CHAPTER 1

Studying Chinese Christianity

In early July 2004, a group of young altar servants held their summer camp in a house in Mui Wo, a remote bay of the Hong Kong territory. The Catholic priest in charge of their parish, a young French missionary, invited me to join this three-day camp. I had already been in Hong Kong for about a year as a volunteer for the local Catholic Church, organizing pastoral activities for French expatriates while living in a local parish and learning Cantonese at Hong Kong University. Joining this summer camp was an opportunity to further immerse myself among young local Catholics.

When all the activities were over, and everyone prepared for bed, a group assigned to sleep in the upper room of the building came to me begging for my *sahpjihga*. Thanks to their gestures and efforts to repeat the term many times, I finally understood that they were looking for my cross. Unfortunately, the French seminarian that I was, I did not wear any cross. Once they understood my lack of piety, they turned to the priest and begged for his cross. Since they were supposed to spend the night alone upstairs, he agreed to give them the cross he wears since his ordination to get peace and reassure everyone. The problem was solved.

Yet, I did not understand what was going on and which problem was behind this "cross hunting." Why were these teenagers so concerned about getting one cross? The priest explained that they were simply afraid of ghosts and wanted protection. Since our building was in the middle of some abandoned fields and in a quite poor condition, these Hong Kong

© The Author(s) 2020

M. Chambon, *Making Christ Present in China*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-55605-1_1

teenagers not used to sleep in such a remote environment were simply scared by the potential wandering spirits filling the surroundings. These explanations were far from satisfying, and all kinds of questions raised in me. How could such modern and well-educated young Christians still be afraid of ghosts? If ghosts exist by any means, how can a piece of wood, even shaped as a Christian cross, be enough to stop their dangerous influence? Should we not challenge their "childish" and "superstitious" behavior?

Coming from a French and rural background where the idea of Halloween was entirely foreign, and where ghosts were perceived as a vanished superstition from the Middle Ages, I still knew how objects are crucial in the deployment of a Christian faith. At my parents' and grandparents' farms, we put pieces of blessed palms at the front of the doors. At church, we sign ourselves with holy water. And once a year, we join a local pilgrimage during which priests bless our cars. So, indeed, material objects were everywhere in my own experience of Christianity, and as a seminarian, I was used to introducing younger generations to sacraments through a pedagogy centered on objects. But, apart from the Holy Eucharist, objects were always used as symbols to indirectly refer to and recall the presence of the Christian God. They were not the presence itself, or any part of it. They were about meaning.

These Hong Kong teenagers puzzled me. In some sense, their belief in the presence of ghosts and in the power of the cross appeared silly, naïve, and somehow from another age. Since we were all Catholics, I was surprised by the operant connection they made between a material object and invisible beings as if a protective mechanism exists there. How could these young, educated, and committed Christians have such strong feelings toward ghosts, and at the same time such an approach to material objects? Can we really believe that religious objects hold protective power? How far can a Christian be still afraid of ghosts and rely "magically" on objects to keep them at bay? Should their relation to Christ not free them from these concerns?

Fourteen years later, it is a similar set of questions that this book aims to investigate. When Chinese people turn to the religion of the cross, what difference does it make? How are the ways in which they perceive and connect things together maintained or transformed? What are the cultural continuities and discontinuities implied by a turn to Christianity? These questions not solely aim to enquire who is acting and how, but to also shift our attention beyond specific social actors in order to wonder "what is

acting?" What is it about Christianity that pushes Christians to act and inter-act this way?

1.1 Dialoguing with the Anthropology of Religion and Anthropology of Christianity

These questions are not new for anthropologists. Indeed, they have generated a rich anthropological literature that explores the turn to Christianity and its cultural implications (Hefner 1993; Cannell 2006; Keane 2007; Robbins 2007). In this section, I briefly introduce some of this literature and the ways in which it approaches the cultural continuities and discontinuities induced by the religion of the cross in order not to provide an exhaustive review but to better situate how this book intends to contribute to this conversation.

A major part of the research on the relationship between Christianity and cultural change takes roots in studies on African churches. Seminal investigations explored the relationship between Christianity and "traditional religions" in regard to the question of Africanization (Comaroff 1985; Meyer 2004). In an intellectual context interested in the question of modernity, some early anthropologists insisted on the modernizing rupture brought by the religion of the cross and foreign missionaries to African societies because Christianity was characterized, for example, as a religion of transcendence (Evens and Peacock 1990; Gluckman 1964; Fortes 1970). Soon enough, other studies highlighted the continuities between traditional African religions and Christianity, downplaying the transformative and disruptive power of the new religion and pointing to the importance of other broader socio-political changes (Horton 1971; Vail 1989; Peel 2000). For instance, Jean Comaroff has studied how the Barolong Boo Ratshidi, an ethnic group of the South Africa-Botswana, have struggled over 150 years to construct an order of Christian symbols and practices through which they can act upon the forces that surround them. Comparing pre-colonial body rituals and contemporary ones found in the local churches of Zion, Comaroff theorizes "the role of the Tshidi as determined, yet determining, in their own history; as human beings who, in their everyday production of goods and meanings, acquiesce yet protest, reproduce yet seek to transform their predicament" (Comaroff 1985: 1). In her approach, Christianity is conceived as a lingua franca

between colonizers and colonized, a malleable tool to reconstruct a sense of history and identity which encapsulates both dominance and resistance.

Subsequently, new forms of Pentecostal churches and of transnational born-again movements in Africa and elsewhere across the world led the research to further question previous assumptions that opposed modernity and tradition, and local and global religions (Corten and Marshall 2001; Englund and Leach 2000). An influential contribution to these conversations on continuities and discontinuities has been made by Joel Robbins through his ethnographic description of the moral dilemma encountered by a tiny ethnic group in Papua New Guinea, the Urapmin (Robbins 2004). Since the 1970s, they have embraced a form of Pentecostalism and constantly deployed efforts in confessions and sin-removal rituals. And yet, they remain deeply and painfully convinced that they are sinners. For Robbins, this manifests how the Urapmin juxtapose two contradictory cultural logics, a traditional moral system and a Christian one. In the tensions between a Urapmin social life, where one has to assert himself in acts of will, and a particular "Christian moral system" condemning desires, jealousies, and envy, Urapmin are doomed to perceive themselves as sinful (Robbins 2004: 248). In this model, Robbins portrays Christianity as a cultural system of moral values in discontinuity with the traditional Urapmin culture. In later works, though, Robbins embraced a more pluralistic view, but still insists on its disruptive power because "many kinds of Christianity stress radical change" (Robbins 2007: 5).

At the same moment, but moving in the opposite direction, Fenella Cannell et al. explored multiples forms of Christianity in various places to present how this religion is first and foremost in continuity with the cultural milieu in which it grows. "Christianity is not an arbitrary construct, but that it is a historically complex one" (Cannell 2006: 7). For Cannell, since the core of Christianity lies in paradoxical teaching about incarnation and redemption, it provides room for each society and time period to develop its own interpretations and social forms of it. By exploring types of personhood, ideas of religious power, kinship, or ritual practices across various churches, those scholars illustrate how the religion of the cross is marked by all types of continuities with non-Christian cultures. For those researchers, Christianity is first and foremost "a changeable phenomenon" (Cannell 2006: 25), and eventually "a tool to assert and maintain cultural stability"(Marshall 2016: 4).

Clearly, social scientists have developed several ways of approaching, evaluating, and theorizing the continuities and discontinuities that

Christianity may bring into a cultural system. Still, the field remains deeply influenced by the Western and Protestant world in which it has emerged (Robbins 2007). Most conversations have evolved around a few concepts central to a certain Protestant imaginary. Notions of rupture, sincerity, and interiority have been repeatedly discussed, and little attention has been paid to non-Protestant communities and their distinctive imaginaries (Hann 2014; Brown and Feener 2017).

Consequently, it is in relation with these particular debates but within the specific historic-cultural context of China that scholars studying Chinese Christians have forged their own conversations. Several historians argue that the initial moral, social, and political disruption brought by Christianity into China has been, in the long run, accustomed to the Chinese religious landscape (Menegon 2009; Xi 2010). By contrast, Henrietta Harrison claims that Chinese Catholicism has followed the opposite path (2013). She argues that forms of Italian piety initially introduced to northern China were extremely similar to Chinese popular religion. But then, Chinese Catholics have worked over the centuries to make their religion increasingly distinct. In a similar way, social scientists suggest that the current appeal of Protestantism in China is fueled by popular opposition to the authoritarian and communist regime and by a disillusion toward the communist ideology (Yang 2012; Vala 2018; Madsen 2000; Kang 2016). However, Cao Nanlai shows how the influential Wenzhou boss Christians are actively supporting the neo-liberal values inscribed within the economic model promoted by the post-reform Chinese state (2011). Indeed, Wenzhou Christians develop an "indigenized Chinese Christianity" which provides "a form of non-market morality that serves to effectively legitimate Wenzhou's pre-modern household economy in the context of market modernity" (Cao 2013: 85). Therefore, they should not be regarded as dissidents or antagonistic toward the state, or even with their broader religious milieu, but in continuity with the new socio-economic order of the country.

In these quests to evaluate change and discontinuity, one may notice that there is a fundamental problem with the references used to theorize it. What is the paramount criterion that one utilizes—more or less explicitly—to approach the messiness of Christianity within a cultural milieu? Some prioritize the relation to the construction of the individual self as a moral subject, while others focus on power relations and political economy. Some insist on transcendence, while others favor social relationships such as gender and kinship issues. Some rely on the supposedly distinctive

features linked to a rural or an urban environment, while others prefer to focus on theological traditions. But which kind of criteria do we prioritize in our scholarly informed understanding of Christianity? And which kinds of assumptions about "religion" and "social science" do we apply to elaborate our evaluations?

This book joins conversions on the continuities and discontinuities brought by Christianity in order to question the models we deploy in theorizing its unity and diversity. More specifically, I propose to look at Chinese Christians who live their religious commitment in a society relatively foreign to Christianity, not only to discuss whether their religious turn is a cultural and social rupture, but first and foremost to critically rethink the ways anthropology conceptualizes the Christian phenomenon. I am interested in considering how Chinese Christians and their various churches produce categories and standards that enable them to position themselves as Christ's disciples. What is Christianity about for them? And in light of the variety of their beliefs, rituals, and institutions, how can we revisit and reformulate an anthropological understanding of Christianity that does not fall into narrow essentialism, nor a contextual relativism, both of which failing to honor the tremendous variations and yet stable resilience of the Christian phenomenon?

1.2 Theoretical Issues and Methodological Approach

To address these questions, this book returns to what my puzzling Hong Kong ghost experience invites; that is, investigating how Chinese Christians relate to the power of material objects. I draw on a tradition in anthropology where the roles of objects in relation to people are carefully scrutinized to unfold the ways in which a cultural system operates (Mauss 1954; Malinowski 1922). Yet, material objects are not just raw matter free from cultural construction. The relations people establish with them are also dynamically informed and oriented by their cultural milieu (Houtman and Meyer 2012). To investigate how Christians relate to their material belongings, and unfold from there what Christianity implies for them, one needs to pay attention to the tensions surrounding the relation to and the understanding of material entities (Keane 2007; Engelke 2007).

To explore these dynamic relations and the ways in which there are constructed, reinforced, challenged and eventually redefined, I apply

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) as a methodological tool to investigate how material objects participate in the collective emergence of Chinese Christianity, and how their participation redefines them in return. At the foundation of ANT, there is a push inspired by modern science and technology studies and encouraged by Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law (Callon 1991; Latour 1988; Law and Hassard 1999) to carefully describe the ways in which humans rely on material objects either in their everyday life or in their way of building knowledge and social cohesion (Sayes 2017). This pragmatic approach invites the social sciences to question predefined ontological distinctions between humans and material objects that place agency on the side of humans only (Latour 2005). According to ANT advocates, such assumptions abusively separate the social sciences from natural sciences and precondition our way of understanding social phenomena. By revisiting the model of natural sciences, ANT argues that nothing exists outside of the constantly evolving relationships in which it is embedded (Latour 2000). Things work in relation to each other, and through the possibilities brought by interrelations, therefore "when we speak of actor we should always add the large network of attachments making it act" (Latour 2005: 218). Since human and nonhuman entities are deeply intertwined and interdependent, they all act upon one another, each crucial in the functioning of social networks (Latour 1988).

At the core of ANT, also known as "sociology of translation" and "sociology of association," there is a fundamental debate about agency and relation (Sayes 2014). How do things rely on each other? What does it take to make links and changes? ANT does not aim to simply describe a network but to explore how things get bound together, sharing "information" to the point of putting things in form. It investigates the distributed agency of networks of humans and non-humans, which can include things, animals and deities. Therefore, to explore social phenomena, we need to increase (1) the number of actors we recognize and acknowledge, and (2) the types of agency they deploy. Since objects have hundreds of ways of exerting an influence on humans and causing them to act, agency should not be essentialized outside of the material and relational conditions from which it emerges. In other words, an action does not occur along a unilineal chain of causality rooted exclusively in the human mind or in the needs of a social group but relies on countless intermediaries that form and constrain this collective action. Recognizing the tremendous variety of actors and "actants" (natural objects striking back

on humans) allows us to avoid essentializing "social forces," and to constantly question the ways in which things make each other do something (Latour 2000). This new empiricism pushes to trace the circulation of "the social" among human actors and non-human actants in their ways of creating a state of affairs, the collective work of a social web.

Nonetheless, ANT has generated various reinterpretations and theoretical hybridizations since its early theorization (Farías 2014; Krarup and Blok 2011), as well as passionate critiques (Bloor 1999; Shapin 1988; Turner 2015). Despite various research directions growing out of ANT and its increasing diversification, it is regularly attacked for its tendency for ontological deconstructivism where nothing exists prior social construction (Elder-Vass 2015; Whittle and Spicer 2008); or for creating a flat ontology where all members of a network share a rather similar agency and potentiality of being (Amsterdamska 1990); or for reducing material objects to their acting potentialities only (Harman 2011).

Aware of these debates, this book applies ANT as a methodological tool to approach Chinese Christians and reflect on their model of Christianity. Despite the large influence of ANT across the social sciences, its contribution to religious studies remains rather limited (Ingman and Lassander 2012). Nonetheless, I suggest elaborating on ANT by paying special attention to the ways in which Chinese Christians rely on a variety of material objects and relationships in order to uncover how things work together. The point is not to find out "why" Chinese people become Christian, but "how" they constantly do so. For example, when interviewed Christians mention that they go to church "because of" Jesus, I do not translate this as something about belief or moral system only, but ask them to explain further how so. How do they go to church? How did they find out that Jesus asks that of them? What provides Jesus with this potentiality? Which path has allowed Jesus to let them do that, and which mediations are involved? The issue behind these questions is to trace back the lines of causalities, and the various actors involved in them, that unfold how their religious commitment is made possible.

ANT invites us to scrutinize the ways in which human actors—in our case Chinese Christians—create their own network, and how they distinguish it from other forms of association. "It is always by comparison with other competing ties that any tie is emphasized. So for every group to be defined, a list of anti-groups is set up as well" (Latour 2005: 32). Consequently, this book provides extensive observations and discussions on alternative local religious traditions to compare and contrast the ways

Chinese Christians create relationships and operate through them. By applying ANT, I aim to highlight which relations and actors are constructed and reinforced among Christian actors, but also which ones are challenged and sidelined. Therefore, this study also works at providing a methodology in comparing and contrasting religious traditions.

While ANT allows us to explore the multiple ties that Chinese Christians favor, construct, reinforce, transform, and display, their materially informed ties also reveal that a central entity is constantly recalled, produced, and revealed at the core of their network. Indeed, Chinese Christians and their objects constantly refer to Jesus Christ or *yesu jidu* (耶稣基督) in Chinese. To describe further this central and unifying actor, and the ways in which it participates in the continual creation of the network, I borrow the notion of the "face" from the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. In his philosophical work, highly concerned with ethics and subjectivity, one's existence and knowledge are first and foremost based on the relation to the intriguing face of the other, and not on some kind of abstract universal being embedded in one's self (Levinas 1969, 1985).

For Levinas, the encounter with the face of the other, a questioning face characterized by ultimate alterity and proximity, is the key phenomenon—epiphany—that reveals to one his own existence. One comes into existence by encountering a face. Furthermore, the particularity and concreteness of the face exceed the idea of the otherness. This gentle revelation of otherness in the vulnerable face of the other simultaneously brings an ambiguous question—Are you going to kill me?—and a demand for responsibility that awakens the subject to his moral potency. The otherness of the face disturbs the self, opening a structural interval questioning the existence of the "I." For Levinas, while the face emerges naked, given, defenseless, never reducible to an inert portrait or a discursive speech, it exceeds all descriptions, open to infinity and totality while remaining first and foremost a vulnerable entity supplicating in front of the nascent subject. Ultimately, Levinas argues that this face-to-face encounter gives direction and orientation to one's subjective being-in-the-world because although the face does not formally speak, it still requires that one respond to him and make ethical judgments. His emergence is an order, a calling, ordering one's own existence without determining in advance the choice he is called to make.

In this philosophical approach, the face of the other, being the key to the epiphany of the subject but still not directly acting upon him, displays a paradoxical agency. While the face forbids to kill but calls for

responsibility, it does not act through direct constraint or interference (Levinas 1985: 86). The face is fundamentally in tension between its given passivity and what it generates. The face, in its absolute anteriority to action, projects a passive agency made of expression and potency without being a mechanical correlation (Gibbs 1992).

Ultimately, *Making Christ Present in China* borrows from these two theoretical developments, ANT and the notion of the questioning face, to explore the dynamic interplay between Christian continuities and changes, unity and diversity. ANT allows us to investigate how Chinese Christians build and transform their relationships to all kinds of entities while relying on material mediations. Yet, ANT uncovers that Christians and their objects give specific importance to one peculiar entity, the Christian God, which stands in continuity with their material and social world but through different ways of being present. The notion of the engaging face, therefore, allows us to further describe how the central but intriguing presence of their God orients, transforms and re-hierarchizes the ways in which relationships are redefined and adjusted within the Christian network. Levinas' concept points to the radical change in agency introduced in the network and enlightens the converging dynamic of the responding but heterogeneous network. Thus, it helps to challenge the potential flat ontology associated with ANT. I argue that only the tension between the two theoretical inputs allows us to approach Christianity as a whole and understand what it specifically entails for those who connect to it.

By looking at the kind of heterogeneous networks elaborated among Chinese Christians, this book offers a model of the religion of the cross that one may call interactionist. In contrast to intellectualist models which ultimately locate the Christian faith in the mind of people (Luhrmann 2012; Keane 2007), and in contrast to social models which tends to approach Christianity through social relationships only (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Cao 2011; Inouye 2019), this study turns the focus on interactions between people and things in order to carefully investigate the type of network they collectively design. By looking at how Chinese Christians rely on objects, and at how material artifacts allow certain kinds of possibilities, I propose to map out the types of actors and agency that inform their networks and characterize their religious enterprise. Thus, the constant dialogue that human subjects and material objects nourish provides the substrate through which this book offers an alternative model theorizing the unity and diversity of Christianity.

1.3 Being an Ethnographer Among Chinese Christians

To better situate this study, I must say a few words about myself. As I mentioned in the opening, I was for several years a seminarian for a Catholic diocese located in central France. This diocese offers eighteen centuries of Christian heritage including major historical events, architectural accomplishments, and intellectual figures (Blaise Pascal, Teilhard de Chardin). Although I received the full training to become a priest of this specific territory, I finally decided to remain a layperson and serve the Church through an academic involvement. Since then, my research interests have crystallized around the interplay of "faith" and "culture."

To further explored the encounter between the religion of the cross and cultural systems, I decided to return to China, a territory that Taoist traditions name "the continent of the gods" (*shenzhou* 神州) (Lagerwey 2019). Indeed, the Chinese world provides a unique opportunity to revisit the religion of the cross through an interreligious lens and within a rather non-Christian culture. Because of the Christian syntheses it increasingly exports abroad, the Middle Kingdom is also gaining a growing influence on World Christianity and calls for further investigation. Therefore, I did a Master's in Theology at the Catholic University of Paris exploring how Taiwanese Catholics deal with the Chinese belief in ghosts (Chambon 2012). While I conducted fieldwork in Taiwan, I also engaged with Presbyterian and Pentecostal churches to enlarge my experience of "Chinese Christianity." Since my initial seminary training, I have been taught to reflect on Christianity from the perspective of its various forms (Orthodox, Eastern, Protestant, etc.), the socio-political context within which they evolve, and their relative demographic and historical importance. Therefore, studying the question of ghosts brought me to engage further with other Christian denominations, but also with social sciences and the scholarly informed study of Chinese religions—either in the field or in France (Chambon 2017). This book is the extension of this journey. Since the number of Christians is purportedly growing in mainland China, mostly within Protestant circles, it appeared interesting to me to explore further this specific portion of Chinese Christianity and see what it may say about the encounter between the Christian faith and the Chinese world. Finally, conducting research among Protestants in mainland China, besides being politically less sensitive, appeared as an opportunity to renew

approaches regarding the situation of Catholics in the People's Republic of China.

Inscribing myself in the anthropological tradition of "doing fieldwork," this book builds on an ethnographic approach and participant observation in one place. Thanks to Dennis Balcombe, an American Pentecostal missionary, and to various contacts I had in Hong Kong and Taiwan, I was able to visit numerous Protestant churches across different parts of mainland China before selecting a site of research. During this selection process, I looked for a suitable and safe place where I could spend at least a full year of immersion as a participant-observer. To do so, I had to find a Protestant Church capable of welcoming me despite a certain number of obstacles. To understand some of those difficulties, we need to introduce the broader situation of the religion of the cross in contemporary China.

Christianity in the Continent of the Gods

The situation of Christianity in China is both complex and sensitive. During the last five centuries, the Chinese state has shown recurrent antagonism against its Christian subjects (Menegon 2009). Either through imperial banishment after the rites controversy (17th and 18th centuries) or during the Boxer Rebellion (1899–1901), Chinese Christians have struggled to find their place in the Chinese society (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). Then, when the Chinese Communist Party took control of the country, Christianity was portrayed as a "foreign religion" used by Western imperialism to colonize China. Like other religious practices, it was entirely banished from the public sphere during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (Lee 2009). Since the early 1980s, though, it publicly reappeared and demonstrated a real dynamism that has attracted the interest of many observers (Bays 2012; Chan and Hunter 1993).

In the 1990s–2000s, most analysts emphasized the division between legally registered Christian communities and those refusing any collaboration with the Chinese Communist state (Lee 2007). Chinese Protestants were depicted as being either part of "house churches" (unregistered ones) or part of "Three-Self Patriotic Churches" (the registered ones taking their name from the three requirements for autonomy that the state tries to implement upon religious groups) (Yang 2006; Cheng 2003;

Wright and Zimmerman-Liu 2013; Homer 2010).[1] Catholics were depicted as being either part of the "underground church" (the unregistered one claiming full obedience to the Pope) or part of the "patriotic church" (the registered one officially autonomous from papal supervision) (Madsen 1998, 2003; Bays 2012).

This Christian panorama fueled endless debates. Chinese Christians offered recurrent opportunities to various entities such as anti-government Chinese Christians, various American media outlets, missionary societies, some Western powers, and so on, to denounce how the authoritarian Chinese state does not meet the "modern" standards of what a state should implement in terms of religious freedom and the rule of law (Yang 2012; Homer 2010; Dulk and Carpenter 2014). Unlike Christians in Turkey or India, who attract far less attention, reports about the situation of Chinese Christians regularly appear in the American public sphere through books and articles that indicate a continuous—and somehow ambiguous—Western interest in Chinese Christians (Bays 2009).

By the end of the 2010s, the situation has evolved and more and more observers agree that Chinese Christians cannot be classified through a simple binary opposition between registered and unregistered communities (Bays 2012). On the one hand, the theological and political diversification of Chinese Christians precludes any typology from clearly emerging. Simultaneously, the ongoing urbanization of China deeply impacts the ways in which house churches reshape themselves (Kang 2016). Therefore, Chinese Christian networks remain more complex and diverse than any classification. On the other hand, the religious policy of the state greatly varies from place to place and therefore diversifies, even more, the ways in which local communities respond and structure themselves (Dulk and Carpenter 2014; Goh et al. 2016; Chan 2015). Analysts are left without a clear map to portray Chinese Christians and their complex relation to the Communist state (Vala 2018).

Although there is no reliable data to evaluate the number of Chinese Christians, broad assessments consider that there are about 15 million Catholics and from 50–100 million Protestants in China (Bays 2012; Yang 2012). What is now certain is that the number of Chinese Christians has increased since the 1970s. Indeed, all religious movements are thriving

[1] The Three-Self Patriotic Movement was initially a Protestant ideology about mission and was recycled by the Chinese Communist Party in 1951 to require self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation from all Protestant churches in China.

and some researchers even refer to a "religious fever" as a way to describe religiosity in China (Johnson 2017). Yet, Christian movements—like all religious organizations—remain a question for the Communist state (Goossaert and Palmer 2011). The level of control and regulation that they are facing remains highly variable from place to place, depending on local history, individual officials, and economic factors. In the rise of Xi Jinping, however, the religious policy of the Chinese state has become tighter. Christians are now more careful, enjoying less autonomy and displaying more self-censorship than a few years ago (Yang 2017). In this context, studying Chinese Christians is not without risks, either for the researcher or for the Christians who support him.

This broader situation, therefore, weighs on the ways in which social scientists approach Chinese Christians. In fact, the scholarly study of Chinese Christianity remains under constant risk of becoming a political means to criticize the Chinese state, a growing challenger to the American hegemony (Yang 2012; Wielander 2013; Vala 2018; Ownby 2011; Ashiwa and Wank 2009). It is meaningful that a large proportion of the research focuses on political questions and on unregistered "house churches" only (Cheng 2003; Yang 2005; Homer 2010; Koesel 2013; Wright and Zimmerman-Liu 2013; Kang 2016; Ma 2019). It leaves aside many other issues and neglects the Three-Self Patriotic Churches, perceived as somehow "corrupted" by the state (Wang 2016; Byler 2014). Anthropologists like Cao Nanlai and a few others have tried to move away from these pitfalls by offering new insights on Protestantism in Wenzhou (Cao 2011; Chen and Huang 2004). Also, the recent academic interest in the growth of Pentecostalism has encouraged researchers to enlarge the scope of their investigation (Yang et al. 2017). Thus, it is in this academically ambiguous, religiously complex, and politically sensitive situation that my research took place.

In order to select a field site, during the summers of 2013 and 2014, I visited around fifty Protestant communities in various parts of China with several criteria in mind. I was looking for somewhere not entirely rural nor urban. I did not want my research becoming too specified by its environment and the farmer's son that I remain was skeptical about any kind of ontological division between urban and rural churches (Huang 2014; Cao 2011; Kang 2016). Also, it was necessary to select a place where Mandarin was the practical language among local people (*putonghua* 普通话). After learning Cantonese and Mandarin, I was not capable of learning a new Chinese dialect. Then, it was important to me to find a large enough

Fig. 1.1 Nanping

church able to reflect a certain level of complexity and diversity. Finally, my last criterion was to find a Protestant Church able to welcome me in a safe way for them, and for me in the long run. Even though I met with many large Protestant churches willing to share their experience, many were anxious about the idea of having a foreign researcher among them, joining almost all church events for more than an entire year. After two summers of inquiry, only one place appeared suitable, and this was in Fujian (Fig. 1.1).

Doing Fieldwork at the Gospel Church in Nanping

Pastor Thomas Sun from the Gospel Church of Nanping was the most confident and welcoming Christian leader I met during my preliminary research.[2] Soon, I understood that my doctoral research would occur in Nanping, a place that met all my research criteria. Located at the junction of rural inner China and the urban coast, the city and its surrounding district, Yanping District, comprise around 504,500 inhabitants according to the 2016 official census.[3] Almost 300,000 of them live in the city itself. Unlike in most parts of Fujian, Nanping people speak Mandarin as their primary language, and local dialects dominate only the rural parts of the

[2] Throughout this book, I keep the real names of my informants whenever they are identifiable public figures, such as Pastor Sun. The rest of the time, I use pseudonyms to respect my informants' privacy.

[3] See 2016 official census: http://www.ypzf.gov.cn/cms/cms/html/npsypqrmzf/2017-04-01/655911812.html visited on October 1, 2019.

territory. This linguistic particularity—quite different from the rest of the Fujian province and already mentioned by missionaries in the 1920s—comes from the fact that Nanping was the crossroad of inner and coastal China. This hub was a place of encounter and trade where people needed a common language.

Local Christianity, like other forms of religious life, is lively, diverse, and visible. Indeed, before my long-term fieldwork, Christians in Fujian Province were enjoying a fairly peaceful and favorable socio-political situation. With the exception of painful conflicts involving underground Catholics in the north of the province, which includes the Nanping Prefecture (also named Minbei Prefecture), the provincial government displayed a more nuanced and pragmatic approach toward Christian churches than in some other parts of China (Chan 2012).

With the blessing of Pastor Sun and an official affiliation with the Department of Anthropology at Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, I moved to the People's Republic of China from January 2015 to May 2016, spending most of my time in Nanping. During my stay there, I lived in one of the elderly homes of the Gospel Church, in an apartment initially designed for the staff. This location, besides being comfortable, allowed me to observe and participate in a wide range of church activities that this book describes. During the first part of my fieldwork, I also tried to immerse myself as much as I could within the extended local network of the Gospel Church while adjusting to life in Nanping. Since the Gospel Church reaches around 4000 people across the Yanping District and interconnects various local churches, it generates countless activities, programs, and sub-groups that kept me quite busy.

While I was getting more familiar with the Gospel Church, I also started to engage with other Nanping churches and joined more and more of their services and activities. I needed to connect with all local Christian communities I could in order to develop a deeper and wider understanding of the Christian phenomenon in Nanping. Besides Christians, I spent a fair amount of time to explore other religious practices and networks that enrich the religious life of most Nanping people. In view of the local religious dynamism, this exploration was an endless journey. Although I always remained focused on the Gospel Church and other Christian communities, I constantly enlarged the scope of my observations, engaging in more and more comparative approaches. This book comes as an echo to these incessant dialogues between different religious practices of Nanping people and their multiple traditions.

Throughout my stay in Nanping, I learned immensely about the Chinese political and administrative equilibrium. After some warnings from the local police, I also learned how to engage with various state officials and communicate more actively about what I was doing in China. Building respect and trust matters! Having a research permit and being affiliated with an outstanding Chinese university are never enough. Therefore, like many other foreigners elsewhere in China, I got repeatedly invited to drink tea with a few officials and enjoyed endless discussions about numerous topics. If they were interested in hearing about social issues in Hong Kong, the soft power of the Vatican, or the religious policy of the USA, I was also able to question them on the Chinese religious policy, environmental problems and other issues that preoccupied my mind at that time.

Beyond the Yanping District itself, engaging with the Gospel Church and other local churches required reassembling the wide and diffuse network that characterizes the ways in which Nanping Christians operate and belong to the broader Chinese Christianity. Several times, I had to follow Pastor Sun on some of his numerous trips outside of the Nanping territory. Indeed, within the highly interconnected Fujian's official Protestantism, the Gospel Church is a beacon shining upon the entire province. Besides the personal network of Pastor Sun that afforded me to travel increasingly during the second half of my stay, I also had to engage with various Protestant and Catholic entities that directly collaborate with Nanping churches. This led me to explore Protestant churches—including house churches—in Zhejiang province, Guangdong province, Nanjing, Beijing, and Shanghai, as well as Catholic communities in Fuan, Fuzhou, and Guangzhou. In one of my follow-up visits, I also visited related churches in the north of China, Heilongjiang Province.

Finally, I must mention that during my fieldwork, I had to regularly return to Guangzhou, the provincial capital of Guangdong, 480 miles away from Nanping. Because of my academic affiliation to Sun Yat-Sen University, I had to spend some time on campus. This became an opportunity to further explore Catholicism in larger Guangzhou. Already familiar with the official diocese, my on-campus time gave me the possibility to increasingly engage with the "non-official" Catholic networks of the megacity. I found out that many of these Catholics came from northern Fujian and were happy to connect me back with their native place. Their help, therefore, was critical in enlarging my networking among Catholic networks of northern Fujian.

What Counts as "Christian" in Nanping?

Before presenting the layout of this book, I must acknowledge one theoretical and methodological difficulty of my research. The way I address it sheds light on the entire project and on the ways in which I approach the Christian phenomenon in Nanping. In fact, a social scientist aiming to study Christianity in China will have to select and define an object of study, and eventually, a set of people recognized and identified as "Christian." In this search for an object of study, the researcher inevitably faces questions such as: "What counts as a Christian church?" or "What is a Christian?" (Robbins 2003). Indeed, selecting an appropriate starting point obliges one to revisit the intellectual trajectories and choices he relies on.

For example, the Nanping True Jesus Church refers to Jesus and presents itself as Christian but does not believe in the Trinity. Other Chinese religious movements may revere the Trinity, but worship individuals as the incarnation of the Holy Spirit or the female reincarnation of Jesus Christ, or rewrite their own "Christian" holy scriptures. How does a researcher distinguish among those groups who are all claiming to be Christian? What are our criteria to select one instead of another one? This problem may appear trivial, and the question of the Trinity, for example, may sound too "theological." Still, ignoring that the Trinity is approached by most Christian traditions as the core essence of Christianity is problematic. In the search for a Christian object of study, one cannot ignore and dismiss what the vast majority of Christian traditions and churches tell us about the religion of the cross without a thorough justification.

To make my search for an object of study even more complex, the Nanping True Jesus Church is recognized by the Chinese state as a Christian church, and this indicates a significant external recognition that cannot be downplayed by the social scientist. Yet, the theological expertise of the Chinese Communist government may not be enough to define what a "Christian" object of study could be (Autry 2013). Nonetheless, in the eyes of most non-Christian Chinese citizens, people joining the True Jesus Church are Christian. If most mainline churches do not recognize them as "Christians" because of issues about the Trinity, other social actors do. Therefore, acknowledging what stands as a Christian entity within the Chinese landscape requires considering multiple levels at once, including political, social, theological and historical ones.

To address these concerns without downplaying their importance, I propose first to not limit the scope of my research to one church but to consider the various Christian entities that operate in Nanping. I propose to listen to what the six local networks may have to say about the Christian phenomenon without narrowing my inquiry to any single church or tradition that supposedly suffices to understand Christianity. Besides enriching my understanding of the locally informed Christian phenomenon, this approach also fits the view of my informants, who are all aware of the different churches active in Nanping and constantly compare and contrast them.

Second, elaborating on insights from ANT, I propose to approach these religious networks as "Christianizing assemblages." "Christianizing" puts the emphasis on the development process inscribed in these communities without stating whether or not they are Christian. By using the term Christianizing, I refrain from implicit assumptions and contested identification, but highlight a collective effort to refer to Jesus Christ. Then, the term "assemblage" puts the emphasis on the composite nature of these Christianizing networks without assuming internal homogeneity. Assemblage is a term widely used in the ANT literature to refer to precarious wholes formed by humans and non-humans (Müller 2015; De Landa 2006; Farías 2014; Latour 2005). Instead of implying a stable and fixed ontology within a network, or essentializing and reifying Christianity, the term "Christianizing assemblage" invites to investigate the variety of heterogeneous actors and actions that constantly produce the Christian community as an operating whole, or as a continuous "agencement" as one may say in French (Guattari and Deleuze 1975). In our case, a Christianizing assemblage includes collaborating people, material objects, and virtual entities that we will gradually introduce and discuss throughout this book.

As a matter of fact, one may recall that terms like ecclesiology, ecclesiastic and ecclesiastical take root in the Latin term, *ekklēsia*, assembly. And so does the French term for church, *église*. Therefore, there are both theoretical and historical affinities for labeling Nanping Christian networks as "Christianizing assemblages." The use of this technical term intends to invite us to constantly reevaluate what those composite communities identifying with Jesus Christ manifest and what we, therefore, mean by "a church." Thus, this unusual term allows me to set apart and revisit the notion of the church itself. While each Christianizing assemblage stands for what is usually recognized as "a church," and the term "church" refers to particular buildings, I reserve the term "Church" for the peculiar agent

which stands among and beyond those networks. As we will gradually uncover, the Church is a semi-transcendent being that is only an interactive part of those networks, even when people call them a church. These nuances are essential to the argument of this book. This being said, I want to briefly present the six Christianizing assemblages evolving in Nanping today.

1.4 Nanping's Six Christianizing Assemblages

The Christianizing assemblage which attracts the most numerous followers is the Gospel Church (*fuyintang* 福音堂). Founded by American Methodist missionaries in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, it connects around 4000 people across the Yanping district. Organized in various local churches, those Christians gather in more than twenty places of worship and several other properties. Socially, this network is extremely diverse in terms of age, education, employment, and income. Although a rather large majority of its members are women in their 50s–60s, all other social profiles are represented as well. Pastor Sun is the head pastor of this network. He collaborates with ten other pastors and ministers, fifteen elected deacons, and dozens of remunerated coworkers (*tonggong* 同工) to serve the many facets of this network. In 2015, the Gospel Church did directly run two renowned kindergartens, which was quite unusual in contemporary China, and has generated an elderly home that Chap. 4 analyzes in detail.

Another relatively large Protestant Christianizing assemblage is the Christian Assembly, also known as the Little Flock (*juhuichu* 聚会处) (Xi 2010). This network connects around 1000 people across the Yanping District, most of them being women in their 50s–60s. For worship, they officially gather in a unique place located downtown Nanping, and yet, they also own a few informal meeting points, as all other local assemblages do. The Christian Assembly is extremely close to the Gospel Church in terms of doctrine, but diverges in terms of church ministry and structures. The network, more egalitarian in its functioning, is served by one ordained elder (*zhanglao* 长老), Elder Wei, in cooperation with height volunteered evangelists (*chuandaoren* 传道人), also named Board of Deacons. Also, the binary opposition of men/women is more visible during services because women cover their heads with a small black bonnet (for historical background see Xi 2010).

The third Protestant Christianizing assemblage in Nanping is the Adventist Church (*anxirihui* 安息日会). This network counts around one hundred people in Nanping who gather at the top of an old tower downtown. Also, a few dozen worshippers gather in Zhanghu Township. In both cases, most members are women of different ages. The community is under the leadership of a Tibetan evangelist (also call *shenxuesheng* 神学生, theologian) in his early 40s, Luke, who collaborates with six local coworkers (*tonggong* 同工) and one Adventist pastor of a nearby prefecture. The Adventists are famous in Nanping for their strict dietary rules and the fact that they worship on Saturday morning, unlike other Christianizing groups. They have a few distinctive rituals and doctrines that I will present in this book.

Besides these three mainline Protestant entities, the Yanping District hosts a fair number of Catholics. The Catholic Church (*tianzhujiaohui* 天主教会) has been present in Nanping since the seventeenth century, before the fall of the Ming Dynasty (1644) (Brockey 2007; Menegon 2003). Today, local Catholics are sharply divided into two different networks: one official and registered parish that connects around 150 people in Nanping and a few dozens in Zhanghu Township, and one unofficial (underground) Catholic community that connects around 400 people in Nanping. Being a more family-based religious tradition, the two networks gather people of all ages with a rather balanced sex ratio. Yet, both operate side by side under the supervision of their own priest (*shenfu* 神父) and nun (*xiunu* 修女). Besides this internal division, they both apply the same universal organization and practice of the Catholic Church, with the exception of (in both cases) having a bishop due to the endless conflicts in Fuzhou and Mindong, and between the Holy See and the Chinese government (Chan 2012). To take these inter-Catholic tensions seriously, this book will refer to them as two distinct Christianizing assemblages belonging to the same Catholic Church.

The last Christianizing assemblage in Nanping is the True Jesus Church (*zhenyesu jiaohui* 真耶稣教会). This network attracts around 700 people and owns a large building in a suburb of Nanping where worshippers gather for worship on Saturday. Again, the sex ratio there is rather balanced and churchgoers are of all ages. Besides specific key rituals, such as washing feet, and strong Pentecostal spirituality, the True Jesus Church does not believe in the Trinity but refers to Jesus as the visible appearance of the only person of God (Inouye 2011). This network is supervised by three ordained deacons (*zhishi* 执事) in collaboration with fifty unpaid

co-workers. Like the Adventist and the Little Flock Churches, the True Jesus Church has been present in Nanping since the late 1930s when many Fuzhou people fled to Nanping, an inland city that was safer at that time.

Besides these six Christianizing assemblages, local Christians talk about the proselyte presence of Christian sectarian movements such as the Shouters (*huhanpai* 呼喊派) and the Disciples' Society (*mentuhui* 門徒會) (Xi 2010: 216–227). Most of these groups, besides promoting a heterodox theology and alternative versions of the Bible, are classified by the state as evil cults (*xiejiao* 邪教) and therefore, actively eradicated. Thus, being a foreign researcher, I never tried to search for them or to have any kind of contact. Nonetheless, based on my own understanding of the Nanping socio-religious equilibrium, I doubt that in 2015–2016 they had much influence upon the local society unlike other Christian sectarian movements like the Church of Almighty God (*quannengshen jiaohui* 全能神教会) had in other parts of China (Dunn 2015).

Finally, during my fieldwork, I barely heard about local unregistered Protestant house churches. In the fairly relaxed socio-political atmosphere of Nanping, local people introduced me to many religious networks and activities. I also gained access to one of the most sensitive "illegal" religious groups of the district, the "underground" Catholics. However, finding unregistered Protestant congregations was less evident. Late in my research, I finally encountered two groups of ten members each who do not affiliate with the four Protestant assemblages already listed. Each gathers in private homes and organizes their own services and activities. Although some of their members come from local official churches or work for them (at the elderly home, for instance), they now prefer to practice Christianity in the small, equalitarian, and independent setting of their apartments. Yet, the two groups refuse to call themselves "house church" (*jiating jiaohui* 家庭教会) but prefer the term "house gathering" (*jiating juhui* 家庭聚会) arguing that they are not large enough to be a church. Indeed, compared to many places in China where houses churches form a large proportion of local Christianity, the Nanping situation is rather exceptional. After eight years of recurrent visits, I tend to believe that this district has only a few unregistered Protestant circles with very limited influence.

1.5 Chapters and Arguments Summary

With the presentation of the local Christian landscape covered, I can now move to the layout of this book and summarize my main arguments. The study is structured in two parts. The following three chapters explore the ways in which local people and objects participate in the making of Nanping Christianity in order to unveil and identify characteristic actors of those networks. Each chapter focuses on one specific kind of actor to reassemble the ways it is produced and manifested through a Christianizing network and the ways it respectively participates in this network. This identification of characteristic actors being completed, the next two chapters look at how they organically collaborate and produce a diversified local Christianity.

With Chap. 2, the ethnography begins with an exploration of all the physical churches and sites of worship that local denominations have erected in the Yanping District. We travel across the entire territory and its various Christian communities to discover how the shape, size, material components, and location of Christian buildings speak to surrounding people and entities such as natural elements, village communities, legal constraints, and non-Christian religious sites. Embedded in a vast network of relationships, I show that buildings participate in the creation of local Christianity and, therefore, should be understood as “agent” of Christianizing assemblages. Ultimately, buildings provide a case study to ponder how material objects are a particular kind of co-actors involved in the making of religious traditions.

After discovering Christian buildings in relation to their Nanping environment, Chap. 3 explores the inside of these places, as well as their main activities. To do so, I focus on one case study—the Gospel Church in the city of Nanping—while comparing it with other local churches. Unveiling key contrasts between Christian churches and non-Christian temples, I argue that Christian places of worship and services are heavily monocentric and dialogic. They engage congregants in a particular way with a central and distinct entity, the Christian God. To further discuss the type of interactions that these Christian sites and activities foster, the chapter introduces the notion of the questioning face in order to label the particular agency that the presence of this Christian center diffuses within the network of relationships displayed throughout Christian worship events, and beyond.

The third step of the study follows Nanping Christians outside of their churches in order to examine how they interact with the surrounding society. To do so, Chap. 4 focuses on one collective, costly, and growing social involvement of Chinese Christians: the opening of church-run homes for the elderly. In contemporary China, many Christian denominations have opened some. But in Nanping, only the Gospel Church has been able to maintain its own over time. Thus, the chapter investigates the history and business reality of this Christian elderly home and explores how Christians financially create, legally justify and concretely manage this place year after year. Thus, the study unveils how Christians operate under the umbrella of two specific entities, distinct but paired, that channel their collective action, the Church and the pastoral clergy. By examining the creation of those specific actors that I name twin sponsors, I argue that Nanping Christians do not simply create a moral community of churchgoers but also a semi-transcendent being standing beyond their own community, the Church, operating under the specific governance of its clergy, the pastoral clergy.

Those distinctive actors being identified, the second part of the book turns to two significant material entities circulating across Nanping Christianizing assemblages in order to investigate their organic relationships. In each case, I select one material object which stands as a quasi-substance of these networks and explore two examples of its circulations. More specifically, Chap. 5 discusses how Nanping Christians make and share offerings. First, I look at offering boxes, the only common object found in all local churches and temples, to examine how they manifest Christianizing efforts to channel monetary offerings. Then, I explore one large gift-giving ritual that the Gospel Church has recently created, Thanksgiving. In Nanping, it is the only annual Christian liturgy during which a large amount of natural goods is offered to the Christian God. By following the overflow of gifts that these two sites of gift-giving allow and reframe, this chapter argues that the distinctive actors who co-make Christianizing assemblages cannot be reduced to their related congregation itself. Indeed, the enigmatic face and the twin sponsors exceed the churchgoers who identify with them.

Chapter 6 investigates one material paradox of Nanping Christians, and it refers to blood. While all local churches set diverse dietary rules, the Gospel Church, the Christian Assembly, the Adventist Church, and the True Jesus Church banish the consumption of any kind of blood. At the same time, all local Christianizing assemblages design specific rituals to

Fig. 1.2 Nanping in its region

drink the blood of Jesus Christ. The chapter explores this Christian paradox by, first, investigating the history and practical scope of the Christian blood taboo in Nanping. Then, I examine how each assemblage materially produces and collectively consumes the blood of Christ. Ultimately, the chapter argues that Christian actors are not setting these rules up to separate their communities from their broader society, but to point out in an engaging way the peculiar and material presence of their God. Borrowing from theories on visual art, I discuss how this material paradox does not aim to create impervious social boundaries between different religious groups but to reveal the questioning Christian face in a language that is audible for all Nanping inhabitants.

A short concluding chapter (Chap. 7) summarizes the findings of this study through a metaphoric comparison. I offer the specific biological features of a banyan tree as an image to recall and illustrate the particularities of Christian networks. Since this tree has the capacity to grow multiple trunks while maintaining connections to its original and central one, it offers an alternative model to understand unity and diversity within the Christian phenomenon (Fig. 1.2).

References

Amsterdamska, Olga. 1990. Surely You Are Joking, Monsieur Latour! *Science, Technology, & Human Values* 15 (4): 495–504.

Ashiwa, Yoshiko, and David L. Wank. 2009. *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Autry, Jiexia Zhai. 2013. Pentecostal Christianity and Church-State Relations in China: The Case of the True Jesus Church Movement. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 11 (3): 40–51.

Bays, Daniel H. 2009. American Public Discourse on the Church in China. *The China Review* 9 (2): 1–16.

———. 2012. *A New History of Christianity in China*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

Bloor, David. 1999. Anti-Latour. *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 30 (1): 81–112.

Brockey, Liam Matthew. 2007. *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Brown, Bernardo, and R. Michael Feener. 2017. Configuring Catholicism in the Anthropology of Christianity. *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 28 (2): 139–151.

Byler, Myrrl. 2014. *The Mission of the Church: A Perspective from Chinese Three-Self Pastors*. Fuller Theological Seminary, ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

Callon, Michel. 1991. Techno-Economic Networks and Irreversibility. In *A Sociology of Monsters: Essays on Power, Technology and Domination*, ed. John Law, 132–161. London: Routledge.

Cannell, Fenella. 2006. *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Cao, Nanlai. 2011. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

———. 2013. Renegotiating Locality and Morality in a Chinese Religious Diaspora: Wenzhou Christian Merchants in Paris, France. *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 14 (1): 85–101.

Chambon, Michel. 2012. The Chinese Gui鬼Within the Catholic Faith: A Field Work Report. *輔仁國際宗教研究* 6 (1): 91–98.

———. 2017. Are Chinese Christians Pentecostal? A Catholic Reading of Pentecostal Influence on Chinese Christians. In *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, ed. Fenggang Yang, Joy K.C. Tong, and Allan H. Anderson, 181–195. Boston: Brill.

Chan, Shun-hing. 2012. Changing Church and State Relations in Contemporary China: The Case of Mindong Diocese, Fujian Province. *The China Quarterly* 212: 982–999.

———. 2015. Changing Church–State Relations in Contemporary China: A Case Study of the Cangzhou Diocese. *Journal of Church and State* 57 (2): 243–267.

Chan, Kim-kwong, and Alan Hunter. 1993. *Protestantism in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, Cunfu, and Tianhai Huang. 2004. The Emergence of a New Type of Christians in China Today. *Review of Religious Research* 46 (2): 183–200.

Cheng, May M.C. 2003. House Church Movements and Religious Freedom in China. *China: An International Journal* 1 (1): 16–45.

Comaroff, Jean. 1985. *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance: The Culture and History of a South African People*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Comaroff, Jean, and John Comaroff. 1991. *Of Revelation and Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Corten, André, and Ruth Marshall. 2001. *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

De Landa, Manuel. 2006. *A New Philosophy of Society Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London: Continuum.

den Dulk, Kevin, and Joel A. Carpenter. 2014. *Christianity in Chinese Public Life: Religion, Society, and the Rule of Law*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dunn, Emily. 2015. *Lightning from the East: Heterodoxy and Christianity in Contemporary China*. Leiden: Brill.

Elder-Vass, Dave. 2015. Disassembling Actor-Network Theory. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 45 (1): 100–121.

Engelke, Matthew Eric. 2007. *A Problem of Presence Beyond Scripture in an African Church*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Englund, Harri, and James Leach. 2000. Ethnography and the Meta-Narratives of Modernity. *Current Anthropology* 41 (2): 225–248.

Evens, Terence M.S., and James L. Peacock. 1990. *Transcendence in Society: Case Studies*. Greenwich: Jai Press.

Farías, Ignacio. 2014. Virtual Attractors, Actual Assemblages. *European Journal of Social Theory* 17 (1): 24–41.

Fortes, Meyer. 1970. *Time and Social Structure and Other Essays*. London: Athlone Press.

Gibbs, Robert. 1992. *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Gluckman, Max. 1964. *Closed Systems and Open Minds*. Chicago: Aldine Pub. Co.
Goh, Daniel, Peter van der Veer, and Shun-hing Chan. 2016. Changing Church–State Relations in Contemporary China: The Case of Wenzhou Diocese. *International Sociology* 31 (4): 489–507.
Goossaert, Vincent, and David A. Palmer. 2011. *The Religious Question in Modern China*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Guattari, Félix, and Gilles Deleuze. 1975. *Kafka: Pour Une Littérature Mineure*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
Hann, Chris. 2014. The Heart of the Matter. *Current Anthropology* 55 (S10): S182–S192.
Harman, Graham. 2011. *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester: Zero Books.
Harrison, Henrietta. 2013. *The Missionary's Curse and Other Tales from a Chinese Catholic Village*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Hefner, Robert W. 1993. *Conversion to Christianity Historical and Anthropological Perspectives on a Great Transformation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Homer, Lauren B. 2010. Registration of Chinese Protestant House Churches Under China's 2005 Regulation on Religious Affairs: Resolving the Implementation Impasse. *Journal of Church and State* 52 (1): 50–73.
Horton, Robert. 1971. African Conversion. *Africa* 41 (2): 85–108.
Houtman, Dick, and Birgit Meyer. 2012. *Things: Religion and the Question of Materiality*. New York: Fordham University Press.
Huang, Jianbo. 2014. Being Christians in Urbanizing China. The Epistemological Tensions of the Rural Churches in the City. *Current Anthropology* 55 (S10): S238–S247.
Ingman, Peik, and Mika Lassander. 2012. Exploring the Social Without a Separate Domain for Religion: On Actor-Network Theory and Religion. *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 24: 210–217.
Inouye, Melissa. 2011. *Miraculous Mundane: The True Jesus Church and Chinese Christianity in the Twentieth Century*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.
———. 2019. *China and the True Jesus: Charisma and Organization in a Chinese Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press.
Johnson, Ian. 2017. *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*. New York: Pantheon Books.
Kang, Jie. 2016. *House Church Christianity in China: From Rural Preachers to City Pastors*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
Keane, Webb. 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Koesel, Karrie J. 2013. The Rise of a Chinese House Church: The Organizational Weapon. *The China Quarterly* 215: 572–589.
Krarup, Troels, and Anders Blok. 2011. Unfolding the Social: Quasi-Actants, Virtual Theory, and the New Empiricism of Bruno Latour. *The Sociological Review* 59 (1): 42–63.

Lagerwey, John. 2019. The Continent of the Gods. *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 6 (2): 188–208.

Latour, Bruno. 1988. *The Pasteurization of France.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. 2000. When Things Strike Back: A Possible Contribution of 'Science Studies' to the Social Sciences. *British Journal of Sociology* 51 (1): 107–123.

———. 2005. *Reassembling the Social an Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Law, John, and John Hassard. 1999. *Actor Network Theory and After*. Oxford: Blackwell/Sociological Review.

Lee, Joseph Tse-Hei. 2007. Christianity in Contemporary China: An Update. *Journal of Church and State* 49 (2): 277–304.

———. 2009. Politics of Faith: Patterns of Church-State Relations in Maoist China (1949–1976). *Historia Actual Online* 17: 129–138.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

———. 1985. *Ethics and Infinity.* Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Luhrmann, Tanya M. 2012. *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Ma, Li. 2019. *Christianity, Femininity and Social Change in Contemporary China*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.

Madsen, Richard. 1998. *China's Catholics: Tragedy and Hope in an Emerging Civil Society.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2000. Chinese Christianity: Indigenization and Conflict. In *Chinese Society, Change, Conflict, Resistance*, ed. Elisabeth J. Perry and Mark Selden, 3rd ed., 239–260. New York: Routledge.

———. 2003. Catholic Revival During the Reform Era. *China Quarterly* 174: 468–487.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific.* London: Routledge.

Marshall, Kimberly Jenkins. 2016. In *Upward, Not Sunwise: Resonant Rupture in Navajo Neo-Pentecostalism*, ed. JSTOR Provider. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Mauss, Marcel. 1954. *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies.* London: Coehn & West.

Menegon, Eugenio. 2003. Christian Loyalists, Spanish Friars, and Holy Virgins in Fujian During the Ming-Qing Transition. *Monumenta Serica* 51 (1): 335–365.

———. 2009. *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Meyer, Birgit. 2004. Christianity in Africa: From African Independent to Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 33: 447–474.

Müller, Martin. 2015. Assemblages and Actor-Networks: Rethinking Socio-Material Power, Politics and Space. *Geography Compass* 9 (1): 27–41.

Ownby, David. 2011. Religion, State Power, and Human Rights in China. In *Religion and the Global Politics of Human Rights*, ed. Thomas Banchoff and Robert Wuthnow. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peel, John D.Y. 2000. *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Robbins, Joel. 2003. What Is a Christian? Notes Toward an Anthropology of Christianity. *Religion* 33 (3): 191–199.

———. 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2007. Continuity Thinking and the Problem of Christian Culture. Belief, Time, and the Anthropology of Christianity. *Current Anthropology* 48 (1): 5–38.

Sayes, Edwin. 2014. Actor–Network Theory and Methodology: Just What Does It Mean to Say That Nonhumans Have Agency? *Social Studies of Science* 44 (1): 134–149.

———. 2017. Marx and the Critique of Actor-Network Theory: Mediation, Translation, and Explanation. *Distinktion: Journal of Social Theory* 18 (3): 294–313.

Shapin, Steven. 1988. Following Scientists Around. *Social Studies of Science* 18 (3): 533–550.

Turner, Charles. 2015. Travels Without a Donkey: The Adventures of Bruno Latour. *History of the Human Sciences* 28 (1): 118–138.

Vail, Leroy. 1989. *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Vala, Carsten. 2018. *The Politics of Protestant Churches and the Party-State in China: God Above Party*? Abingdon: Oxon.

Wang, Z. 2016. Chinese Christians' 'Biblical Patriotism'? Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Tian Feng and Political Hermeneutics in Reform China. *Sino-Christian Studies* 22: 65–94.

Whittle, Andrea, and André Spicer. 2008. Is Actor Network Theory Critique? *Organization Studies* 29 (4): 611–629.

Wielander, Gerda. 2013. *Christian Values in Communist China*. London: Routledge.

Wright, Teresa, and Teresa Zimmerman-Liu. 2013. Engaging and Evading the Party-State: Unofficial Chinese Protestant Groups in China's Reform Era. *China: An International Journal* 11 (1): 1–20.

Xi, Lian. 2010. *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Yang, Fenggang. 2005. Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44 (4): 423–441.

———. 2006. The Red, Black, and Gray Markets of Religion in China. *Sociological Quarterly* 47 (1): 93–122.

———. 2012. *Religion in China Survival and Revival Under Communist Rule*. New York: Oxford University Press.

———. 2017. From Cooperation to Resistance: Christian Responses to Intensified Suppression in China Today. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 15 (1): 79.

Yang, Fenggang, Joy Kooi-Chin Tong, and Allan Anderson. 2017. *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*. Boston: Brill.