (ibid.: 44), as well as personal, social, or both.
3. Quest: "this search becomes compelling; people actively look for resources that offer growth and development to 'fill the void,' solve the problem, or enrich life" (ibid.: 56).
4. Encounter: the dynamic process in which "an advocate and a potential convert come together and begin to engage in processes that will result, for some people, in conversion" (ibid.: 66).
5. Interaction: "the potential convert either chooses to continue the contact and become more involved, or the advocate works to sustain the interaction in order to extend the possibility of persuading the person to convert" (ibid.: 102).
6. Commitment: following an intense period of interaction, "the potential convert faces the prospect, the choice, of commitment" (ibid.: 124). Herein, a "specific turning point or decision" is normally required, and the commitment itself commonly takes the form of a public demonstration.
7. Consequences: the "complex and multifaceted" (ibid.: 142) outcome of the transformative experience of conversion.

Conversely, Ng (2002: 201) identifies two conversion models:

1. Classic model of conversion: "conversion is seen as a momentous transformation of life from a depraved past to a sacred present and a promised future."
2. Contemporary model of conversion: "a more gradual and relatively undramatic process."

What particularly distinguishes the latter from the former is that unlike the classic model, contemporary conversion "is perceived as a starting point of one's journey with God; the process of faith seeking is lifelong." Notably, in his study of adult converts to Christianity in the United States, Ng noted that the new converts he spoke to did not fall into either conversion models but instead "come to learn the 'American way' through a creative deployment of their own cultural categories, symbols, and practices" (ibid.: 196).

Pokorny (2016: 223) emphasises that "conversion experience does not necessarily entail formal conversion, that is, community affiliation." In his study on the Austrian Unification Movement, he asserts that "personal crisis, insufficiently checked by the social lifeworld, and being comforted emotionally or, from an emic understanding, relieved socially and spiritually, is the syntax of religious converting in the UM" (ibid.: 249).

There are several ways of translating the term into Chinese: *gǎibiàn xìnyǎng zhě* is commonly employed as "convert"; *zōngjiào guī xìn* is often taken to mean "religious conversion"; but, interestingly, the most common term employed is *guīyī*. Although I found that the latter was commonly used in the context of conversion to Christianity by both my interviewees and Chinese scholars, what is striking is that the term literally means to "take refuge": a concept deeply embedded within the context of Buddhism.

2.2. Childhood Religiosity and Conversion

Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011: 258) lament the fact that, to date, there have been very few dedicated studies on childhood religiosity, noting how the majority of scholarship has "nearly entirely focused on the adult perspective and on the particular role of religious social organizations rather than on the individual experience." Similarly, Ridgely (2012: 240) writes that "rarely […] have adults—be they parents, priests, or researchers—acknowledged the contributions of children in the creation of religious, social, or political worlds." This is very much the case with the majority of studies on immigrant Chinese conversion to Christianity. For example, Wong's *From Atheists to Evangelicals: The Christian Conversion: Experiences of Mainland Chinese Intellectuals in the United States of America* (2008) deals solely with adult conversion. Similarly, Liou and Shenk (2016) study older Chinese immigrants' social support

within the context of conversion. Indeed, most studies pertaining to Chinese immigration treat religion as something of a non-issue: Chen et al. (2014), Ma (2019), Dai and McGregor (2018), Yang et al. (2020), Kim et al. (2013), and Qin, Way, and Rana (2008), all, despite being otherwise fascinating studies on Chinese immigrants, make no mention of religion. Thus, one typically finds the prevailing scholarly view that the Hàn are predominantly irreligious.[1]

3. The Importance of the Chinese Christian Community

A central theme in the literature pertaining to conversion within the context of Chinese immigrants is the importance of the Chinese Christian community in the conversion process. Qiao (2017: 38) found that most Chinese Christian converts were brought to the Church by their friends, whereas Jiang (2009: 66) noted that "half of my respondents referred to their Christian friends and confessed that these people influenced their conversion." Ng (2002: 212) argues that the Chinese immigrant Church provides Chinese immigrants "with opportunities to reinvigorate their own ethnic cultural practices on the one hand (ethnic identification) while learning American cultural values and know-how on the other (assimilation)."

Abel (2006: 162) argued that "certain very loosely ritualized interactional routines of helping" were of central importance to Chinese converts. He emphasised the importance of community, coining the term "punch-bowl Christians" (in contrast to "rice-bowl Christians"[2]): "the most engaging aspect of church life at [the Chinese church] was not the chance to meet immediate material needs, but rather the milieu for interaction the church provides and the interaction rituals […] that support the social networks between [church] members and, importantly, between Chinese Christians in general" (ibid.: 172). Some scholars note that the community aspect of the immigrant Church is restricted to some Chinese immigrants (especially students) who "just went to church for food, friends, or just for fun [… The] total number of Chinese students who stayed and eventually became Christian is much smaller than the number of Chinese students who initially got recruited" (Qiao 2017: 40). Indeed, this is not limited to the context of Chinese immigrant converts alone,

1 This view is found in both Western and Chinese scholarship. Liáng (2014: 112), for example, states that contemporary "China has replaced religion with morality" (*Zhōngguó yǐ dàodé dài zōngjiào* 中国以道德代宗教).

2 Those who join a church without undergoing genuine conversion in order to reap various benefits (those who seek to have their bowl filled with rice by the Church).

nor, for that matter, is a unique observation. Rather, diasporic religious groups manifesting as cultural enclaves have been observed by scholars for some time. For example, in their recent study of a Korean church in Vienna, Pokorny and Sung (2018: 164) drew upon this scholarly tradition and highlighted how diasporic churches fulfil a variety of functions, such as "provide space for social interaction; maintaining the Korean cultural tradition; offer social service and orientation vis-à-vis the local environment (especially utilised by neo-immigrants); and give social status."

In the context of children, Church community is central to the relevant scholarship. Although particularly focusing on the case of Chinese immigrants from working-class low-income families, Cao (2005: 192) also argues that the "church family provides emotional support that their [i.e., Chinese immigrant children] immediate families fail to provide." Similarly, Lu et al. (2013: 230) write that "many Chinese immigrant parents rely on Chinese Christian churches for meaningful and attractive youth activities, in an effort to keep their youth away from potential effects of American society that are viewed as damaging to traditional marital and family values often held by Chinese." Noting the numerous studies of the children of Chinese immigrants struggling with the ambiguity and in-between-ness of identities of being Chinese, American, and Chinese American, Yu (2018: 187) argues that "Chinese churches together with other U.S.-born Chinese peers provides them a safe space to share their identities of Chinese Americanness and Christianity." He further asserts that the Chinese Church is crucial to these children, with many sharing "testaments suggesting that growing up in a Chinese church helped them learn about their cultural roots, build a sense of self, and value their Chinese identity" (ibid.). Zhang (2006: 150) notes how children and youth programmes—which include Sunday school, residential visits, Bible school, camps, and retreats—are "the major vehicles the church uses to nurture the faith of members' children." He even states that these programmes also have the potential to lead to adult conversion: many non-Christian Chinese parents have brought their children to the church and other youth programmes "mostly because the children want to be with their Chinese friends" and this subsequently "forced" the parents to participate in Church activities which led to their eventual conversion (ibid.: 151).

The importance of community in the conversion process can also be seen in the context of the family. For example, Cáo and Lín (2016: 151) have studied Chinese Christians who brought their faith with them to Europe. They argued that the family context was core to their Christian faith and identity. Discussing the appeal of the Church to Chinese immigrant families, Chen (2006: 575) has argued that "immigrant parents struggle to apply Confucian principles of parenting to their American children, evangelical Christianity

offers an attractive new moral model of the family." Chén (2013: 2) has examined Chinese parents who actively "convert to Christianity for the sake of the family,"[3] whereas Lu, Marks, and Apavaloiae (2012) have similarly discussed how Chinese families convert to Christianity as a family unit. Finally, Yu (2018: 182) has noted how "after being converted, the Chinese began to take their children, spouses, parents, and friends to churches."

4. Christianity as a Bridge or a Barrier

Some scholars have argued that Christianity is sometimes utilised by Chinese immigrants as a means of assimilating into "Western culture."[4] For instance, Mì (2016: 43) asserted that "since Christian culture is ubiquitous in North America, Christianity has become an important way for Chinese to integrate into the local mainstream society."[5] Similarly, in his study of Chinese churches in Memphis, Yu (2018: 183) argued that "many Chinese believe that Christianity is the foundation of the United States, so that becoming Christian is becoming American." However, Yu also highlighted how conflicts between Chinese and Christian identities can occur, "especially when Chinese Christians go back to mainland China and visit their family and friends" (ibid.: 185).

Fenggang Yang has argued, however, that assimilation is not the primary goal of converts. He gives three reasons for this (Yang 1998: 243):

1. If assimilation was the true goal, then the converts would "remain nonreligious" in order to fit in the predominantly secular Western society.
2. If immigrants wanted to assimilate, they would join a non-ethnic church instead of a Chinese one.
3. If immigrants wanted to religiously assimilate, they would join a mainline church instead of an evangelical or fundamentalist Christian one (which, as Yang writes, is the norm for Chinese immigrants).

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3 *Wéi jiātíng ér guī xìn jīdūjiào* 为家庭而皈信基督教。

4 It is very common for first generation Chinese immigrants to refer to "Western culture" (*xīfāng wénhuà*). This is generally taken to mean certain perceived cultural values—particularly Christianity and democracy—that the Chinese immigrants view as fundamentally different to the cultural values of China.

5 *Yóuyú jīdūjiào wénhuà zài běiměi wú chù bùzài, huárén ruò xiǎng róngrù dāngdì zhǔliú shèhuì, xìnyǎng jīdūjiào jiù chéngwéi yīgè zhòngyào tújìng zhī yī* 由于基督教文化在北美无处不在，华人若想融入当地主流社会，信仰基督教就成为一个重要途径之一。

Some scholars argue that in contrast to being a bridge, the Christian faith of Chinese immigrants can act as a barrier to assimilation. In their study of Chinese immigrant Christianity in France and Italy, Cáo and Lín (2016: 152) found that due to the primarily secular context of the two said countries, the Chinese Christian identity in both cases "strengthen[s] the tension between the Chinese immigrant Christian community and the mainstream society, and objectively strengthen the cohesion and religious commitment within the immigrant church."[6]

5. Christianity Replaces Chinese Cultural Values

Much of the literature pertaining to Christianity in the context of Chinese immigrants asserts that Chinese immigrant parents commonly perceive Christianity as something of a haven of values. Fenggang Yang, one of the most prolific scholars of Chinese immigrant religiosity, has long asserted that despite immigrants continuing to cherish their traditional values (particularly those of Confucianism), in the process of modernisation, Chinese cultural traditions have been broken down. Subsequently, in migration, these Chinese immigrants turn to Christianity where they "find a good match for their cherished social-ethical values [… and] a universal and absolute ground on which these Chinese could selectively reject or accept certain cultural traditions" (Yang 2001: 90). Indeed, "the Chinese church helps to selectively preserve Chinese cultural traditions, including the Chinese language, cultural customs, and Confucian values" (Yang 1999: 16). Thus, by differentiating Chinese nonreligious traditions from religious ones and selectively preserving nonreligious traditional values, rituals, and symbols, "becoming Christian and American does not mean that these Chinese immigrants are giving up their Chinese identity" (Yang 2001: 90). Instead, Church members "try to separate Chinese religious traditions from nonreligious traditions, rejecting the former while accepting the latter" (Yang 1999: 16). He avers that this is possible due to the fact that "most Chinese regard Confucianism not as a religion but as a traditional philosophy of life [… converts] can retain Confucian moral values without falling into a stigmatized syncretism" (Yang 1998: 253). Similarly, Lu, Marks, and Apavaloiae (2012: 119) hold that Chinese immigrant parents

6 *Dàn tā dōu qiánghuàle huárén yímín jīdūjiào qúntǐ yǔ zhǔliú shèhuì jiān de zhānglì, kèguān shàng jiāqiángle yímín jiàohuì nèibù de níngjùlì yǔ zōngjiào wěishēn* 但它都强化了华人移民基督教群体与主流社会间的张力，客观上加强了移民教会内部的凝聚力与宗教委身。

commonly "rely on the Chinese Christian church for meaningful and attractive youth activities in an effort to keep immigrant youth away from the potential effects of American society that are viewed as damaging to traditional marital and family values."

Chen (2006: 579) writes how the Taiwanese perceive the Western value of "individual freedom" as "a threat to family harmony": "surrounded by the mainstream culture of American individualism, some of the claims of the Confucian family have lost their moral legitimacy within the family" (ibid.: 583). She notes how "in the United States, where Taiwanese believe that the schools offer no, or severely deficient, moral education, Christianity fills this function" (ibid.: 584). Chen thus argues that these families find a solution to this problem in the Church and explains that it is for this precise reason that Chinese immigrant churches place a strong emphasis on family. She concludes by alluding to a plaque that reads "Christ is the Lord of this House" that reportedly adorns the homes of many Taiwanese Christians, asserting that it symbolically supersedes any remnant of Chinese popular religion: "the symbolism of the plaque replacing the ancestral shrine vividly illustrates how evangelical Christianity shifts the moral foundation of Taiwanese immigrant families from filial piety to religious piety" (ibid.: 588). Likewise, Cohen (1991: 113) goes as far as to argue that "[t]hose who today identify themselves as Chinese do so without the cultural support provided by tradition." Similarly, Cao (2005: 198) contends that "conversion to Christianity involves a re-authoritization process in which the new authorities in the Western Christian world, as represented by the pastor's role as a foster father, replace the old ones embedded in traditional Chinese families and create an emotionally open culture," concluding that the more religiously committed Chinese immigrant children who convert to Christianity "tend to integrate their Christian faith with Chinese heritage by revising traditional notions of Chineseness and adjusting traditional Chinese practices" (ibid.: 193–194). Tokunaga (1998: 21–22) draws parallels between Confucianism and the Bible—the importance of honouring one's parents, putting desires of others above our own—but then also acknowledges core differences, such as Confucius offering "no hope of life after death" and the primacy of honouring God over one's family. Indeed, the argument that Christianity essentially replaces Chinese popular religion in the Chinese immigrant family home is not a new one. As early as 1971, Hsu wrote that "as the human relationships supplied by the family and the wider kinship net weaken and dissipate, church affiliation or other differences will certainly hold the possibility of becoming more relevant to the Chinese" (Hsu 1971: 64).

One can find this discourse in Chinese scholarship as well. Zhāng (2010: 10) describes the problem of Chinese immigrant youth thus: "Coupled with

the fact that immigrant families have few basic members and few relatives, newly immigrated Chinese teenagers tend to look for traces of China's 5,000 years of history, culture, and morality in their parents, which is like a blind man feeling an elephant, and inevitably misunderstandings arise frequently and even relationships break up."[7] Zhāng asserts that the Chinese Church in the host countries of Chinese immigrants can provide the solution to this problem. Overseas Chinese churches provide Chinese immigrants with a familiar cultural environment and a sense of ethnic identity: "The church is not only a place of religious worship for the Chinese, but also a centre of social and cultural activities" (ibid.: 12).[8] Crucially, the Chinese immigrant Church, often composed of congregants who themselves have gone through the same feelings, is well equipped to help young Chinese Christians overcome their common sense of "otherness" (*yìlèi gǎn*). Zhāng (ibid.) thus concludes that Chinese youth who undergo this common problem "return to the ethnic church again to rediscover their sense of ethnic identity."[9] Similarly, Zhū (2009) argues that achieving a balance between the ecumenical ideal of Christianity and Chinese cultural identity is an existing and complex historical process that constitutes a very real problem faced by contemporary overseas Chinese Christian communities.

Other scholars emphasise how Chinese immigrant converts to Christianity have their faith informed by their prior Chinese beliefs. This can take the form of appreciating certain Christian values that are in tune with Chinese popular religious belief—such as the aforementioned emphasis on the family—but can also translate to more direct aspects of Christian belief. For example, Jiang (2009: 102) notes how Christian converts "seemed hesitant to accept a Christian doctrine that everyone not believing in God, especially

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7 *Zài jiā shàng yímín jiātíng de jīběn chéngyuán bù duō, qīnshǔ bù duō, xīn yímín de huárén qīngshàonián duō zài fùmǔ shēnshang xúnzhǎo zhōngguó wǔqiān nián lái de lìshǐ, wénhuà, dàodé hénjī, yǒurú xiāzi mō xiàng, nánmiǎn wùhuì pín shēng, shènzhì guānxì pòliè* 再加上移民家庭的基本成员不多，亲属不多，新移民的华人青少年多在父母身上寻找中国五千年来的历史、文化、道德痕迹，有如瞎子摸象，难免误会频生，甚至关系破裂。

8 *Hǎiwài huárén jiàohuì wèi huárén yímín tígōngle yīgè sìcéngxiāngshí de huánjìng, yě shǐ tāmen zhǎodào yī zhǒng zúqún rèntóng gǎn. Yīncǐ jiàohuì duì huárén lái shuō bu jǐn shì yīgè zōngjiào chóngbài chǎngsuǒ, yěshì yīgè shèjiāo hé wénhuà huódòng zhōngxīn* 海外华人教会为华人移民提供了一个似曾相识的环境，也使他们找到一种族群认同感。 因此教会对华人来说不仅是一个宗教崇拜场所，也是一个社交和文化活动中心。

9 *Zàidù huí dào zú yì jiàohuì zhōng, chóngxīn zhǎodào zúqún rèntóng gǎn* 再度回到族裔教会中，重新找到族群认同感。

conscientious atheists, goes to hell." Ng (2002: 203) takes this line of argument much further, asserting that the "notion of a tutelary god [which is central to Chinese immigrant Christianity] intimately involved in the affairs of the world is not something the congregants received from the teachings of [the Bible …] it is an understanding that has been common in their ethnic culture since long before they converted to Christianity." He therefore argues that this tutelary god and "the emphases on practical blessing and guidance" are rooted in Chinese popular religion, evidenced by the "congregants' own self-conscious comparisons of the Christian God to some of the traditional Chinese deities in which they once believed and which they once worshiped" (ibid.: 204).

Cao (2005: 185) asserts that middle class Chinese families "view the ethnic church as a primary way of resisting complete cultural assimilation and preserving cherished aspects of a traditional ethnic identity," holding that the children, in this context, focus "on negotiating their cultural identity."

6. Core Characteristics of Chinese Immigrant Christianity

6.1. Support

Very much related to the importance of church community, support is a commonly perceived feature of Chinese immigrant Christianity. Noting how Chinese immigrant children can find it difficult to relate their problems to traditional authoritarian parents, Cao (2005: 197) argues that the Church can provide what their parents cannot: "a feeling of empowerment and a sense of belonging and warm bonding."

Many scholars note the material support given by Chinese churches in the West. Mì (2016: 44) refers to this material aid as "the secular function of overseas Chinese Christian faith,"[10] arguing that the social service function of the overseas Chinese Christian faith has played an important role in the missionary process.[11] However, Yang (1998: 242–243) argues against the "rice-bowl Christian" narrative, asserting that most churches place emphasis

10 *Hǎiwài huárén jīdūjiào xìnyǎng de shìsú gōngnéng* 海外华人基督教信仰的世俗功能。

11 *Hǎiwài huárén jīdūjiào xìnyǎng de shèhuì fúwù gōngnéng zài chuánjiào guòchéng zhōng fāhuīle zhòngyào zuòyòng* 海外华人基督教信仰的社会服务功能在传教过程中发挥了重要作用。

on evangelisation as opposed to providing social service programmes, and most Chinese immigrant converts are well-educated professionals who have no need of material support.

Support can also manifest in both a human and spiritual sense (often simultaneously). For example, Jiang (2009: 60) notes how one interviewee after suffering the loss of her grandmother underwent a conversion experience that "began with the love of God transferred through the love of Christians." Similarly, Ng (2002: 205) holds that Chinese immigrant Christianity essentially constitutes "the frightful recognition of one's powerlessness in a foreign environment, followed by an acceptance of God as the ultimate guardian." Indeed, some scholars note that the communal and spiritual support of Christianity is the largest alteration in worldview of recent Chinese converts. For example, Qiao (2017: 64) draws a contrast between pre- and post-conversion: Chinese converts "used to view their lives as their own; they were not only responsible for what they did to their lives but also the consequence of it," whereas Chinese immigrant converts live with the belief that they are part of God's plan and should live their lives accordingly. Yu (2018: 184) writes that the "sense of eternity and home Christianity provides is especially healing for immigrants who often feel unsettled and alienated," while being "'children of God' makes them feel less marginalized."

6.2. Ritual

Chén (2013: 3) argues that ritual is the primary feature of Chinese Christianity—particularly ritual that is "embedded in everyday life" (*qiànrù rìcháng shēnghuó*) that combats feelings of powerlessness. Prayer is especially emphasised in the literature. Jiang (2009: 74) writes about how converts go through something of a sequence of learning how to pray: they initially "define prayer as a request for rewards from God" and eventually come to define it "as a way to communicate with God […] and do not worry about whether or not their prayers are answered."

6.3. Identity

Another commonly identified feature of Chinese immigrant Christians is the sense of identity itself. For instance, in her study of Taiwanese immigrant women, Chen (2005: 336) asserts that these women utilise Christianity as a means "to construct a distinct sense of self from the family." She argues that

although this new religious commitment often competes with their traditional commitments to their families, the women of her study described how with conversion to Christianity came a sense of "freedom from the restrictions of traditional Taiwanese womanhood—a womanhood that they see as hemmed in by familial obligations—and freedom to follow their individual spiritual callings independent of their families' demands."

6.4. Openness

Some scholars have noted the openness of Chinese Christians in the West, particularly noting their enthusiasm towards discussing their faith. Jiang (2009: 25) expresses this directly when writing that "Chinese Christians are always ready to share their feelings about God."

6.5. Weak Faith

A somewhat recent trend among scholars is the notion that Chinese immigrant converts to Christianity have a weaker faith compared to their Western peers. An increasing number of reports (e.g., Zhang 2017) state that it is very common for Chinese immigrants to convert to Christianity while living abroad, but then decide to drop this newly adopted religious identity when they return to China. More striking, however, is the recent questioning of Chinese immigrant faith. For example, Jiang (2009: 2) writes that "it remains doubtful whether their belief in God and their religious commitment are the same as Western Christians." Taken to the extreme, one recently finds mention of Chinese immigrants who fake a Christian faith in order assist the asylum process. By way of illustration, a large-scale investigation in 2012 resulted in the discovery of asylum mills in the United States that coached clients to fabricate Christian identities and stories of persecutions in China. The cases of 13,500 immigrants are still reportedly under review (Petri 2019).

7. Chinese Popular Religion

In order to fully comprehend the conversion of Chinese immigrant children, one must have a firm understanding of Chinese popular religion. Yang and Ebaugh (2001: 376) aptly pointed out that religious changes in immigrant

communities cannot be confined to the receiving community and one must account for the religion(s) of the immigrant's home country: "Majority/minority religious status in the home and host countries is an important factor that impacts the internal dynamics and overall changes in immigrant religious institutions." It should be acknowledged from the outset that China is commonly regarded as "the primary country of origin for migrants who are religiously unaffiliated" (Pew Research Center 2012). However, Yang (2001: 71) has rightly noted that many Chinese individuals, both in national and international contexts, follow an assortment of personalised eclectic practices without identifying themselves with any particular religion. These practices (that are often undefined) are commonly referred to by scholars as "Chinese popular religion" (Johnson 1996: 123). This is an extremely broad category. Chinese popular religion is deeply rooted in (and sometimes echoes) the Three Teachings (*sānjiào*): Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. Although by no means comprehensive, I have previously (Chadwin 2020: 179–181) offered a broad system of classification of Chinese popular religion:

1. Gods (*tiānshén*), ancestors (*zǔxiān*), and ghosts (*guǐ*): these agents essentially encapsulate the religious metaphysics, situating humans in a universe cohabited by supernatural beings.
2. *Bài*: this constitutes the ritual component of Chinese popular religion. It is, in essence, by means of various bodily actions, the physical embodiment of religious belief.
3. *Bào*: this encapsulates the core notion of reciprocity. It constitutes the necessary reciprocal obligations that exist within the universe. Its most obvious manifestation is the concept of filiality (*xiào*; see the following section). Má (2000: 129) describes this relationship by writing that "a person exists because of his ancestors, and in turn his ancestors exist because of his descendants."[12] A very common manifestation of this is in the enactment and upholding of filiality.[13]

Finally, there exists a very common argument that Chinese popular religion and the values that go with it are diminishing in both the domestic and the (Chinese) immigrant contexts. Thus, Sung (1983: 335) writes that "filial piety is still strong, but duty to the family has already been diluted."

12 *Yīgè rén de cúnzài shì yóuyú tā de zǔxiān, fǎn guòlái zǔxiān de cúnzài yěshì yóuyú tā de zǐsūn* 一个人的存在是由于他的祖先、反过来祖先的存在也是由于他的子孙。

13 For a more in-depth examination of this concept, see my previous work "Parental Popular Religion and Filiality: An Ethnographic Study of the Religiosity of Chinese Parents in Vienna" (Chadwin 2021b).

8. The Contrast between Chinese Popular Religion and Christianity

Many scholars such as Yang (2006), Abel (2006), and Chen (2005) have noted a striking contrast between Chinese popular religion and Christianity. Yang and Tamney (2006: 128) write how "many Chinese avoid Christianity because it is perceived as preventing the performance of traditional duties related to filial piety and ancestor worship." After ethnographically studying a Chinese church in the United States, Abel asserts that the congregation's pattern of giving "disrupts" the basic pattern of reciprocity central to Chinese religion: the convert's transition to Christianity "represents a striking and quite fundamental rejection of some traditional Chinese religious norms […] especially in regard to the reciprocity inherent in Chinese religious practice" (Abel 2006: 171). Herein, one finds a clear distinction between Chinese religion and Christianity, where "recruits repeatedly contrasted life amongst the members against a Chinese society they characterized as lacking in altruism and kindness" (ibid.: 168). Emphasising anonymous giving, rejection of the concern for face, and strong standards for honesty and forgiveness, Abel concludes that it is exactly this rebellion of "established Chinese norms that is meaningful" (ibid.: 174).

Similarly, Carolyn Chen highlights the tension that can occur between Chinese popular religion and Christianity, arguing that Taiwanese women who convert to Christianity, and despite adopting a new sense of religious self that cultivates a new-found sense of freedom, simultaneously recognise the danger that Christianity poses to their pre-existing family values: "It is through the pursuit of these extrafamilial, religious goals that most women carve spaces of independence and authority for themselves, albeit never at the cost of radically threatening the nuclear family." Thus, she notes "that rarely do women use their religious license to abandon or reject familial responsibilities altogether, however [… and] more often, women fulfil competing religious commitments within the constraints of the family" (Chen 2005: 354).

9. Methodology

This research took place over a period of five months from August 15, 2021, to February 16, 2022. My sample size consisted of twenty-eight ethnic Hàn children (fifteen male and thirteen female) who were born in China. This sample can be further divided into nine children aged eight and under (five

male and four female), nine aged nine to thirteen (five male and four female), and ten aged fourteen to eighteen (five male and five female). The sample was selected by sending out study invitations that explained the project and various criteria to Chinese parents in Vienna (found, for the most part, by utilising a personal network of Chinese immigrants in the city that I have built up over the past three years, as well as by using WeChat). Each participant was enrolled in some form of Christian education, in the form of either formal Catholic education that takes place in school or Sunday schools. I carried out semi-structured interviews that lasted, on average, an hour as well as participant observation. The interviews, for the most part, took place in the homes of my interviewees, but a few of the adults (given the status of COVID-19 during my study period) opted for outdoor interviews. Moreover, given that "children and the adults live together and learn from one another [… and one should] not study the children without studying adults who taught them" (Ridgely 2012: 11), I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the guardians of each interviewee. For the most part, these families were somewhat recent residents of Vienna: the most recent family having migrated in 2019, with ten years constituting the opposite end, and the average time spent in Austria was five years. The families were mostly (nineteen out of twenty-eight) semi-affluent and middle class, seven families were working class, and the remaining two were particularly affluent. Every guardian reported irreligiosity. As I seek to examine the religious beliefs (or lack thereof) of individuals as opposed to congregations, I have opted to avoid conducting a dedicated study of specific churches. I therefore adopted the line of reasoning of Chén (2013: 1) who argued that the phenomenon of religious conversion—the motives, mechanisms, and processes—"is best examined in the context of daily life."[14] That said, carrying out participant observation in a number of churches did lead to establishing interviews with four priests and two church volunteers that I had not originally planned, further informing this research.

My research methods heavily drew upon both Harvey's concept of "guesthood" (Harvey 2005: 227–228; 2013: 94), in which interviewees are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed" (Arthur 2019: 16), as well as Ridgely's (2011: 82) approach of "allowing children to shape the research"—an approach that centres on the researcher doing everything in their power to avoid an "adultist" (Ridgely

14 *Bǐzhě zhǔzhāng jiāng zōngjiào guī xìn xiànxiàng fàngzhì zài rìcháng shēnghuó de qíngjìng hé màiluò zhōng qù lǐjiě qí dòngyīn, jīzhì yǔ guòchéng* 笔者主张将宗教皈信现象放置在日常生活的情境和脉络中去理解其动因、机制与过程。

2012: 11) perspective. I also drew upon my own prior experience of conducting ethnographic research with children. To this end, I ensured that I did all within my power to cultivate an atmosphere founded on mutual respect in which my interviewees felt as comfortable as possible and in which it was very clear that they (as opposed to myself) were the experts. I therefore employed a very different approach to that of Yang (1999: 12) who writes about how his identity as a Chinese Christian was beneficial to his ethnographic studies of Chinese Christians in the United States. He describes "Chinese doctoral students who tried to study Chinese churches but were heavily proselytized" as well as a Chinese pastor who bluntly told him that "[i]f you were not a Christian, I would have not told you all the conflicts in these Chinese churches, because you would misinterpret them. And if you were not a Chinese scholar, I would have not explained to you the historical and social connections between these churches here and Christian movements in China, because you would not be able to understand whatsoever." I am neither Chinese nor a Christian. However, in contrast to Yang, my role as an outsider with knowledge of Mandarin was to my advantage. As with my previous studies (e.g., Chadwin 2020: 187–188), I found that when conducting ethnography with younger children, being an outsider and emphasising how little you know, generates an environment in which the child is more likely to want to take on the role of a teacher. Moreover, I have found that teenagers are often more likely to speak to those they deem outsiders of their social and religious bubble because they do not have to conform to social or religious rules and stigmas.

Finally, given that my interviewees were children, I adopted BERA's (BERA 2019) guidelines to ensure that my project and subsequent data were "ethically acceptable." In my capacity as researcher, I did all in my power to ensure that the participants I interviewed were protected from any manner of harm at every stage of planning and execution of the project. I therefore thoroughly briefed each participant (including the guardians) about my project, provided an ongoing option to opt out at any moment, and ensured that I acquired informed consent. All participants are anonymised (including names of schools, churches, teachers, priests, and guardians), no residential addresses are disclosed, and no information that could potentially be traced back to my participants is given. I have assigned pseudonyms that reflect both gender and ethnic background to each participant. I do reveal the age of each participant.

10. Discussion of Ethnographic Findings

This section will elucidate the key findings of this study. I have opted to divide it thematically. Broadly speaking, my interviewees fell into one of three categories: religiously apathetic, hybrid Christians, traditional converts. It is worth noting that the original sample comprised of thirty children. However, two children were withdrawn from the study by their parents. Although one interviewee was withdrawn by her parents for undisclosed reasons, the other case is worthy of mention. A mother and father contacted me and told me that even though they (and their child) were perfectly happy for their child to be a part of this study, they had recently mentioned it to their family in China. The child's grandfather had apparently reacted in an extreme way and explicitly forbade his son from letting his grandson participate in the study. The parents therefore decided to comply with the grandfather's wishes. I believe that this is significant for two reasons. First, herein one witnesses a very explicit display of filiality: despite the interviewee's parents being comfortable with this project, they decided to comply with the wishes of the grandfather out of a clear sense of obligation. Second, I believe that one can notice a generation divide. Although religion is certainly a sensitive issue in contemporary China, the situation is incomparable to the days of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976): a period that would have greater relevance to the grandfather.

10.1. Religiously Apathetic

This group is comprised of the least amount of interviewees, with only five fitting into this category: two under eight, one nine to thirteen, and two fourteen to eighteen. As the name suggests, these children demonstrated a notable sense of apathy towards both Christianity and Chinese popular religion. Following their parent's wishes, each attended classes in Christianity as well as conducted various forms of *bài* at home, but none would actively engage in religious activity of any kind of their own accord. The religious identity and beliefs of these children were the most difficult to identify and pin down. Zhāng Wěi (14) was noticeably perplexed when I tried to ask him about the specifics of his beliefs: while telling me about his latest Christianity class at school, I asked him about God and whether or not he believes in Him. After

thinking about my question for quite some time, he simply responded "I really don't know."[15] After an even longer period of thinking, he then told me "I really haven't thought about it before."[16] He had already told me his reasoning for attending these classes: "My parents want me to learn about Christianity so I go."[17] This notion of simply not giving thought to one's religious beliefs was common among all five of the religiously apathetic interviewees. Indeed, my enquiring about belief itself was seen to be strange by all five. After Fēng Mián (16) told me about how she and her family clean their flat in Vienna every Spring Festival (*chūnjié*) in order to "welcome the ancestors into the home,"[18] she found the questions I had about her ancestors funny. She explained:

> I know questions like "do you believe in God" are really common in Austria, but these things are not important for us. We clean our flat to welcome our ancestors because it is something we *have* to do. We don't tell people "I believe in my ancestors" because that just sounds strange![19]

Thus, these interviewees treated both Chinese popular religion and Christianity as more of a duty. However, this duty was founded in Chinese popular religion whereas not one of these interviewees demonstrated any belief in Christian doctrine. Indeed, their very reason for learning about Christian doctrine was due to their desire to respect and obey the wishes of their parents. Therefore, even though no thought had been given to the *why* of their religious practice, the practice itself was still perceived as important. I would therefore argue that these interviewees were typical practitioners of Chinese popular religion. *Bào* manifested as filiality was clearly important to them, as was various manifestations of *bài*. This notion of parents making their immigrant children attend religious classes or visiting religious institutions as a means of cultural assimilation can also be noted in scholarship. Despite not focusing on religion at all, Chao (2013: 66) nevertheless unwittingly recorded

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15 *Wǒ zhēn de bù zhīdào* 我真的不知道。

16 *Wǒ yǐqián zhēn de méiyǒu xiǎngguò* 我以前真的没有想过。

17 *Wǒ fùmǔ xīwàng wǒ xué jīdūjiào suǒyǐ wǒ qùle* 我父母希望我学基督教所以我去了。

18 *Huānyíng zǔxiānmen dào jiālǐ lái* 欢迎祖先们到家里来。

19 *Wǒ liǎojiě dào de zài àodìlì zuì chángjiàn de wèntí shì:'Nǐ xìn shén ma?' Dànshì zhège wèntí duì wǒmen lái shuō bu zhòngyào. Wǒmen xūyào dǎsǎo jiā lái huānyíng zǔxiān. Zhè tīng qǐlái yǒudiǎn er qíguài, wǒmen cónglái bu gàosù biérén 'wǒmen xiāngxìn wǒmen de zǔxiān'!* 我了解到的在奥地利最常见的问题是：'你信神吗？' 但是这个问题对我们来说不重要。我们需要打扫家来欢迎祖先。这听起来有点儿奇怪，我们从来不告诉别人'我们相信我们的祖先'! (emphasis added).

a most valuable interview that provides further evidence that there is a general perception among many Chinese immigrant parents that it is useful for their children to learn about Christianity:

> We also went to church on Sundays. I didn't mean to impose Christianity on her. Just let her get more familiar with the ways Americans live. She didn't want to go at first, but she went for enjoying church choral music.

Examining these interviewees in light of prior research, one can reach several conclusions. Religion acted as neither a bridge nor barrier to any of the respondents: they were perfectly happy (albeit in a couple of cases a tad bored) to attend classes in Christianity but not one of them said that it made them feel any more Austrian (which was their parents' desire). Similarly, given that their Chinese practice of Chinese popular religion was important to them, but, in terms of *bài*, very much confined to their home coupled with the fact that this practice of Chinese popular religion did not play an outward role in their identity (at least consciously), they did not feel like their religion acted as a barrier to inclusion. They did not discuss religion with their Austrian peers and, when asked, they would honestly say that they are irreligious. Furthermore, given that the Christianity classes were seen as something of a chore, they did not seem to benefit from any sense of Christian community.

10.2. Hybrid Christians

The majority of interviewees (sixteen of twenty-eight) fell into this group, which was specifically comprised of seven under eight, four nine to thirteen, and five fourteen to eighteen. Unlike the religiously apathetic, these interviewees spent a great deal of time pondering religiosity and their own beliefs. Indeed, religion was something of a confusing area for many of them. Each adhered to both Christianity and Chinese popular religion. Although the degrees (of both practice and belief) varied, each one possessed a dual religious identity that some had managed to successfully reconcile while others were in the process of doing so.

What quickly became apparent was that Christianity informed the interviewees' belief in Chinese popular religion and vice versa. Indeed, undertaking classes in Christianity and attending church commonly led to religious reflection. Niàn Zhēn (11) explained it thus:

> When we first arrived in Vienna my parents wanted me to go to church so that I could become like an Austrian. At first, I just went and listened. But after some time, I started to pray and I really liked it. It made me think that China and Austria are the same! My mum has a special statue that she speaks to and prays to.[20] Christians in church do the same thing! I don't know why but this made me really happy.[21]

Prior to attending Sunday school classes, Niàn Zhēn had clearly never considered the subject of religion or her own system of belief. After being taught how to pray, she began to develop a relationship with the Christian God akin to the relationship her mother has with Guānyīn. She even started to take the initiative and pray to Guānyīn with her mother. Thus, one finds here an example of Christianity that can be incorporated into Chinese popular religion and lead to a wholly new religious identity.

I therefore found that the lived religious experience and beliefs of the interviewees is reminiscent of Ng's (2002) assertion that Chinese popular religion informs the religious beliefs of immigrants—but Ng's interviewees were Christians. The Hybrid Christians of this study went beyond having their Chinese popular religion background informing their newly found Christian faith; rather, Christianity simply became a part of their Chinese popular religious beliefs. Some respondents were even happy to place greater emphasis on the God of Christianity. Fēi Hóng (8) told me that in class he had learned about some of the "amazing things" that the Christian God has done. He told me that "God is the most powerful god!"[22] However, despite regarding the Christian God as more powerful than Chinese popular religious deities and/or one's ancestors, the fact that Fēi Hóng referred to gods in a plural sense is significant. It demonstrates that he had not wholly adopted Christian doctrine but instead had formed a hybrid belief. I was impressed with the degree to which some of the interviewees had given thought to the matter of religion. Yǔ Yān (17) described Christianity as a specific "religion" (*zōngjiào*) and

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20 I later learned when Niàn Zhēn showed me the statue that the figure was Guānyīn, a female bodhisattva typically associated with compassion.

21 *Wǒmen dào wéiyěnà de shíhòu, wǒ de fùmǔ wèile ràng wǒ chéngwéi yīgè àodìlì rén ér ràng wǒ qù jiàotáng. Yī kāishǐ, wǒ zhǐshì qù tīng tīng. Dànshìguòle yīduàn shíjiān hòu, wǒ kāishǐ qídài, bìngqiě xǐhuān shàngle. Zhè ràng wǒ juédé zhōngguó hé àodìlì shì yīyàng de. Wǒ māmā yǒu yīgè tèbié de qídǎo de diāoxiàng jīdūjiào rén zài jiàotáng lǐ yě zuò yīyàng de shì. Wǒ bù zhīdào wèishéme zhè ràng wǒ hěn gāoxìng* 我们到维也纳的时候，我的父母为了让我成为一个奥地利人而让我去教堂。一开始，我只是去听听。但是过了一段时间后，我开始期待，并且喜欢上了。这让我觉得中国和奥地利是一样的。我妈妈有一个特别的祈祷的雕像基督教人在教堂里也做一样的事。我不知道为什么这让我很高兴。

22 *Zhǔ shì zuì qiáng dà de shén* 主是最强大的神。

told me (with a wry smile), in answer to my question about the first of the Ten Commandments:

> All religions want to be the best. Of course Christians are going to say that Christianity is the best religion.[23]

The term "religion" (*zōngjiào*) is crucial here insofar as none of the hybrid Christians regarded Chinese popular religion as falling under the umbrella of "religion." Like Niàn Zhēn, many alluded to the similarities, but no one referred to their various beliefs and practices pertaining to Chinese popular religion as "religion." Indeed, this could be because there is no accepted term for Chinese popular religion in Mandarin nor is it a typical subject of discussion outside scholarship. Instead, many general terms exist. I have found terms such as *jiàzhí tǐ* (system of values), *chuántǒng* (tradition), and *lúnlǐ dàodé* (moral ethics) far more useful in an ethnographic context when discussing Chinese popular religion. I have also observed that even the term *zhōngguó mínjiān xìnyǎng* (Chinese folk religion) leads to misunderstandings and obscured data as practitioners of Chinese popular religion will not commonly self-identify as adhering to *zhōngguó mínjiān xìnyǎng*.

When examining these hybrid Christians in light of prior research, a number of conclusions can be drawn. The very beliefs of these children exemplify the limits of the term "conversion." Although each child readily participated in Christian ritual and held Christian beliefs, not one of them believed that they had undergone conversion nor self-identified as Christian. I would therefore build upon Fan and Chen (2014) and argue that examining conversion in the context of Chinese immigrants is only applicable when studying Chinese immigrants who undergo formal conversion to Christianity.

Unlike the religiously apathetic interviewees, the Christian community was to varying degrees an important part of the hybrid Christian's life. Many reported making friends at church and six spoke of going to priests and church councillors for support. Rú Shì (17), for example, often visited her church to talk to the priest about problems: "I speak to [Father David] about problems that I can't talk to my parents about."[24] Sometimes, these problems were about Christianity and matters of faith but more often than not they were about daily issues such as dating. The Church therefore becomes something of a counselling service. For some, the Church has clearly grown into what

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23 *Suǒyǒu de zōngjiào dōu yuàn zuì hǎo de shì fāshēng. Jīdūjiào rén dāngrán huì shuō jīdūjiào shì zuì hǎo de zōngjià*. 所有的宗教都愿最好的事发生。基督教人当然会说基督教是最好的宗教。

24 *Wǒ gàosù* [Father David] *yīxiē wǒ bùnéng gēn fùmǔ tán de wèntí* 我告诉 [Father David] 一些我不能跟父母谈的问题。

Zhou (2009: 34–35) argues ethnic institutions are for Chinese immigrant youth in the United States: namely, places which "allow the children to develop strategies to cope with parental constraints" as well as "offer some space where children can share their feelings." Rú Shì was certainly not the only one to report going to church or Christian teachers at school to talk about problems they felt that they could not be discussed with their parents.

I later interviewed Father David, who elaborated:

> I have honestly never had a congregant like Rú Shì before. She seems to take her Christian practice pretty seriously and she always has lots of questions about things like praying, but I also get the impression that she is not ready to fully adopt the faith. I have never known someone who studies and practises Christianity so seriously without actually becoming a Christian. We have spoken about baptism many times but she has never been keen.

In a follow-up interview with Rú Shì, I learned that she was unwilling to undergo baptism because that, to her, would be fully committing to Christianity:

> God tells us that we have to be honest. If I were to get baptised then I would not be being honest with myself or with [Father David].[25]

Herein, the hybrid nature of Rú Shì's religious belief is apparent: she clearly believes in the Christian God and also believes that one has an obligation to obey Him, but she also simultaneously readily acknowledges (without naming) her Chinese popular religious practice. By contrast, Wáng Xiùyīng (9) was more than happy to get baptised: "My priest told me that I should get baptised so I did."[26] Wáng Xiùyīng therefore saw no problem with being baptised and continuing to engage in Chinese popular religious activity.

I believe that the religious practice and identity of the hybrid Christians did serve as a bridge to assimilating into Austrian society. However, while the acceptance of Christian values and belief coupled with church attendance made these children feel more Austrian, the Chinese popular religious practice they participated in at home served as a bridge to their Chinese identity. Yìng Yuè (15) demonstrated this dual religious identity when she told me about how she turns to religion in times of need:

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25 *Zhǔ gàosù wǒmen yào chéngshí. Rúguǒ wǒmen shòule xǐlǐ, jiù xūyào duì zìjǐ huò* [Father David] *chéngshí* 主告诉我们要诚实。如果我们受了洗礼，就需要对自己或 [Father David] 诚实。

26 *Mùshī shuō wǒ yīnggāi xǐlǐ, suǒyǐ wǒ zuòle* 牧师说我应该洗礼，所以我做了。

> It depends what the problem is. Sometimes I will pray to God when I am feeling sad but I don't think he can help me as much with school.[27]

She then showed me a statue of Confucius that her Mother had brought from China and explained that she sometimes prays to him when she needs help with school. When I asked her to elaborate on this essential cherry picking, she described how different gods have different specialities. She described how her mum had recently lost her best friend who still lived in China to cancer. At the time, Yìng Yuè was very worried about her mother. She did bring it up in church and told me that she prayed for her mum with her peers, but she also questioned how much help the Christian God would be:

> I know it's kind of silly, but I mostly asked Confucius for help. I just feel like it is the right thing to do.[28]

I would therefore adamantly argue against Christianity replacing Chinese popular religion. These hybrid Christian children demonstrate that it is very possible to have a religious identity comprised of both Christianity and Chinese popular religion or even one in which their Chinese popular religious identity is absorbed into their new Christian one (or vice versa).

10.3. Traditional Converts

This group included the remaining interviewees: seven of twenty-eight. More specifically, it was comprised of no children under the age of eight, four nine to thirteen, and three fourteen to eighteen. As the name suggests, these children all self-identified as Christian. Unlike the hybrid Christians, the traditional converts underwent a more typical, that is, "contemporary model of conversion" (Ng 2002: 201) to Christianity.

Of the three groups, the traditional converts were the ones to demonstrate a genuine religious identity struggle and only one of the seven had actually told their parents that they had converted. All seven spoke of an inner conflict of loyalty to God and loyalty to their parents, whom they associated with Chinese popular religion. Certain rituals, such as kneeling and burning gifts

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27 *Kàn shì shénme wèntí, gǎnjué shāngxīn de shíhòu wǒ huì gēn zhǔ qídǎo. Dànshì wǒ bù rènwéi zhǔ huì bāngzhù wǒ de xuéyè* 看是什么问题，感觉伤心的时候我会跟主祈祷。但是我不认为主会帮助我的学业。

28 *Wǒ zhīdào zhèyàng hěn shǎ dànshì wǒ chángcháng huì wèn kǒngzǐ bāngzhù. Wǒ juédé zhèyàng zuò shì duì de* 我知道这样很傻但是我常常会问孔子帮助. 我觉得这样做是对的。

for the ancestors, were perceived as breaking the First Commandment. Herein one finds a parallel with Shaolu Yu who argues that conversion has the potential to generate conflicts between Chinese and Christian identities, "especially when Chinese Christians go back to mainland China and visit their family and friends" (Yu 2018: 185). This was very much the case with Hóu Yǎchún (12) who told me:

> In China, I really don't want my family to know that I am Christian. I therefore usually exaggerate my Chinese identity when I'm there. It's the same with my parents here in Vienna. The Bible teaches us that we need to respect our parents and I really, really want to make them both proud of me. But I also want to make God happy and I am worried that he doesn't like it when we commemorate our ancestors. I do what my parents tell me but then I always say sorry to God afterwards.[29]

Although the remaining traditional converts did not talk about conflict in China, they readily spoke of potential home conflicts and their desire to avoid them. All these traditional converts reported adhering to Chinese popular religion, with two even referencing the importance of filiality. However, each one felt, to varying degrees, bad about engaging in Chinese popular religious acts. Hán Bóyǎn (17) was somewhat jaded about this:

> At home, I am the perfect filial Chinese son. When I leave home, I am a Christian.[30]

Herein one finds a striking similarity to an interview carried out by Yu (2018: 185):

> The first time I went back to China I tried to share my religion with my friends and family, I was rejected. My friends even asked me "What's wrong with you?" But later I began to hide my identity and wrap myself around. When I

29 *Zài zhōngguó, wǒ bùxiǎng ràng wǒ de jiārén zhīdào wǒ xìn jīdūjiào. Zài nà'er shí wǒ tōngcháng huì kuādà wǒ de zhōngguó shēnfèn. Fùmǔ zài wéiyěnà yě huì zuò tóngyàng de shì. Shèngjīng jiào wǒmen yào zūnzhòng wǒmen de fùmǔ, wǒ zhēn de xīwàng wǒ néng ràng tāmen wèi wǒ gǎndào jiāo'ào. Dànshì wǒ yě xiǎng ràng zhǔ gāoxìng. Wǒ dānxīn wǒ huáiniàn zǔxiān de shíhòu tā huì bù xǐhuān. Wǒ zuò fùmǔ ràng wǒ zuò de shì, shìhòu zǒng shì gēn zhǔ shuō duìbùqǐ* 在中国，我不想让我的家人知道我信基督教。在那儿时我通常会夸大我的中国身份。父母在维也纳也会做同样的事。圣经教我们要尊重我们的父母，我真的希望我能让他们为我感到骄傲。但是我也想让主高兴。我担心我怀念祖先的时候他会不喜欢。我做父母让我做的事，事后总是跟主说对不起。

30 *Zài jiālǐ wǒ shì yīgè xiàoshùn de érzi. Zài wàimiàn wǒ shì yīgè jīdūjiào rén* 在家里我是一个孝顺的儿子。在外面我是一个基督教人。

> go back to China, I behave like a "normal person." When I am here in America, I am a Christian.

I would therefore argue that Christianity acted as both a bridge and a barrier to these interviewees. It was a bridge insofar as each traditional convert reported that Christianity enabled them to connect with an Austrian sense of identity. This even came as a surprise to Hán Bóyǎn (17):

> At first, I didn't want to believe it myself. My parents made me attend Christianity classes at school and I remember that at the time I really didn't want to go. They told me that it would help me understand Austria and I thought that this was really stupid! I tried to tell them that most people in my class were not even Christian but they wouldn't listen. But today, whenever I go to church and hang out with my Christian friends, I can't help but feel Austrian.[31]

He then started laughing when we spoke about him not being able to talk to his parents about his Christian identity:

> Maybe I should tell them about Christianity making me feel like an Austrian because it will prove that they were right all along. That would make them happy![32]

Christianity also served as a barrier to these interviewees insofar as it made them feel at odds with their parents, their home life, and Chinese popular religion. Even Hé Zhīhuá (15), the only traditional convert who had actually told her parents about her conversion, felt that Christianity was something of a barrier:

> My parents try to be supportive and they sometimes even come to church with me. But I know deep in their hearts they do not understand why this is so important to me. Last Spring Festival, I tried to tell mum that because I am

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31 *Yī kāishǐ, wǒ bùxiǎng xiāngxìn wǒ zìjǐ. Wǒ de fùmǔ ràng wǒ zài xuéxiào shàng jī dū jiāo kè, wǒ jìdé nà shí wǒ zhēn de xiǎng qù. Tāmen shuō nàyàng huì bāngzhù wǒ liǎojiě àodìlì, wǒ juédé nà shì fēicháng yúchǔn de. Wǒ gēn tāmen shuō bān lǐ dà duō shǔ de tóngxué dōu bùxìn jīdūjiào, dànshì tāmen bù tīng. Dànshì xiànzài, wúlùn shénme shíhòu wǒ gēn jīdūjiào péngyǒu chūqù, dōu gǎnjué wǒ shì àodìlì rén* 一开始，我不想相信我自己。我的父母让我在学校上基督教课，我记得那时我真的想去。她们说那样会帮助我了解奥地利，我觉得那是非常愚蠢的。我跟他们说班里大多数的同学都不信基督教，但是他们不听。但是现在，无论什么时候我跟基督教朋友出去，都感觉我是奥地利人。

32 *Wǒ huòxǔ yīn gāi gàosù fùmǔ shìshí zhèngmíng tāmen shì duì de, jīdūjiào ràng wǒ gǎnjué wǒ shì àodìlì rén. Nà huì ràng tāmen gāoxìng.* 我或许因该告诉父母事实证明他们是对的，基督教让我感觉我是奥地利人。那会让他们高兴。

> Christian I can't offer incense to our ancestors because this would make God angry. This made her really sad and it broke my heart! In the end, I burned incense but I felt really guilty about it. It's like I can't win.[33]

To some degree, I would argue that for these interviewees, Christianity did replace Chinese popular religion. Even though they all still engaged in Chinese popular religious practice, they did so for the sake of their parents. However, one could also argue that the very fact that pleasing one's parents was coupled with the allusions to filiality means that a certain degree of Chinese popular religious belief was retained.

11. Research Findings and the Core Characteristics of Chinese Immigrant Christianity

Although this is the first study of isolated—insofar as they do not belong to a singular congregation or Christian community—immigrant Chinese children, I believe that it is still very much worth examining the results of this study in light of the five aforementioned core characteristics of Chinese immigrant Christianity:

1. Support

With the exception of the religiously apathetic, I believe that this study very much demonstrates that Chinese immigrant children often gain a great deal of "support from Christianity." All the interviewees that belong to the traditional convert category reported receiving both spiritual support in the form of a newly found relationship with God as well as psychological support that came with the new church counselling opportunities. Similarly, the majority (fourteen out of sixteen) of the hybrid Christians spoke of the support that comes from both Christianity and Chinese popular religious belief.

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33 *Wǒ de fùmǔ xiǎng ràng wǒ héqún, yǒu shíhòu shènzhì gēn wǒ yīqǐ dào jiàotáng qù. Wǒ shēn shēn dì zhīdào zài tāmen xīnlǐ gēnběn bù lǐjiě wèishéme zhè duì wǒ hěn zhòngyào. Qùnián chūnjié, wǒ gàosù māmā wǒ xìn jīdūjiào, suǒyǐ wǒ bùnéng gěi zǔxiān shàng xiāng, yīnwèi nàyàng huì ràng zhǔ shēngqì. Zhè ràng tā fēicháng nánguò, yě ràng wǒ shāngxīn. Zuìhòu wǒ háishì shàngle xiāng, dànshì wǒ juédé yǒudiǎn er kuìjiù. Gǎnjué wǒ gēnběn bù huì yíng.* 我的父母想让我合群，有时候甚至跟我一起到教堂去。我深深地知道在他们心里根本不理解为什么这对我很重要。去年春节，我告诉妈妈我信基督教，所以我不能给祖先上香，因为那样会让主生气。这让她非常难过，也让我伤心。最后我还是上了香，但是我觉得有点儿愧疚。感觉我根本不会赢。

2. Ritual

Unsurprisingly, ritual was important to the majority of interviewees with twenty-six of them making direct references to its significance. Christian prayer was cited as an effective means of support and aid by all traditional converts. What is noteworthy is that, alongside prayer, the majority (namely the hybrid Christians: sixteen interviewees) *also* placed a great deal of importance on Chinese popular religious ritual. Indeed, even all religiously apathetic interviewees were happy to acknowledge the importance of, for example, ancestor commemoration.

3. Identity

For the most part, identity was important to the majority of the interviewees. For some (fourteen interviewees), it was an identity that happily married Chinese popular religion with Christianity, whereas for all seven children who actually self-identified as Christian, it was the cause of something of a religious identity crisis—which is in line with Chen (2005).

4. Openness

Although the children in this study were happy to discuss their religious beliefs with me, I would not go as far to say that their religiosity was defined by a sense of openness. Those who predominantly adhered to Chinese popular religion (five interviewees) found it strange to discuss their beliefs within the context of religion. The hybrid Christians (sixteen interviewees) were happy to talk to me about their beliefs but also, for the most part, said that religion was not something that they usually spoke about with their friends. On the contrary, all seven traditional converts tended more towards being closed, finding church the only place that they could openly discuss their religiosity: indeed, only one of these interviewees was even able to tell their parents about their Christian identity, the other six opting to keep it hidden.

5. Weak Faith

Although the traditional converts experienced religious turmoil, there was not one child in this entire study that I would describe as having a weak faith. Even the five religiously apathetic children believed that their adherence to Chinese popular religion was important. When Jiang (2009: 2) writes that "it remains doubtful whether their belief in God and their religious commitment are the same as Western Christians," I would retort that this study has demonstrated that the very way that many Chinese children engage with Christianity is different: it is not a question of religious commitment whether a child undergoes a crisis of religious identity brought about conflicting loyalties or adheres to both Christianity and Chinese popular religion. Indeed, I would argue that every child in this study was religiously committed (albeit to varying degrees).

12. Conclusion

Although this study has drawn on a relatively small sample size, it has offered a window into a previously unexplored realm of the lived religious identity and experience of Chinese immigrant children. What is significant of all three groups is that each case was individual: in contrast to studies that have noted the importance of Chinese churches in the lives of immigrant Chinese youth, this study has examined Chinese parents who send their children to non-ethnic Roman Catholic churches. Therefore, the interviewees of this study had to reconcile newly found religious identities either by themselves or with the assistance of non-Chinese church members. Moreover, even though it was their parents that gave them the push towards Christianity, these children largely grappled with and reconciled their new belief in the Christian God by themselves as opposed to previous studies that have highlighted the central role of ethnic Chinese peers in bringing Chinese immigrants to Christianity.

This article has demonstrated the somewhat unique way that Chinese immigrant children often engage with Christianity. Indeed, the very concept of "conversion" can be seen as problematic in the Chinese context. Fan and Chen (2014: 556) very rightly note that the the manner by which religion is defused in China means that official membership is not a prerequisite for participation in religious practice, nor is a sense of being religious or being converted. One could therefore argue that to examine Chinese immigrant religiosity through the lens of conversion is to miss the point. Even without formal conversion, this study has demonstrated the deep and meaningful impact Christianity can have upon Chinese immigrant children. Indeed, one could subsequently argue that it is far more useful to follow in the footsteps of Yang, Hu, and Yang (2017: 186) who argue that "[w]hether immigrants convert to or resist certain religious traditions in the host society, the religious landscape in their host society has undeniably permeated and transformed not just their belief system and worldviews, but also the very organization of their religious practices." However, one could equally argue that there is some merit to applying certain theories of conversion to the Chinese immigrant context. Indeed, Pokorny (2016) has, for example, successfully applied Rambo's seven stage model of conversion to the case of the Austrian Unification Movement. It is certainly possible to follow suit. Thus, in order:

1. Context

For the immigrants of this study, their conversion experience (or rather, in the case of those who did not formally convert, their new engagement with Christianity) very much took place in a dynamic context. Their "macrocontext," via immigration, underwent drastic change, and although their "microcontext" remained somewhat constant (insofar as their immediate family is

concerned), their friends and neighbourhood were new. What was particularly noticeable was that the context of Chinese popular religion was prevalent among each interviewee.

2. Crisis

The vast majority of interviewees did undergo, to varying degrees, a crisis. For some, it was the crisis of identity and coming to terms with their new Austrian home. For others, it was a religious crisis of reconciling Chinese popular religious belief and practice with Christianity. Others spoke of loneliness and the desire to make their parents proud.

3. Quest

These various crises very much informed the conversion experience of the majority of the interviewees. Moreover, it was clear that religion was a direct means of addressing these crises.

4. Encounter

This was the least recognisable stage. As each interviewee initially encountered Christianity in answer to the wishes of their parents, they were not evangelised by a typical advocate. However, one could certainly argue that, at least for some of the interviewees, advocates (such as pastors or Church volunteers) played an important role in the conversion process.

5. Interaction

This was mostly evident for the traditional converts. These children did seek to become increasingly involved with their church.

6. Commitment

This was similarly mostly only evident with the traditional converts who opted to undergo baptism. However, the hybrid Christians also experienced something of a turning point when they accepted Christianity into their religious world.

7. Consequences

It was certainly the case that the conversion experiences (if one chooses to use the term) were "complex and multifaceted" (Rambo 1993: 142). Even the interviewees who fell into the traditional convert category experienced a plethora of emotions and barriers during their conversion.

It should be acknowledged that each interviewee's individual religious narrative was unique: each interaction with Christianity did not necessarily fall into each stage and, given that for many the conversion process was ongoing, consequences, for example, were often not present.

Thus, one finds two arguments that are seemingly at odds with one another. The data presented within this article demonstrates that the very term "conversion" is problematic in a Chinese religious context, but equally shows that one can readily apply the religious narratives of these children to Rambo's seven-stage model of conversion. Although it is certainly the case

that these conclusions very much depend on one's definition of conversion, what is clear is that one needs to be cautious when utilising the term within the context of Chinese immigrants.

When Yang asks "for Chinese immigrants who have even forsaken their traditional religion and converted to Christianity, what is left for them to preserve?" (Yang 1999: 132), I would readily answer that, at least with the sample of this study, it is Chinese popular religion that is very much preserved. I agree with Yang that "Chinese Christians undergo a two-way process of segregating various dimensions of the Chinese identity and integrating Chinese, Christian, and American…" or, in my case, Austrian "… identities" (ibid.: 163). Yet, whereas Yang holds that Chinese Christians are able to remove the religious dimension of Chinese culture in favour of the primacy of the Christian faith, I believe that this article has demonstrated a middle way: some children have adopted a Christian faith without relinquishing their Chinese popular religious beliefs. Indeed, like Pokorny (2016: 223), who argues that "conversion experience does not necessarily entail formal conversion, that is, community affiliation," this article has demonstrated that Chinese immigrant children are wholly capable of possessing Christian beliefs and adhering to Christian rules while not self-identifying as Christian.

On a final note, it is exactly the simultaneous blending of Christianity and Chinese popular religion that is significant. Jiang's ethnographic study of Chinese Christians in the United States may have unwittingly missed a most fascinating line of enquiry. Jiang notes that the home of a dedicated Chinese convert to Christianity "was full of Chinese artefacts and Christian signs" (Jiang 2009: 33). Although it is clear from Jiang's ethnography that this Chinese Christian very much self-identified as such, I would be more curious about the Chinese artefacts: did this Christian merely perceive them as secular trinkets that remind him of his country of origin, or might they betray adherence to Chinese popular religion? Similarly, Jiang (ibid.: 63) also states that one interviewee "indicated that he converted because God answered his prayers about troubles in his family and he wanted to keep the promise he made to God in his prayer." I believe that the language employed here is extremely reminiscent of Chinese popular religion, particularly the laws of reciprocity. It is my hope that, at the very least, this article has opened up this question for further discussion.

Appendix

Bái Bóyǎn (11): Interview from 9:00–10:20 on September 11, 2021, at family home. Interview with parents from 10:30–11:15.

Bái Mànyín (8): Interview from 9:00–10:50 on September 26, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 11:00–11:45.

Céng Hónghán (7) Interview from 10:00–11:05 on August 15, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 11:15–12:20.

Father David: Interview from 11:00–12:20 on September 16, 2021 at his church.

Father Kevin: Interview from 12:00–13:05 on February 10, 2022 at his church.

Father Matthew: Interview from 11:30–12:40 on February 02, 2022 at his church.

Father Peter: Interview from 14:00–14:50 on February 22, 2022 at his church.

Fēi Hóng (8): Interview from 8:30–10:05 on October 30, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 10:15–11:10.

Fēng Mián (16): Interview from 14:00–15:35 on August 29, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 15:45–16:50.

Féng Yǎchún (8): Interview from 10:15–11:20 on September 12, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 11:35–12:20.

Gōng Hónghán (10): Interview from 8:30–9:20 on September 25, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 9:30–10:15.

Gōng Zhēn (17): Interview from 15:00–16:15 on August 28, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 16:30–17:40.

Hán Bóyǎn (17): Interview from 10:00–11:35 on November 07, 2021 at a park near the family home. Interview with parents from 12:00–12:55 at family home.

Hé Mián (14): Interview from 9:20–10:15 on August 21, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 10:30–11:10.

Hé Zhīhuá (15): Interview from 13:05–14:20 on December 12, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 14:30–15:45.

Hóu Yǎchún (12): Interview from 10:30–11:55 on November 20, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 12:10–13:00.

Jiǎ Mànyín (7): Interview from 9:00–9:40 on December 04, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 9:55–10:40.

Kāng Yǎchún (5): Interview from 8:30–9:10 on January 09, 2022 at family home. Interview with parents from 8:25–10:20.

Kāng Zhāng (12): Interview from 11:20–13:05 on September 05, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 13:15–14:05.

Péng Yǎchún (8): Interview from 8:00–9:20 on December 20, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 9:30–10:40.

Niàn Zhēn (11) Interview from 12:10–13:25 on August 22, 2021 at a park near the family home. Interview with parents from 13:30–14:30.

Rèn Jìmíng (6): Interview from 9:15–10:05 on November 21, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 10:20–11:25.

Rèn Hóng (17): Interview from 15:00–17:10 on August 18, 2021 at a park near the family home, Interview with parents from 17:30–18:25 at family home.

Rú Shì (17): Interview from 13:00–14:40 on September 04, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 15:00–16:10.

Sū Yǎchún (6): Interview from 8:45–9:40 on October 31, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 9:50–10:55.

Sū Zhāng (18): Interview from 13:40–15:25 on January 23, 2022 at family home. Interview with parents from 15:40–16:50.

Wáng Xiùyīng (9): Interview from 10:15–11:45 on January 16, 2022 at family home. Interview with parents from 12:00–13:15.

Yìng Yuè (15): Interview from 11:45–13:05 on December 19, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 13:45–14:30.

Yǔ Yān (17): Interview from 11:30–12:55 on January 08, 2022 at family home. Interview with parents from 13:05–14:00.

Zhāng Hóng (13): Interview from 9:50-10:00 on December 05, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 10:10–10:55.

Zhāng Mànyín (10): Interview from 8:45–10:10 on January 15, 2022 at family home. Interview with parents from 10:25–11:35.

Zhāng Wěi (14): Interview from 13:35–14:55 on December 11, 2021 at family home. Interview with parents from 15:15–16:25.

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Glossary

bài	拜
bào	報
chuántǒng	传统
chūnjié	春节
gǎibiàn xìnyǎng zhě	改变信仰者
Guānyīn	观音
guǐ	鬼
guīyī	皈依
hàn	汉
jiàzhí tǐ	价值体
lúnlǐ dàodé	伦理道德
qiànrù rìcháng shēnghuó	嵌入日常生活
sānjiào	三教
tiānshén	天神
yìlèi gǎn	异类感
xiào	孝
xīfāng wénhuà	西方文化
zhōngguó mínjiān xìnyǎng	中国民间信仰
zōngjiào	宗教
zōngjiào guī xìn	宗教皈信
zǔxiān	祖先

religions

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Article

Overt and Covert Buddhism: The Two Faces of University-Based Buddhism in Beijing

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Abstract: As more and more students in China turn to religion, it follows that an increasing number of students in Chinese universities self-identify as Buddhist. Chinese academia has a tendency to treat this as problematic, offering reasons for this trend as well as solutions but neglecting to examine the nature of student belief and identity. By utilising two case studies, this paper seeks to demonstrate how the Buddhist identity and practice of self-proclaimed Buddhist students in Beijing can manifest in two very different ways: overtly or covertly. More specifically, each case study provides an example of students in Beijing who very much break with the commonly held perception that students in China who self-identify as religious have a fundamentally flawed and limited understanding of their religion and rarely actually practice it.

Keywords: Chinese students; Buddhism; religious identity; Beijing

1. Introduction

Student religiosity in China is a somewhat obscure field. On the surface level, one might think that it is a field that has, of late, received much academic attention. It is certainly true that there are multiple recent studies that focus upon the religious beliefs of university students in China. Indeed, 2008–2010 witnessed particular interest in the field with nearly 200 papers being published in the *China Academic Journals* (*zhōngguó zhī wǎng shùjùkù* 中国知网数据库)[1] about the rise of religious belief among Chinese university students (Zhongguo zhi wang shuju 2019). However, the overwhelming majority of these studies (Zuo 2005; Gao 2005; Li 2006; Yang 2009; Chen 2010; Zhao 2011; Zhang and Wang 2012; Riyila 2015) address student religiosity as a problem to be solved. Zhang Shuwen and Wang Xue, for example, write that "university students' religious beliefs have become a problem that society cannot ignore" (Zhang and Wang 2012, p. 94). It is for this reason that I believe that much of the existing scholastic work pertaining to student religious belief in China is rather lacking: by focusing upon the reasons and causes for the "problem" as well as suggested "solutions", these works neglect to examine the very nature of student religious belief. Even though it is undeniably valuable examining why students increasingly turn to Buddhism (indeed, this paper shall also add to this dialogue), I hold that this is only part of the picture: how students practice Buddhism and how they conceive of their own Buddhist identity is a subject that is severely lacking in examination. This paper hopes to begin to address exactly this. More explicitly, I intend to shine light upon the nature of Buddhist identity among students in Beijing. By utilising two case studies from two separate universities in Beijing, I hope to show two very different ways that students in Beijing interact with Buddhism and form their own sense of religious identity. I specifically wish to present an alternative to the predominant themes in existing Chinese scholarship: namely that university students who engage in Buddhist practices have a fundamentally flawed and limited understanding of Buddhism

[1] A Chinese article database that covers the vast majority of humanities and social sciences academic journals published in the PRC.

and rarely actually practice their religion. By presenting two university case studies that show two extremely different manifestations of dedicated Buddhist practice, this paper intends to offer not only a valuable insight into student-run Buddhist societies, but also specifically demonstrate an alternative to this problematic predominant view.

According to the (albeit incomplete) official government statistics, since the beginning of the new century, the number of Chinese university students who possess "religious beliefs" (*xìnyǎng zōngjiào* 信仰宗教) has increased and risen to nearly 15% of the entire national student population (Riyila 2015). It has also been well documented that the religion that receives the most attention from students in China is Buddhism. This trend can be seen as early as the late 1980s when students were becoming an increasingly active, vocal, and confident group within Chinese society. Mak notes that during this time, with Chinese university students becoming more and more involved in several social and political activities which centred upon altruism, it was natural that Buddhism came into the lives of many students "despite the lingering aversion towards religious beliefs due to the Marxist-Leninist ideology" (Mak 2007). In 2009, the Ministry of Education (*jiàoyù bù* 教育部) carried out research pertaining to "the problem of young college students' faith" (*qīngnián dàxuéshēng xìnyǎng wèntí* 青年大学生信仰问题) in which three universities in Beijing were surveyed alongside one university outside of Beijing. According to their survey, a total of 21.9% reported that they regard themselves as religious with Buddhism contributing 12.5% to this (Huang 2014). Similarly, a survey of 832 students at Minzu University of China (*zhōngyāng mínzú dàxué* 中央民族大学) conducted by Wen Yingjie found that of the 83,278 students identified as Buddhist (Wen 2011). A very obvious part of and indeed (at least to a certain extent in Beijing) reason for this trend is the rise of student-run Buddhist societies. Established in the early 1990s, my first case study claims to be among the first of these societies.

2. Research Aims

The primary aim of this paper is to build upon the excellent work started by Ji and Han Qi. In 2006, Ji examined the phenomenon of rising youth religiosity in contemporary China (Ji 2006). Ji noted that in recent years, the Chinese Buddhist elite have done much to satisfy the needs of the Chinese youth: certain temples published periodicals, conferences were organised to which university students were invited, and summer camps were organised for young people. However, Ji also stated that "it is evident that the analysis of each case should be deepened, and some topics have not been highlighted" (Ji 2006, p. 546). Similarly, in 2014, Han Qi examined Buddhist university students in Beijing and argued that these students exhibited an extremely rational lifestyle (Han 2014). Although the main purpose of this article was to critique Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Han Qi concludes that we must develop new theories and descriptions of Buddhism that are suitable for the contemporary Chinese context. This paper intends to do exactly this. By presenting two extremely different case studies of university Buddhist societies in Beijing, this paper intends to theorise that university Buddhism in Beijing can manifest in two extremely different ways. More explicitly, I will propose two new categories of university-based Buddhism: overt Buddhism and covert Buddhism. The former category, as the name suggests, refers to students who practice Buddhism in an overt manner. By this, I specifically mean that these students openly identify as Buddhist to those around them and do not hide the fact that they engage in Buddhist practice. Covert Buddhists are quite the opposite of this. Students who fall into this category keep their Buddhist identity hidden from the public eye and very much practise in secret.

I will argue that the evidence from both case studies suggests that overt and covert Buddhists initially encounter Buddhism in extremely different ways: overt Buddhists find Buddhism through any of the five proposed means (namely university societies, classes and public lectures, off-campus Buddhist groups and sites, private and personal means, and family) whereas covert Buddhists encounter the religion predominantly through their own private means. In order to come to this conclusion, I will build upon Mak, who wrote a 2007 paper that, while only offering a very broad introduction, nevertheless grants insightful reasons as to why students in China choose to practice Buddhism. He proposed that students in China encounter Buddhism in one of four ways: classes and

public lectures, university society activities, off-campus activities, and study groups (Mak 2007). I will develop each of these categories, tying them to both of my case studies, as well as add my own.

This paper shall also build upon and critique the work of Moser (2013), who, in turn, built upon the work of Jones (2010). Although neither focused upon university students specifically, instead providing far wider-reaching studies that examined the overall practice of Buddhism in Chinese cities, each have provided an invaluable insight into urban Buddhism that proved to be an ideal foundation for my own study. Of greatest relevance to this paper is Moser's identification of three distinct types of Buddhists in China: problem solvers, seekers, and lifestyle Buddhists (Moser 2013). Although Moser's study is undeniably valuable, by applying the findings from my two case studies to each of Moser's categories, I intend to highlight the flaws of each category.

Finally, this paper intends to move away from the prevalent trend in Chinese academia that holds that student religiosity is a problem to be solved. I intend to do this by critiquing the work of Riyila that perfectly encapsulates this problematic sentiment. After examining the religious beliefs of university students in China, Riyila came to three major conclusions based upon both pre-existing data as well as his own investigations (Riyila 2015):

1. The degree of understanding of religion among university students with religious beliefs is not very deep. Multiple university students who claim to possess religious identity do not understand or comprehend the very basic content of their own religious beliefs.
2. Many of the groups of students who practice religion together only participate in religious activity at a very low and unreliable frequency.
3. The degree of understanding of relevant religious policies are not very deep among university students.

Continuing on in the vein of Chi, who in 2014 interviewed educated Buddhist youths in China and noted a distinct intellectual vigour marked by a strategic analysis of their belief, science, and superstition (Chi 2014), I intend to apply each of these findings to my two case studies and by doing so, show that each conclusion is, at best, too sweeping and at worst, incredibly problematic.

3. **Methodology**

Conducting ethnographic research in China, especially research pertaining to a controversial area such as religion, is somewhat sensitive. Despite the fact that (non-Tibetan) Buddhism along with Confucianism are comparatively the least sensitive religions in contemporary China, scholars have, in the past, been hindered by the police while conducting research (Jones 2010). Thankfully, I did not experience any such obstacles. The largest obstacle I faced was knowing where to begin. I am utterly indebted to the friends I made while I myself was a student in Beijing. Without their help, it would have been nigh impossible for me to gain access to University B's Buddhist society. Solinger speaks of the importance of retaining all of one's old contacts in China "no matter how trivial" (Solinger 2006, p. 158). It was only through sheer luck that I learned of a Buddhist discussion group (*tǎolùn bān* 讨论班) at University B: a former contact brought the group's existence to my attention. Learning of the existence of and then, subsequently receiving access to the society at University B, was, by far, the most difficult obstacle of this paper and I am acutely aware of the luck that factored into my eventual access. Thus, this paper differs from, for example, the work of Jones (2010) who may not have received access to similar societies due to not having an appropriate insider to point her in the right direction. Indeed, herein one finds the first noticeable manifestation of a notable difference between overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students: it was exceedingly easy for me to gain access to University A (the overt student Buddhist society). In total contrast, University B's Buddhist society (the covert student Buddhist society) was hidden to the extent that it was only through sheer luck that I was able to learn of their very existence in the first place. Moreover, gaining true access (namely access that allowed me to see that the society is in fact a dedicated Buddhist group rather than a study group) to the University B's Buddhist Society took four months. Therefore, one can already begin to note a key difference between overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist

students: the former are extremely easy to find and contact, whereas the latter are comparatively hidden and difficult to contact.

Regarding the research itself, I, like Arthur, adopted Harvey's concept of "guesthood" (Harvey 2005, pp. 227–28, 2013, p. 94) as an ethnographic research method: establishing relationships with my interviewees built upon mutual respect whereby meetings are "less like formal interviews with one-way exchange of information and more like mutually constituted relationships where knowledge is exchanged and discussed" (Arthur 2019, p. 16). By undertaking a far more intimate and less sweeping study compared to Riyila, who based his findings on official census data and statistics from relevant university departments that he himself acknowledges to be incomplete, I hope to offer an insight into university Buddhism that goes far beyond a surface level view. I therefore joined in with the activities of both societies and developed relationships whereby I felt as though my interviewees were very comfortable speaking to me. Once this relationship had been established, I found that my student interviewees were more than happy to discuss their involvement with their respective society as well as their own Buddhist identity and practice.

My sample size consists of 22 students from University A. These students made up the core membership of the university society. It should be acknowledged that, technically speaking, University A has far more than 22 members. Their WeChat (*wēixìn* 微信) group consists of hundreds of current students. However, I found that it was 22 students who very much made up the core of the society. It was these students who would consistently attend meetings and events. It should therefore be acknowledged from the outset, that even though I will, at times, refer to the wider, more sporadic membership base of University A, this paper predominantly relies upon the data obtained from the 22 core members. My sample size also consists of 19 students from University B who made up the entire membership of University B's Buddhist society. I conducted 22 formal semi-structured interviews with the core membership of University A's Buddhist Society as well as 19 formal semi-structured interviews with the entire membership of University B's Buddhist society. I closely followed each society from September 2018–September 2019, conducting participant observations on a weekly basis. All names, including the names of both universities, have been anonymised.

4. Case Study 1: University A

This section shall provide an overview of my first case study: the overt Buddhist student society found at University A.

Rather surprisingly, I was told that it was a very quiet year for the society as a whole. This was not the impression I received at all. I first met the society during the university societies fair. Dressed in matching society uniform, three representatives handed out leaflets to the backdrop of Buddhist music[2] and discussed Chan (*chán* 禅) with passing students in the hopes of recruiting new members. These society members were exceptionally friendly and, above all else, wished to portray to prospective members how accessible their society is. Although the three of them self-identified as Buddhists, they wished to make it abundantly clear that the society is open to everyone. Responding to my question about who the society is for, one of them answered:

> "This society is for everyone. From students who are just a little bit interested to lifelong Buddhists, we welcome all."

They rather liberally kept coming back to joking about how what their society practices is not "mysterious and ineffable" (*xuán ér yòu xuán* 玄而又玄)[3]. I was instantly struck by how open and confident the society was about their practice of Buddhism. I later found out that the society was even featured in an article about this particular societies fair by Life Academy (*yuánzhuō jiàoyù jījīn huì* 圓桌教育基金會). I believe that this is of great significance given that Life Academy, who are known for publishing articles pertaining to matters of education in Beijing, heavily draw from the work of *Beijing Youth Daily* (*běijīng qīngnián bào* 北京青年报) journalists who, it goes without saying, heavily

[2] The students referred to the music as "佛乐" (*fú yuè*: Buddha music).

[3] This is famously part of the opening of the Daodejing (dàodé jīng: 道德经).

push the party line. I believe that the significance here is that the article clearly shows just how normalised University A's Buddhist Society is. The reporter describes them in an exceptionally casual manner and seems to make nothing of the society being a religious group. Moreover, the reporter opens the article by writing that this particular societies fair consisted of 169 different society stalls. The article then goes on to describe 10 of these 169 societies, one of them being the University A's Buddhist Society. Rather than being swept under the rug, it is clear that the Buddhist Society of University A is simply seen as a very normal student society.

I found the weekly activities of the society to be very packed. They conducted a daily[4] morning meditation session as well as an evening meditation session once a week. These took place in a rather beautiful meditation room situated in an idyllic location on the scenic part of campus. I was told that the society had received special permission from the university to make regular use of this room. These sessions were usually attended by approximately 15–20 students. However, during exam season, these sessions became especially popular (the highest number while I was in attendance was 65). The meditations were always guided. Sometimes it would be a society member leading it and other times it would be one of the Buddhist monks studying at the university. Fa Yin, who attended nearly every session that I was present for, described the sessions thus:

> "I actually think that the *Sutras* are kind of straight forward about this. Meditation is the key to happiness. I actually joined this society because I was curious about the benefits of meditation and I hoped that it would help me with stress. At the time, I did not think that I would become a Buddhist myself. But when I felt that the meditation meetings were making such a big difference in my life, I decided that I wanted Buddhism to play an even bigger role in my life. Today, I cannot imagine my life without meditation. Whenever I feel stressed about my studies, I know that meditation will help me."

Similarly, the president of the society spoke of the importance of meditation to the society:

> "Personally, I think that meditation is the very heart of our society. We all have problems in our lives and I think that meditation is a way of coping with these problems. The Buddha only needed to meditate for 49 days but we are not so lucky!"

When I asked him to elaborate, he explained:

> "After 49 days, the Buddha reached enlightenment. I have been meditating for hundreds of days and I am still not there. We therefore all need to keep meditating as much as we can!"

From the core membership of the society, the overwhelming impression I gathered was one of impressive dedication to practice. I think one can safely argue that daily meditation practice is both regular and dedicated. I believe that herein, one find a contradiction to Riyila's assertion that religious students practice their religion at very low and unreliable frequencies. If I were to even compare the frequency of meditation meetings of this society to, for example, student-run Buddhist societies in the UK, the University A's Buddhist Society has a far higher frequency than the overwhelming majority of UK Buddhist societies who, I have found, have 1–2 meditation meetings a week.

I was especially surprised at the extent of religious conviction among the regular attendees. Of the 22 core members, 20 stated that they very much self-identify as Buddhist. However, during exam season when the meditation session attendance skyrocketed, the vast majority of new students did not self-identify as Buddhists. In contrast, these students saw the meditation sessions as a temporary means to an end. Yu Chan, one such student, summed up the general view of these students. She told me in very clear terms:

> "No I am not a Buddhist. My Aunt is a Buddhist but I am not."

She then, in response to my asking what brought her to this particular session, replied:

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[4] This was every week day without fail and usually every weekend as well, unless a larger society event (such as a temple visit) was planned.

> "I am very stressed these days. I have a lot of exams and I am very scared that I will fail. My parents keep telling me that I have to do well but I am so worried that I will let them down. One of my friends told me about this group and said that the meditation sessions are really good at helping with stress."

On top of these meditations sessions, the society also met at least once a week[5] for "discussion groups" (*tǎolùn bān* 讨论班). The president of the society informed me that each semester, the society "systematically studies Chan doctrine" in both historic and contemporary China, as well as Buddhist philosophy in general. He said that the aim was for each society member to "fully understand Chan and Buddhist culture." These meetings, to say the very least, were an utter contrast to Riyila's conclusion that students with religious identity possess a limited understanding of their own beliefs. Every single student who attended these meetings appeared (and also confirmed in my interviews) to be exceptionally engaged with what I can only describe as a rigorous and academic study of Buddhist doctrine. Meetings would usually revolve around a particular text. The society would discuss the text in depth, often comparing it to other Buddhist texts. To my knowledge, each of the regular attendees[6] had a strong knowledge of the Chinese Buddhist canon that far surpassed my expectations. Indeed, I often struggled to keep up with these sessions. The conversation flit quickly between in-depth analyses of, for example, the *Blue Cliff Records* (*Biyan Lu* 碧巖錄), to making Buddhist jokes, to discussing how the texts can be applied to their own lives. Ai Zuang, a third year mathematics student who was usually the one to organise and run these sessions, told me:

> "I think that as Buddhists it is crucial that we are constantly doing our best to study Buddhism. Today there are many examples of false and half-baked Buddhist teachings so I think it is important to keep studying! For me, it makes a really big difference to be able to study and talk to my fellow students."

I was particularly interested in his identification of "false belief in Buddhism" (*wěi xìn fó* 伪信佛) and "half-baked Buddhist teachings" (*bàn diào zǐ xìn fú* 半调子信佛). These were concepts that came up regularly in the group's discussions. I felt that there was a very real desire within the group to stay true to what they perceived to be as the true teachings of Buddhism. Indeed, in a very potent contrast to Riyila, they had an extremely strong desire to go far beyond the mere basic content of Buddhist belief. This was very much a group of students who were deeply proud of their own Buddhist identity.

Although the meditation sessions and the discussion groups made up the main bulk of society activity over the year, the society also frequently (at least every other week) convened for social activities. Dinners were often arranged, karaoke remained something of a staple society evening social event, and from time to time, the group would meet to watch a film together. What struck me about these meetings was the extent to which these otherwise typical Chinese students were united by a shared Buddhist identity. At meals, conversation usually landed upon Buddhism. Movie nights usually revolved around *kung fu* (*gōngfu* 功夫) films, during which society members would often joke about how the film does not truly align with Buddhist doctrine. At karaoke, the students would often (to much laughter) change song lyrics to incorporate Buddhism: my personal favourite was when, after the group had been discussing the nature of *anātman*[7] (*wú wǒ* 无我), the very popular chorus of "You exist in my song" (*wǒ de gēshēng lǐ* 我的歌声里) was changed from "you exist" (*nǐ cúnzài* 你存在) to "you cannot exist" (*nǐ bù kěyǐ cúnzài* 你不可以存在). I found that the newsletters very much reflected this picture of typical Chinese students united by a shared Buddhist identity: newsletters flitted between outlining the overall themes of upcoming discussions such as "the world is not real" (*shìjiè shì bù zhēnshí de* 世界是不真实的) and "can one truly overcome ignorance?" (*nǐ zhēn de nénggòu*

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[5] These meetings were, more often than not, more frequent than once a week with the most being four times a week.

[6] Exactly the same students who regularly attended the meditation sessions.

[7] The Buddhist concept of non-self.

dǎpò wú míng ma 你真的能够打破无明吗) to distinct images of Chinese youth culture such as pineapples wearing sunglasses (which were particularly lost on me).

The University A's Buddhist Society also organised and ran several large-scale events throughout the year. During my time with them, they organised several lectures, discussions, and workshops headed by those from the academic community as well as those from the monastic community. Master Ming Xian of Behai Temple (北海寺), for example, conducted a Dharma talk followed by a meditation workshop. Moreover, visits to local temples and monasteries were organised as well as an incredibly popular summer retreat. To my surprise, these lectures and visits often attracted hundreds of students from across campus. I believe that it is particularly worthy of mention that the society shares a very close relationship with Longquan Monastery (*lóngquán sì* 龍泉寺) that is situated in Fenghuangling Nature Park (*fènghuáng lǐng* 凤凰岭) in the Heidan District (*hǎidiàn qū* 海淀区) about 18 miles away from downtown Beijing. The city of Beijing itself is totally devoid of functioning Buddhist temples and monasteries. Longquan Monastery is one of the two major officially recognised sites for Buddhist practice in the area. That the University A's Buddhist Society has such close ties with Longquan Monastery is of great significance. Mei You, a very devoted member of the society, volunteered at Longquan Monastery every week on Sundays. In an insightful discussion, she told me:

> "Longquan is very special to me. I love that as a society we can discuss and practice Buddhism together, but none of us are experts. I think it makes a very big difference that we are also able to go to Longquan to learn from masters as well as be in a place that really makes us feel close to the Buddha."

I asked her to elaborate upon what she meant by closeness to the Buddha. Her answer was most revealing:

> "Longquan is a truly sacred place. Every day, the monks do intense daily recitations and worship. You can really feel it when you visit. You can feel how good the *karma* is. They even have a special ceremony to purify *karma* twice a month. To all of us [in the society] this is of great benefit to our practice when we visit. I love Beijing, but the *karma* here is [she laughs at this moment]. Therefore, learning from and being in the presence of eminent monks is important, but also just being in the place itself is helpful too."

Herein, I believe the significance is twofold. I think that such a close relationship with the monastery has allowed the members of the University A's Buddhist Society to develop an even greater sense of Buddhist community. The students have a physical place where they can learn from ordained members of the Sangha. Secondly, it grants the society a great deal of legitimacy. In 2005, Longquan was officially restored as a site of religious activity. Today, it continues to share a very good relationship with the government. Thus, by affiliating themselves with an officially recognised religious site, the University A's Buddhist Society has essentially been able to legitimise the Buddhist practice and identity of their own society.

Of Riyila's three major conclusions, it was only the third that I found evidence of in the University A's Buddhist Society. For the most part, students had very little to say when I asked them about government policy pertaining to the practice of religion. The president of the society was the one who gave me the longest answer. He stated:

> "I know that religion is allowed in our country and the government do not have a problem with us practicing it. I know that we have official permission from the university."

Most of the society members I asked thought that my asking about official policy was rather a strange thing to ask about. It could therefore be argued that, in line with Riyila's assertion, the members of the society did not have a deep understanding of relevant policies relating to the practice of religion. However, it could also be argued that the word "relevance" should be reassessed. The impression that I received was that the students truly did not believe that my question was of particular "relevance" (let alone interest) to them. Indeed, rather than official government policy, the only policy they thought was immediately relevant to them was their university's policy. It could also be the case

that the students were not comfortable talking to me about state policy and therefore, kept their answers brief.

5. Case Study 2: University B

This section shall provide an overview of my second case study: the covert Buddhist student society found at University B.

In utter contrast to the University A's Buddhist Society, finding the University B's Buddhist Society was not easy. There was certainly no Buddhist society present at this university's society fair. Indeed, when I asked one of the organisers of the fair, I was told that no such society exists. However, I was directed to a group who frequently meet every week to discuss Buddhism by a former Beijing contact who happened to know of the existence of this private group. Upon request and with permission, I was added to a WeChat group focused upon organising these Buddhist discussion sessions at University B. I obtained permission from the group to join these meetings. Over the next four months (from September to December) I attended each session (usually twice a week). Excluding myself, 19 students were part of this WeChat group and the meetings were usually attended by all 19. The content of these meetings was very similar to the discussion sessions held by the University A's Buddhist Society: Buddhist texts were discussed in a great deal of depth. However, this is where the similarities ended. The tone of the University B meetings were very serious. No jokes were made and the feeling was of a group of students who simply wanted to do a rigorous study of Buddhist texts. Moreover, in total contrast to the University A's Buddhist Society, absolutely none of the 19 students in the University B group self-identified as Buddhist. Instead, each responded to my question regarding Buddhist identity along the lines of "I am interested in Buddhism but I am certainly not Buddhist myself." Furthermore, when asked about the nature of their group, the students would respond with "We wish to academically study Buddhism. We have no interest in the practice but we enjoy reading and discussing the texts." The WeChat group chat reflected this serious nature: meeting times and places were discussed and various articles pertaining to Buddhist texts were posted (and sometimes discussed). My initial conclusion, therefore, was that there was no fruitful comparison to be made between the two societies. One was very much a religious group and the other was a study group that centred upon a religious topic. Moreover, given that none of the students self-identified as Buddhist, I was unable to apply Riyila's conclusions as these were not religious students.

My relationship with the group dramatically changed after spending four months with them. In January, I was invited to join them for a previously unmentioned (despite being very much present during my previous four months) type of meeting. After a discussion group session, we went to a classroom on campus that the students knew was currently empty. I was then informed that we would be having a group meditation session. Each student sat behind a desk and for 50 min we sat in total silence. There was no guidance to the meditation nor a preliminary discussion. I thus learned that the surface level Buddhist study group was also something of an undefined meditation group. I was fascinated to find that once I started attending the meditation sessions on top of the discussion sessions, the group became much more open with what they discussed with me. Of particular note, 18 of the 19 students changed their answer to my question "do you self-identify as a Buddhist?" I therefore found that 18 out of 19 of the students did indeed self-identify as Buddhist but were initially reluctant to tell me. I thus learned that the students had something of a semi-secret[8] meditation session after each discussion meeting. Therefore, herein one finds another example that contrasts with Riyila's first two conclusions: the depth and rigour of these students' study of the Chinese Buddhist canon contradicts Riyila's assertion that students with religious beliefs do not possess a deep understanding of their own religion, and I believe that having a meditation meeting twice a week can be described as regular practice.

[8] These meditation sessions were never mentioned in the WeChat group nor in my presence during the discussion meetings.

I soon learned that 16 of the 18 who self-identify as Buddhist keep their identity hidden from everyone except the other members of the group (the other 2 telling only their respective families). I found that the main reasons for this were a mixture between two factors: face (*miànzi* 面子) and caution. The concept of face is crucial to Chinese society. Every citizen of China is expected to have a deeply ingrained understanding of the social nuances of face: the ability to "feel the hurt that comes from public humiliation, and the desire to protect oneself [and by extension one's family] from public humiliation" (Schoenhals 2015, p. 67). I should emphasise, from the outset, that none of the students who privately identified as Buddhist believed that being more open about their religious identity would be a major loss of face. However, this said, they were concerned that having an open Buddhist identity was not worth it when weighed with the potential of face loss. This feeling was best exemplified by one student who told me:

> "I think that China is very different to the UK. I feel as though religion is not really a problem where you come from. Even the song that every English person knows is basically about religion [he at this point sings the tune to "God Save the Queen"]. In China it is very different. Nobody talks about religion. It was never mentioned in school or in my textbooks. My parents never mentioned it and my friends never talk about it. The closest thing you get is Journey to the West but I don't think that's real Buddhism. I sometimes think that I would really like to talk to my friends about Buddhism but I don't think it would be very comfortable. I think they would think that I am strange."

This feeling of general discomfort towards his religious identity was echoed by the other members who self-identified as Buddhist. I did not get the impression that they thought that their religious identity would be a large problem with their friends and family, but there was enough of a feeling of discomfort to warrant keeping it a secret.

If anything, the feeling of caution was the more pronounced reason. I chose the term caution because fear would be too strong. None of the students were afraid but there was a strong feeling among each member of wanting to be careful. When I directly asked about their reason for caution, one student informed me:

> "It is kind of complicated. In China, we are not allowed to practice Buddhism in public places. Our university is a public place so I think we need to be careful."

The university is, therefore, not aware of the presence of this unofficial society. Herein, I believe one finds an understanding of relevant government policies pertaining to the practice of religion that Riyila believes religious students do not possess. The revised Regulation on Religious Affairs (*zōngjiào shìwù tiáolì* 宗教事务条例) which took effect on 1 February 2018, states:

> Citizens are entitled to the right of freedom of religious belief (*Id.* art. 2 ¶ 1.)… [but] sites not appropriately designated as religious ones [are prohibited] from conducting religious activities, accepting religious donations, carrying out religious training, and organizing citizens leaving the country to participate in religious training, meetings, and activities (*Id.* art. 41.) (Zhang 2017).

Although none of the students mentioned any specific policy, each one was aware of where religious practices are and are not allowed.

In contrast to the University A's Buddhist Society, the students of University B did not organise any events outside of the usual discussion groups and meditation sessions. Unsurprisingly, due to the unofficial nature of the society, they had no affiliation with any official Buddhist sites nor a relationship with any masters. Interestingly, when I mentioned the University A's Buddhist Society, the students of University B were immediately interested and engaged. They spoke of the society at University A with awe and I had the strong impression that they saw the society as something of a Buddhist society ideal. One student told me:

> "They are really very amazing! I read about them all the time online. I would love [University B] to have a Buddhist group like that but I know it is impossible."

In contrast to my initial conclusion about the University B's group, I now believe that a comparison between this group and the University A's Buddhist Society can easily be made. The University B's Buddhist Society was, like the society at University A, very much a religious group. However, even though I believe that the members of each group shared similar religious convictions, the way in which these convictions manifested were extremely different. Herein, one finds the dichotomy between overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students: the students of the University A's Buddhist Society held open and loud Buddhist identities while the students of University B held secret and quiet ones.

6. How Do Students in Beijing Encounter Buddhism?

This paper shall now turn to what I believe are the most significant conclusions that can be drawn from my fieldwork. It should be noted that I have omitted from the following conclusions the 2 students from University A and the 1 student from University B who did not self-identify as Buddhist.

The evidence acquired from both case studies show that overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students differ in their initial encounter with Buddhism. Therefore, the question of how students encounter Buddhism is crucial to understanding the fundamental differences between overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students. Therefore, in order to properly assess each fundamental difference between overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students, this section shall examine how students in Beijing encounter Buddhism.

In 2007, Mak proposed that students in China encounter Buddhism in one of four ways: classes and public lectures, university society activities, off-campus activities, and study groups (Mak 2007). These reasons served as an excellent foundation for my own conclusions. Aside from the occasional rare exception, essentially everyone in China has at least an elementary understanding of Buddhism. However, surprisingly few today have a knowledge of Buddhism that transcends this elementary nature. In this section, I shall outline the ways in which I believe university students initially encounter Buddhism in a manner that goes beyond this basic understanding most people in China possess. Building upon Mak and using my own fieldwork combined with recent Chinese academic findings (Jones 2010; Zhao 2011; Zhang and Wang 2012; Moser 2013; Riyila 2015) as my foundation, I propose that students encounter Buddhism in either one or a combination of the following ways:

1. University Societies

Although religious activities are not permitted on any campus in China (or any public spaces, for that matter), university societies are often the first point of contact between students and Buddhism. Larger and more established student societies such as the University A's Buddhist Society sometimes have relationships with Buddhist organisations outside the university. The society therefore acts as something of a springboard through which students can encounter and engage with formal Buddhist establishments and institutions. The University A's Buddhist Society is very much an example of this. They were very well advertised and had a strong online presence. Unsurprisingly, many students had their first true encounter with Buddhism via this society. Of the core 20 members, 8 initially encountered Buddhism through the society. In contrast, only 1 member[9] of the University B's society encountered Buddhism through their society. Due to the fact that both of my case study societies were made up of students who possessed serious religious convictions, I would like to move away from the assumed idea that student Buddhist societies are not made up of students who earnestly practice religion but are instead made up of students who simply "have an interest in Buddhism and/or traditional Chinese culture" (Mak 2007). However, it should be acknowledged that this is very much the image that these societies often wish to portray (as opposed to societies who meet in order to actively practice religion). The University A's Buddhist Society, for example, despite manifesting as a society that seriously practices, studies, and engages with Buddhism, very much

[9] This was due to the fact that this member happened to be best friends with one of the core members of the society.

seeks to advertise this more laid-back image of being a society filled with students who simply have an interest in Buddhism and Chinese culture in general: when describing the general ethos of the society, the president stated "we hope to continue to adhere to the characteristics of the society, and to further highlight the cultural connotation and practical value of the Chan culture, and to organise activities to serve the campus and society." Similarly, although not advertised, the initial impression the students of University B wished to give me was of a non-religious group who were interested in academically finding out more about Buddhism.

2. Classes and Public Lectures

In contrast to pre-university education, which is totally secular and devoid of any religious content, major universities[10] across China now offer classes on the history of Buddhism as well as Buddhist philosophy. With steadily rising applications from students seeking to learn more about Buddhism, formal university classes are a growing platform on which students in China are exposed to Buddhism. Furthermore, universities in China have been known to organise various public lectures by Buddhist leaders. However, of all of the five reasons, I believe that this is the least common. For the most part, students who enrol in these courses and attend these public lectures already have an established interest in Buddhism. Indeed, only 1 of the 20 students of the University A's Buddhist Society, who was also an official student of Buddhism at University A, and no students from University B (which, unlike University A, has no faculty of religion), initially encountered Buddhism through these means.

3. Off-Campus Buddhist Groups and Sites

Some students encounter Buddhism through official and non-official Buddhist groups and sites that exist off-campus. I found that student encounters with such groups and sites usually take place prior to attending university. As previously stated, although Beijing has no officially recognised temples open to the public (most having either been turned into tourist attractions or are reserved for internal activities for the Sangha) there are two major Buddhist centres that attract a great number of university students: Longquan Monastery and Bailin Monastery (*bólín sì* 柏林寺). Both of these sites organise several events that are specifically catered to university students.[11] Although the former was of great significance to my first case study, it should be noted that none of the students from either case study initially encountered Buddhism from Beijing-based off-campus Buddhist groups and sites. Two students from the University A's Buddhist Society stated that their initial encounter with Buddhism was at the respective temples in their hometowns. No students from University B encountered Buddhism in this manner.

4. Private and Personal Means: Mass Media, Books, and Pamphlets

Many students encounter Buddhism through their own personal research. A plethora of websites, books, and pamphlets are dedicated to the teaching of Buddhism. Some students, instead of opting for a more social-based exposure, chose to peruse a more solitary route of personal research. A 2012 survey regarding student religious views found that 25% of students who regard themselves as religious found out about religion through the internet and 27.9% through books about religion (Zhang and Wang 2012). Three of the 20 students at University A's Buddhist Society encountered Buddhism this way. In contrast, 15 of the 18 students at University B encountered Buddhism via their own personal means.

5. Family

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[10] An admittedly ambiguous term. The larger Chinese universities that receive a lot of international attention typically have departments that teach Buddhism. Peking University (Beijing), Renmin University (Beijing), Fudan University (Shanghai), Nanking University (Nanjing) and Zhongshan University (Guangzhou) are all obvious examples of universities that have experienced a steady growth of applications from students seeking to study Buddhism.

[11] For an excellent insight into Buddhist summer camps, see: Wei Dedong's 2008 paper "Dangdai zhongguo zongjiao hong shi de fa zhan: yi shenghuo chan xialingying wei li." (Wei 2008).

A common means through which university students in China encounter Buddhism is through their family. The aforementioned 2012 survey regarding student religious views found that 55.6% (by far the highest proportion of all responses) of students who regard themselves as religious do so because of their family (Zhang and Wang 2012). Needless to say, university students are deeply influenced by their family. It therefore stands to reason that many university students who identify as Buddhist do so because they come from a Buddhist family. It is often found that this is especially the case with minority[12] university students. However, even though I accept that family is indeed a crucial means through which many students do indeed encounter Buddhism, neither of my case studies held this means as being the most common: 6 of the 20 students at University A and 2 of the 18 at University B. It should be acknowledged that the reason for this could have been due to the nature of my research samples. It is widely documented that the vast majority of students in China who possess a religious identity come from minority families. For example, officially speaking, the proportion of Tibetan students who believe in religion is 100%, and the proportion of Hui (*Huízú* 回族) students who believe in religion is 71.4% (Zhang and Wang 2012; Huang 2014). Moreover, a recent study in Xi'an found that among the minority group students, 48.76% were religious in contrast to 10.34% of Han (*hànzú* 汉族) students (Wang 2016). Although I met a number of students from non-Han backgrounds at the University A's Buddhist Society, all 20 of my core sample were Han. Furthermore, none of the students from the University B's society were non-Han.

7. Why Do Students in Beijing Choose to Practice Buddhism?

The evidence from both case studies suggest that overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students choose to practice Buddhism for different reasons. However, in order to properly explore this finding, I believe that an initial, more general discussion of why students tend to choose to practice Buddhism is necessary.

Many Chinese academics hold that the predominant reason why students choose to practice Buddhism (and religion in general) is due to the current failings of the educational system (Zhao 2011; Zhang and Wang 2012; Huang 2014; Riyila 2015). Many hold that universities are not providing sufficient moral, social, ideological, and psychological education and guidance, and in response, some students turn to religion to fill this vacuum. I certainly do not seek to dispute whether or not this is indeed the case. Indeed, I find it of great significance that in a recent survey, when asked "are you presently satisfied with the ideological and political work of the higher learning institution?" only 28% of students surveyed responded with "satisfied" (Zhang and Wang 2012). However, I do believe that this is not the entire picture. Instead, I shall build upon the work of Moser, who identified three distinct, albeit non-mutually exclusive, types of Buddhists in China: problem solvers who came to Buddhism in response to a crisis or serious life trauma, seekers who are constantly looking for spiritual or religious meaning, and lifestyle Buddhists who view Buddhism as something more akin to a passionate hobby (Moser 2013). Although each of these categories hold much merit and are indeed valuable tools for assessing why people in China turn to Buddhism, I believe that they are not without their limitations. This section shall critique these categories by using the data obtained from both University A and University B.

1. Problem Solvers

Seven of the 20 students from University A fell into this category and 15 from University B. Although I wholeheartedly agree with Moser that many students (although in his case, all people living in urban areas) choose to practice Buddhism in response to a problem they face, I do not agree with the extent that he outlines. I disagree with how he defines the term "problem": "problem solvers" convert to Buddhism in response to "a crisis or serious life trauma" (Moser 2013). However, I find that it is all manner of problems that cause students to turn to Buddhism, not only major ones. The "problems" in which students from both societies identified in their lives ranged greatly from general stress to the death of a loved one. One student from University B described what I believe to

[12] Non-Han (*hànzú* 汉族).

be a very typical student scenario in Beijing: he told me how university life was proving to be too stressful so he began practicing Buddhism in order to "seek spiritual support and psychological comfort" (*xúnqiú jīngshén jìtuō hé xīnlǐ ānwèi* 寻求精神寄托和心理安慰). Similarly, 5 students (1 from University A and 4 from University B) all referred to the same manner of stress by mentioning the same phrase: "unemployed as soon as one graduates" (*yī bìyè jiù shīyè* 一毕业就失业). Students are acutely aware that during their studies and upon graduation they will face immense competition. This inevitably leads to students feeling an enormous amount of pressure and stress that leads some to turn to Buddhism. One student from University B summarised this feeling by stating that "the current competitive nature of society is too fierce. The belief in Buddha is very steadfast and comfortable." Sometimes, the problem described to me was more existential in nature: students from both societies described having a "crisis of faith" (*xìnyǎng wéijī* 信仰危机), others described more general feelings of confusion (*gǎndào míwǎng* 感到迷惘), and one student even claimed that he turned to Buddhist practice in order to "suppress dissatisfaction with reality" (*yìzhì duì xiànshí de bùmǎn qíngxù* 抑制对现实的不满情绪). Furthermore, although they were not part of the core 20 members, it should be acknowledged that, to my knowledge, during exam season, when the University A's Buddhist Society's meditation sessions were attended by vastly more students than normal, these new students who only attended during exam seasons all attended in order to combat the stress that came with exams. Thus, while some students certainly fell into Moser's category—one student, for example, began practicing Buddhism in response to the death of her mother—I believe that reducing the term "problem" to major crisis is too limiting when, in reality, all manner of problems, both small and large, attract students to Buddhism. Indeed, two students (both from University A) described simply desiring "spiritual comfort" (*jīngshén wèijí* 精神慰藉). Furthermore, Moser actively noted that "problem solvers" tended to be from low socio-economic backgrounds and with limited education. The very fact that I was working with students in Beijing who come from families who can afford to send their children to university means that I must disagree.

2. Seekers

Moser's "seeker" category are adults who have been on "a longstanding search for spiritual or religious meaning" (Moser 2013). Although it rather goes without saying that none of the students I interviewed fell into this category due to the simple fact of age, a number did very much come across as being at the beginning of such a journey. It could well be the case that in a few year time, these students might have turned into one of Moser's "seekers." Six students from University A fell into this category as well as two from University B. I noticed common phrases among these students such as "basic spiritual needs" (*jīběn jīngshén xūyào* 基本精神需要) and the president of the University A's Buddhist Society told me that he thinks that what makes Buddhism so popular to students is that it "satisfies students desire for liberation" (*mǎnzú tóngxuémen yāoqiú jiětuō de yuànwàng* 满足同学们要求解脱的愿望). One student from University A explained that upon starting university he began to ask a plethora of questions about life. For him it was "Buddhism's unique interpretation and investigation of life and nature" (*fójiào duì rénshēng, zìrán dútè de quánshì hé tànjiù* 佛教对人生、自然独特的诠释和探究) that prompted him to practice. These students did not view their search for meaning as a problem. On the contrary, most of these students were most excited to describe their own personal search and the answers they eventually found in Buddhism. However, I believe that Moser somewhat limits this category by focusing too much upon those with "latent interest in metaphysical issues" (Moser 2013) while neglecting to mention a far more mundane seeker: namely those who seek self-improvement. While Moser identifies Buddhists who seek deep spiritual or religious meaning, or have an interest in metaphysical and philosophical questions, I believe that added to this are those who seek moral self-improvement. Indeed, five students from University A and one from University B described such a journey. These students came to Buddhism in order to improve their own moral character and become more focused (through meditation) in their studies and person. One student from University A actively stated that the main reason for practicing Buddhism and the main function Buddhism plays in life is to "improve one's moral character" (*tígāo zìshēn dàodé sùyǎng* 提高自身道德素养). Similarly, one student from University B explained to me how Buddhism granted her "social rules" (*shèhuì guīzé* 社会规则) that made all of the difference to her day-

to-day life. Furthermore, another student from University A actively attacked the current moral state of the nation, claiming that she turned to Buddhist practice in order to gain something of a moral compass: "We are in a current state of spiritual desertification. Our generation has not paid much attention to ideology and morality. In the process of our schooling, only primary schools have ideological and political classes, and secondary schools have never grasped them, so there is no spiritual pillar." I therefore believe that Moser's seeker category could be improved by allowing for moral as opposed to religious/metaphysical seekers.

3. Lifestyle Buddhists

Moser's lifestyle Buddhists approach Buddhism like a passionate hobby whereby the "religion becomes part of their self-image, and they often exhibit their belief in evident displays such as distinctive dress, ornaments, [and] home shrines" (Moser 2013). I found that this category very much applied to University A. Absolutely every core member fell (although not exclusively) into this category. In contrast, this category could not be applied at all to University B. This finding shall be explored in the following section. Although this category is an extremely valuable way to view Buddhists, I also believe that it can be improved. I hold that Moser limits himself by stating that lifestyle Buddhists are attracted to Buddhism because it has become "cool": "Buddhism's trendiness in part comes from the host of media figures who embrace the religion" (Moser 2013). While I certainly do not dispute that this is often the case, I have found that some Buddhists become lifestyle Buddhists in order to reconnect with their family and culture. Although these Buddhists still treat the religion as part of their own self- image, it is not because they perceive Buddhism to be necessarily trendy. Two students from University A described their practice of Buddhism as a means of getting in touch with their own heritage. Identity formation played a large role in their reasoning with each student coming to Buddhism as part of a wider move to come to terms with and define their own identity. However, neither spoke of this identity as being the "cool" and "trendy" identity that Moser holds that lifestyle Buddhists have. One student told me that Buddhism used to play a major role in her family but this was no longer the case. She, therefore, began practicing Buddhism because she wished to reconnect with what she believed to be an important aspect of her family, that she was worried was in danger of dying out with her grandmother. The other student was currently in the process of coming to terms with and defining his own national identity. He explained that he started practicing Buddhism because "Buddhism is an important carrier of traditional culture" (*fójiào zuòwéi chuántǒng wénhuà de zhòngyào zàitǐ* 佛教作为传统文化的重要载体). I therefore believe that there are essentially two manifestations of lifestyle Buddhists: the first is exactly as Moser describes—those who hold a "trendy fascination" (Moser 2013) with Buddhism and the second are those who seek to adopt a Buddhist identity that allows them to reconnect with their family and culture.

8. How Do the Religious Identities, Beliefs, and Practices of Buddhist Students Manifest?

Despite having an extremely small sample of two student Buddhist societies in Beijing, I believe that given how different each is, one can come to something of a tentative conclusion that the religious identities, beliefs, and practices of Buddhist students in Beijing can manifest in two exceedingly different ways:

1. Overt Identity, Belief, and Practice

As the name suggests, these Buddhist students are very open, and indeed, often proud, about their own Buddhist identity. Everything about the students of the University A's Buddhist Society pointed towards this overt attitude. Buddhism played a very outward and obvious role in all of their lives. Their Buddhist identity was typically known to everyone who knew them and they would make very open displays of this identity: many wore Buddhist prayer beads (*fózhū* 佛珠), many used Buddhist images as their WeChat profile pictures, and a few even sometimes wore Buddhist items of clothing (such as t-shirts purchased from Longquan Monastery). To this end, absolutely every student from the core membership of this society was a lifestyle Buddhist: Buddhism played an extremely prominent role in their image and also interactions with others. They typically deeply

enjoy discussing their Buddhist belief with their fellow classmates. It is this type of Buddhist student that academia, the media, and the public notices: when one finds mention of Buddhist students, it is of students who openly refer to themselves as being Buddhist. This is hardly surprising as Buddhists who fall into this category seem to do everything in their power to be seen. The Buddhist society of University A was officially recognised by the university and the society had a very active and visible online presence. Moreover, members actively tried to advertise the society and recruit new members. These Buddhists can fall under any of the five ways of initially encountering Buddhism and also any of, or indeed a mixture of, Moser's three categories. The overt Buddhist society of University A was, therefore, something of an all-encompassing student Buddhist society. These students were, for the most part, extroverted and more than happy to talk to me at length about their identity, beliefs, and practices.

2. Covert Identity, Belief, and Practice

These Buddhist students are a complete contrast to those with an overt identity, belief, and practice. Indeed, I believe that this group is rather similar to Moser's "invisible path" of Buddhists whose "religious participation is kept apart from their professional lives" (Moser 2013). It was the students of University B that exhibited these traits. These Buddhist students keep their Buddhist identity, belief, and practice hidden from absolutely all except their fellow secret practitioners. I was extremely lucky to even discover that University B had a group that met to discuss Buddhist texts, let alone eventually discover that this group was actually a religious group in disguise. Whereas the overt Buddhist students I interviewed initially encountered Buddhism for any of my five identified reasons and fell within any of Moser's categories, I found that covert Buddhist students predominantly initially encountered Buddhism through their own personal means and fell into the problem solver category. Therefore, students initially came to this society for one reason: to help solve a particular problem (or problems). Even though their own personal Buddhist identity meant a great deal to each of the Buddhist members of University B, none of them made any outward expressions of this identity. In further contrast to overt Buddhist students, covert Buddhist students, for the most part, were extremely shy and were initially reluctant to even talk to me about the texts that they were studying, let alone their personal Buddhist beliefs and practices that they initially kept hidden from me.

9. Why Do Overt Buddhist Students and Covert Buddhist Students Practice in Seemingly Opposite Ways?

Overt Buddhist students are defined by freedom. In their very being, overt Buddhists embody this term. They have the freedom to practice their religion in their university. They have the freedom to seek guidance from local experts. They have the freedom to openly express their beliefs in public. They have the freedom to actively seek out new members. The exact opposite can be said for covert Buddhist students. Without official recognition from their university, the students of University B lacked the freedom to operate in the same manner as the students of University A. Whereas overt Buddhist students are not troubled by the idea of losing face as a result of their Buddhist identity and have no need to be cautious about their religious activities and identity, covert Buddhists are troubled by the potential loss of face that their Buddhist identity could bring about and, more importantly, extremely cautious about their religious activities and identity. The importance of official backing cannot be diminished. With official backing, the students of University A were very much able to practice something that was seen to be as public religion. Without official backing, the students of University B were forced to engage in private practice of religion. With official university backing, the activities of overt Buddhist students become completely normalised and there is, subsequently, no risk of losing face. In contrast, without official university backing, covert Buddhists feel as though they are practicing something that is not normal. There is, therefore, danger of losing face (or even getting into trouble) should they opt to practice publicly. Therefore, one could argue that the answer to why overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students practice in seemingly opposite ways is simple: overt Buddhist students possess the freedom to act and identify as Buddhist whereas covert

Buddhist students do not. However, one could also argue that this is an oversimplification of a far more complicated matter. Although it was very clear that the students of University B did not feel as though they possessed the freedom to openly act, this is not necessarily because they did not actively possess this freedom. Indeed, the founder of the group told me that they had never actually attempted to request permission from the university on the grounds that they were too worried about the possibility of the university denying their request. This uncertainty visibly worried the members of the University B's Buddhist Society and I very much got the impression that rather than attempt to receive permission and risk failure, the students were more comfortable keeping their society private. Moreover, I thought that it was extremely revealing that the majority of the members of University B's society told me that if they were to be open about their Buddhist identity, their respective families and friends would probably have no problem whatsoever. One could therefore argue that rather than the possession of freedom, the true underlying reason as to why overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students practice in seemingly opposite ways is due to opposing levels of confidence. The president of University A inherited charge of a long-established society with a long history of extremely active members. He inherited a culture of confidence and this set the tone for the entire society. In contrast, the founder of University B's Buddhist Society is a very soft-spoken, shy student that told me on three separate occasions that he struggles with social anxiety. In contrast to inheriting a large well-established Buddhist society, he quietly started his own and expressed a desire to "keep it small." Although it is too sweeping to claim that the differences between overt and covert Buddhist students are entirely down to how student Buddhist societies are run, I believe that it is very much the case that the founder of University B's society set the tone for how the society would be run. The students of University B all came across as shy and reserved and it could well be the case that they together cultivated a culture whereby this reserved attitude towards their religious identity has flourished. Indeed, one could therefore argue that the very fact that the society could, in theory, request permission from University B to function as a recognised society together with the fact that the majority claim that their friends and family would have no problem with their Buddhist identity, suggests that the private nature of covert Buddhist students is self-imposed rather than imposed. However, although one could certainly argue that they are secretive about their practice of Buddhism out of their own choice, the fact that the students actively express desire to be like the University A's Buddhist Society suggests that this is not necessarily the case. Therefore, one could argue that the core difference between overt Buddhist students and covert Buddhist students is that the former group are built upon a culture of openness and confidence whereas the latter is a group built upon a lack of confidence grounded in uncertainty. Needless to say, these conclusions are very much conjecture. However, the confidence I observed at University A was utterly contrasted by the lack of confidence I observed at University B.

10. Conclusions

Needless to say, the sample that this paper has drawn upon is extremely small: only two student Buddhist societies in Beijing have been examined. I, therefore, do not wish to offer any sweeping nor even anything other than tentative conclusions. Given this small sample size, I do not, for example, wish to claim that Riyila's claims have been disproved without a doubt. However, the very fact that this paper has outlined two extremely different student Buddhist societies that share an equal passion for Buddhism, a deep understanding of Buddhist doctrine, and practice on a very regular basis, is certainly evidence to contrast the predominant theme in existing Chinese scholarship: namely that university students who engage in Buddhist practices have a fundamentally flawed and limited understanding of Buddhism and do not frequently practice. Indeed, what binds these two groups together is exactly this shared love for Buddhism mixed with frequent practice and rigorous study. Furthermore, I believe that the very existence of University B's Buddhist Society is significant. In 2010, Jones concluded that she "was not able to discover any Buddhist student groups at any of Nanjing's many universities that meet in person, there are several university student discussion boards where people discuss Buddhism" (Jones 2010, p. 98). This is an unsurprising conclusion as the University A's Buddhist Society is something of a rare case: the norm in universities in China is to

find absolutely no mention of an official student Buddhist society. However, the very presence of University B's Buddhist Society might suggest that there are more of its ilk. At the very least, I would be wholly unsurprised to find that universities across China possess far more covert Buddhist students than official statistics might lead us to believe. Finally, although I was initially hesitant to forward any form of a value judgement, the evidence I have gathered overwhelmingly suggests that overt Buddhism is the preferential of the two. The overt Buddhist students of University A were extremely happy in their identity. In contrast, even though they all spoke very highly of their society, the covert students of University B had a sense of longing: they wanted to be overt Buddhists but did not feel as though this option was possible. Indeed, whereas overt Buddhists students always had the option to be covert Buddhists by simply enacting their own private practice of Buddhism, covert Buddhist students, whether it is due to a lack of freedom or a lack of confidence, do not feel as though they have the choice to become overt. The fact that covert Buddhists are cautious and reserved is not necessarily a bad thing. However, the fact that the students of University B spoke of the University A's Buddhist Society with such a sense of awe and longing implies that they do not want to be cautious and reserved. Moreover, with the official recognition granted to overt Buddhist students comes the benefit of professional guidance from Buddhist experts, the freedom to practice openly, and support in advertising the society to new students. Of these benefits, I believe that the opportunity to receive professional religious guidance is of greatest significance. The students of University B were entirely on their own. Any questions that arose pertaining to their Buddhist practice could only be discussed amongst themselves. Many of them often spoke of the desire to receive professional guidance but none of them felt as though they could. In contrast, the students of University A were very quick to speak of the benefits of receiving guidance from the monks of Longquan Monastery as well as academics who focus on Buddhism.

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