Migrant Workers in an Era of Religious Revival: Industrial Capitalism, Labour and Christianity in Shenzhen

Quan Gao* and Junxi Qian†

Abstract

In the reform era, China appears to be caught in a contradictory dual process – the entrenchment of secular values and simultaneously, the notable revival of all forms of religion. However, the existing literature has achieved limited success theorizing how the thriving of faiths constitutes, and co-evolves with, secular modernity and capitalism. This article contributes to this re-theorization by bringing migration, labour and industrial capitalism to bear on faith and religious practices. Our empirical study in Shenzhen focuses on the formation of rural-to-urban migrant workers' Christian faith. We examine the ways in which migrant workers manoeuvre religion as a cultural, symbolic and discursive resource to come to terms with, but also sometimes to question and counteract, the double exploitation enforced by state regulation and labour relations. In the meantime, however, this article also argues that migrants' efforts in self-transformation through the discourses of *benfen* and *suzhi*, and their theologically mediated interpretation of alienation, labour exploitation and social inequality, overlap with, and reinforce, the agenda of producing docile, productive bodies of migrants, an agenda endorsed by the state–capital coalition. This research opens new opportunities for theorizing how capitalist secularity and religious orientation implicate one another in the current Chinese society.

Keywords: religiosity; secular modernity; capitalism; rural-to-urban migration; migrant subjectivity; Protestant Christianity

In the post-reform era, China appears to be caught in a contradictory dual process – the entrenchment of the secular values and state-sanctioned capitalist ideologies and simultaneously, the notable revival of all forms of religiosity

* School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, and Centre for Human Geography and Urban Development, Guangzhou University. Email: q.gao2@newcastle.ac.uk.
† Department of Geography, The University of Hong Kong. Email: jxqian@hku.hk (corresponding author).

© SOAS University of London, 2019 doi:10.1017/S0305741019000766 First published online 1 July 2019

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and faith.[1] China has been viewed as an avowedly atheist state and, in Casanova's words, as "one of the most secular societies on earth."[2] However, an astounding religious revival has taken place over the last three or four decades, and in particular, the unlikely "Christianity fever" in China warrants special consideration. A 2012 survey conducted by the China Family Panel Studies programme suggests that the number of Chinese Protestants is approximately 26 million, making up 1.9 per cent of the total population.[3] According to another report titled "Global Christianity" released by Pew Research Centre, there were at least 58 million Protestants in China in 2010, having increased almost tenfold over a period of 30 years.[4]

Multiple explanations have been proposed to interpret this revival, including moral and spiritual crises caused by drastic social change,[5] the renewal of traditional practices,[6] the changing state–society relations,[7] and the religious market.[8] This line of inquiry casts light on what religion means in reform-era China by underscoring two points of view: first, it implies an anti-secular and anti-hegemonic sensibility that sometimes uncritically associates China's modernization with the domination of secular and capitalist ethics; and hence, second, religiosity is therefore analysed as a backlash against secular modernity. These perspectives have resulted in specific theoretical difficulties for conceptualizing religion in an era of transition. Religion is read in reductive terms as a preconceived system of meanings and cosmologies that cuts against the hegemonic state–capital coalition. What has been left largely unanswered, however, is how religion partakes in the constitution and consolidation of new socio-economic relations, values and experiences. Recent research on religious life in China is moving beyond a macro-institutional narrative of religious revival under state dominance and beginning to examine how new configurations of power, morality and subjectivity are formed in local articulation of state ideologies, capitalism, and religious sensibilities.[9] This line of research suggests that newly emerging religiosities are not simply enactments of established religious beliefs and practices but ongoing and malleable transformations of them, implicated in context-specific political and ritual economies. Religious revival is therefore interpreted by some scholars as a dynamic process in which local people manoeuvre discursive and cultural resources to enable socio-economic practices or to achieve self-transformation in response to the changing political and economic conditions.[10]

1 For example, Yang (2004) describes this contradiction as "between secularist ideology and desecularizing reality." Also see Zhao 2010; Szonyi 2009.
2 Casanova 2013, 42.
3 China Family Panel Studies 2012.
4 Pew Research Center 2011.
5 Hunter and Chan 2007; Yang 2005; Bay 2003.
6 Chao 1999; Jing 1996.
7 Feuchtwang 2000; Yang 2008.
8 Yang 2011.
9 Chau 2006; Cao 2010; Ji 2012; Liang 2014.
10 Cao 2010; Chau 2006.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Nevertheless, this process is subject to, as Cao claims, a larger moral discourse of modernity that justifies social, political, and moral hierarchies and changes in China.[11] For example, Protestantism and the state-led project of modernization actually share many common values and aspirations, particularly in the pursuit of stability, self-discipline and development.[12]

This article builds on but also advances these theorizations. We start from the standpoint that there are mutually reinforcing and constitutive relationships between faiths and the economic, social and political conditions in the specific configurations of secular modernity in China. We deliver this objective by investigating migrant workers in Shenzhen who adhere to Protestant Christian faith. In the past two decades, the massive rural-to-urban migration, in conjunction with the nationwide religious renaissance, has given rise to a distinctive religious group – Christian migrant workers.[13] Although the majority of Christian evangelical movements in China thrive in rural areas where it is difficult for the state's surveillance to reach, this scenario is now beginning to be re-mapped, as tens of millions of rural Christians have thronged into cities in search of better incomes and livelihoods, and as urban churches increasingly see migrant workers as important targets for mission work.[14]

This phenomenon is particularly evident in Shenzhen, the epitomic Chinese city rising from industrial capitalism in the reform era. Over the past four decades, drastic industrialization and urbanization in Shenzhen have precipitated class inequality, precarious and disciplined labour regimes, and vulnerability to exploitation for the large number of rural migrant workers. The alliance of the state and capitalism enforces economy- and profit-centred governance on migrant workers. For example, the local government has encouraged the expansion of the "factory dormitory regime," which accommodates the large number of migrant workers yet simultaneously minimizes their consumption of urban welfare.[15] Shenzhen's migrant workers, on the one hand, experience the institutional discrimination inflicted by China's urban–rural duality and the *hukou* 户口 household registration system.[16] On the other hand, they suffer from a sense of uncertainty and uprootedness, disembeddedness from social networks, and the discontinuity between urban and rural lifeworlds.

It is against this background that many migrant workers seek spiritual shelter in the Christian faith. Our fieldwork in Shenzhen indicates that migrant workers represent an estimated 80 per cent of the attendance in some churches located in or around manufacturing-concentrated urban areas. We, in the first place,

11 Cao 2010.
12 Cao 2010; Wielander 2013; He 2014.
13 In this article, the term "migrant workers" refers to people of rural *hukou* travelling to the city to work, while "Christian migrant workers" refers to migrant workers who are baptized Christians or claim to be Christians. They can be differentiated according to whether they are converted before (roughly two-thirds among our informants) or after migrating to the city (the other one-third).
14 Huang 2014; Huang 2015.
15 Pun and Smith 2007.
16 Zhang 2001.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

examine the ways in which migrant workers manoeuvre religion as a cultural, symbolic and discursive resource to come to terms with, even though sometimes to question, the double exploitation perpetuated by the state and labour relations. In the meantime, however, we also recognize that this nexus of religion and labour is implicated in the project backed by the state and capital to produce disciplined, docile and productive bodies. As we highlight in the empirical research, while enabling migrant workers to envisage meaningful lives and community, Christian faith simply makes exploitation and labour regulation more bearable, and Christian values, re-rendered and re-interpreted by migrants, are oftentimes complicit in the discipline of labouring subjects. In other words, at the specific historical juncture of Shenzhen's rise as an epicentre of China's industrial modernity, Protestant Christian faith is integral to, and indeed constitutive of, the way in which state developmentalism, ethos of the market economy, and neoliberal labour relations are legitimated, lived and reinforced, both individually and collectively. Above all, this article argues that political economic transformation in China has indeed catalysed new desires for religiosities and new efforts to legitimize religious thoughts and practices. However, people's courting with religion in the reform era is not so much about whether the society is becoming "more" or "less" religious. Faith is not always synonymous with the pursuit of a transcendental spiritual domain aloof from, even superseding, everyday life experiences in the secular world. Stories of migrant Christians in Shenzhen illustrate vividly that new religious interpretations, ethos and subjects are formed at the interstice of capitalist economy, state power and spiritual pursuit.[17] In certain cases, religion is a redemptive force countering the state and market logics, as extant treatises on state-religion and market-religion relations in China have extensively examined;[18] in other circumstances, however, people of faith may inadvertently collaborate with state and capital ideologies in producing routinized experiences and subjects dovetailing with the needs and priorities of development and the market. This point of view is systematically treated and theorized in this article.

Re-mapping Christian Faith in China: Migrants, Industrial Capitalism and New Religiosity

A substantive body of research has documented the remarkable religious revival in China. Scholars have taken various approaches to explain this religious change. One of the prevailing explanations is that people in the post-Mao era are experiencing a spiritual vacuum that is enlivening aspirations for various religiosities and traditional ethics. This thesis takes the view that changes in lived experiences are effectuated by drastic social changes, such as the collapse of

17 Palmer and Winiger 2019; Cao 2010.
18 Yang 2005; Ashiwa and Wank 2009; Bay 2003.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Maoist ideology,[19] the dismantling of traditional social, moral and cosmic orders,[20] and the intensifying sense of uncertainty among individuals in the face of overwhelming market forces. A spiritual anchor, therefore, is desirable. Yang Fenggang argues that the "emerging market is exciting and perilous, accompanied by widespread moral corruption, which prompts many individuals to seek a theodicy, or a religious worldview, to put the seemingly chaotic universe into order."[21]

In this line of scholarship, the rebuilding of rituals and practices, especially of folk religions, has sometimes been interpreted by some scholars as an "invented tradition" that repacks the lived spiritual order of the pre-Mao past by drawing from communal memories.[22] However, an all-encompassing folk belief system was irrevocably diluted due to the political movements. Therefore, revival of popular religions are not continuations of past traditions, but cultural innovations drawn from the cultural fragments in the post-Mao era.[23]

However, this perspective is problematic due to its assumption that coherent and authentic "traditions" existed before Mao's era.[24] Moreover, this approach implies an understanding of China's transformation to capitalist modernity as what Kipnis criticizes as "historical rupture," which poses the "tradition" as the antithesis of the "modern."[25] Communal memories, in fact, are neither about mechanically collecting pieces of traditional practices nor freely re-inventing spiritual and ritual experiences in response to a changing social and political environment. Instead, it should be better conceived of as what Kipnis calls a "recombinant transformation," an ongoing recombination of pre-existing elements into a new pattern or mixture.[26] In the light of Kipnis's views, religion is changing and historically constituted, and should not be reduced to neither preconceived categories nor a de-historicized, free-floating representation of the present.

Echoing this, recent research has switched the focus from macro-structural explanations to the examination of how situated and multifaceted religiosities arise in everyday practices. Despite spiritual and moral crises read as macro-social changes, they are pervasively felt, performed and negotiated at the level of the local and the everyday. For instance, Chau[27] suggests that religious revival is a complex sociocultural process in which religion is practised and performed by different social actors and shaped by local elite activism and political dynamics. Above all, this line of works has emphasized the specific *affordances* of meanings and practices that local economic, social and cultural contexts render possible.

19 Lee 2007.
20 Yang 2008.
21 Yang 2005, 325.
22 Siu 1990; Chao 1999; Jing 1996.
23 Siu 1990.
24 Chau 2006.
25 Kipnis 2016.
26 Kipnis 2016.
27 Chau 2006.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Nevertheless, in this strand of arguments, the prevailing position is still that religion provides an alternative or antidote to problems wrought by modernization, foreclosing the theorization of religion as an integral, even facilitating force in the formation of new values, experiences and relations in the economic, social and political domains.

Another stream of literature prioritizes the analysis of state–society relations. Some argue that the liberalization of the state's religious policy in the 1980s created limited expanded space for religious expression.[28] Potter[29] argues that the Chinese state has adopted a more tolerant approach towards religion in the reform era as a means of building regime legitimacy, by granting limited social and cultural autonomy in exchange for people's political loyalty. Instead of coercive oppression, the state has deployed active governance and regulatory techniques that keep religion in the sphere of private faith while continuing to enforce its atheist propaganda. Correspondingly, religious revival signifies local communities reclaiming autonomy from the totalizing party-state.[30] However, this approach embraces a dominance-resistance dualism that concerns "moral clarity and an old political logic rather than the views of local believers."[31] Moreover, this literature exhibits a clear-cut distinction between state secularism and private spirituality, implying that state interests and religious practices exist in a zero-sum game. If this is true, how can we understand the contradiction between, as Yang[32] observes, "secular ideology and desecularizing reality"? Yang's triple market theory (TMT)[33] seeks to provide a solution to this contradiction by arguing that "regulation cannot effectively reduce religion;" rather, it "complicate[s] the religious market by pushing religious organizations and believers into the black and gray markets." The merits of TMT notwithstanding, it does not move beyond the dominance-resistance dualism, as it admits a separation between state ideologies and the sacred, and attempts to map out discrete, mutually exclusive spheres.

To sum up, while both strands of literature shed important light on religiosities in reform-era China, the normative separations between religion and secular modernity, between religion and state ideologies, while valid in certain circumstances, create notable theoretical difficulties. The current research attempts to move beyond these difficulties to develop a more productive reading of migrant religiosity in Shenzhen. Overall, we see religion as co-evolving with, rather than simply antagonistic to, the entrenchment of development and capitalist economy. We draw intellectual nutrition, first of all, from recent theoretical developments in the sociology of religion, which have moved away from the Weberian tradition that equates modernization with disenchantment and considers secular ethics

28 Feuchtwang 2000; Yang 2008.
29 Potter 2003.
30 Feuchtwang 2000.
31 Cao 2010, 6.
32 Yang 2004.
33 Yang 2011, 117.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

inimical to religion. In the spirit of the postsecular turn in social theory, religion has been re-theorized as an ethical and self-reflective project that supplies key building blocks to values and ideologies of secular modernity. As Habermas[34] suggests, modern society cannot flourish by simply resting on the moral stance supplied by secular reason; in fact, religious ways of life play an important role in addressing the malaises of modern society. Recent research of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the West, however, suggests that religion does not only negotiate neoliberal economy and governance, but also co-constitutes the latter. On the one hand, religious organizations are sometimes co-opted into the wider governmentalities of neoliberal politics, as the state not only channels the risk and responsibility of welfare provision into enlisted FBOs but also extends its control on marginalized and socially excluded people through theologically mediated discourses of social equality and institutional arrangements.[35] On the other hand, religion provides ethical impulses (for example, universal love) that subvert, resist and rework the neoliberal forms of care, thus restoring ethics and hopes beyond the logics perpetuated by the state and the market.[36]

Studies in the Chinese context have echoed these emerging theoretical ideas. For example, a recent special issue in *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* examined the moral dimension of religious revival in rural China and challenged "the current tendency to reduce religion into a politics or economy of human need."[37] Religion offers "a moral life devoid of state presence" for underprivileged villagers in rural communities who appropriate Christian ethics to re-imagine ill bodies under limited public healthcare or construct a local cosmological system as an alternative moral order to instrumental rationality and market.[38] Yet, instead of assuming that Christian values and ethics enable a space in which Chinese people negotiate and reclaim their autonomy from an authoritarian state, Wielander critically argues that Christian values actually overlap with the party-state's project of maintaining power and moral legitimacy.[39] Christian values, and particularly the concept of love, are compatible with the state's efforts to construct a "harmonious society" by propagating state-endorsed moral standards and filling up the gap of social welfare and services. Additionally, the Christian theologies of original sin and agape work in tandem with the state discourse of civility that seeks to construct a "harmonious" public sphere composed of cultured, self-disciplined, law-abiding and productive citizens. This is consonant with Cao's argument that "Christianity certainly has gained recognition from the state as a useful source in local governance."[40] For Cao, Christian belief not only serves as a moral asset for governance but also facilitates the state

34 Habermas 2006, 2010.
35 Hackworth 2012.
36 Williams 2015.
37 Liang 2014, 394.
38 Liang 2014; Qi, Liang and Li 2014; Tapp 2014.
39 Wielander 2013.
40 Cao 2007.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

developmentalism and labour regime by disciplining and motivating the workforce. In his research of Wenzhou Christianity, many Christian entrepreneurs apply theologically mediated moral vocabularies, for example, "transforming faith to productivity" and "using Christians to govern the factory," to reinforce capitalist production and enterprise management.[41] Above all, these perspectives imply that faith is not simply responsive to changes in realms of the state and economy, but rather drawn into the very processes of social formation and reconstruction.

In particular, this article brings the theoretical points revisited hitherto to bear on the intricate relationships between migration and industrial capitalism. Migration plays an increasingly important role in both the translocal mobility of religiosity and situated religious renewal. Likewise, rural-to-urban migration in China has substantially remade geographies of faith and spirituality. The massive inflows of migrant workers to cities have altered the geographic location of the Christian population, giving rise to what Huang Jianbo has called the "rural church in the city."[42] Huang focuses on rural Christians' conflicted experiences of religiosity in urban churches in terms of "moral torment," identity tension and different epistemological styles. Similarly, Huang Ke-Hsien suggests that there is distinctive religious hierarchy in urban churches between migrant workers and those high *suzhi* 素质 (quality) urban Christians and educated migrants.[43] However, it is doubtful whether rural and urban religiosities are truly as different as they claim, if both articulate with new socio-economic conditions in the secular realm. Casanova argues that migrant religiosity is not a residual of traditions brought from a place of origin but rather an adaptive response to a new world.[44] In other words, migrants' religiosity rarely relies on settled, pregiven religious identity but instead represents an ongoing, hybrid construction as migrants live out and negotiate their religious selves to achieve self-awareness and self-governance in new socio-economic environments.

Migrant workers' religiosity cannot be separated from the politics of migrant labour under the capitalist restructuring of the Chinese economy. To begin with, the Chinese state deploys different techniques of biopolitics to differentiate rural migrants from urban citizens, among which the *hukou* system is the primary institution that maintains the differentiation in terms of wage, legal protection and social welfare. Rural migrants are also subject to a highly pressured and exploitative production regime. This is manifestly evident in Shenzhen, where disciplinary techniques such as collective dormitories, intensive pre-work training, compulsory overtime, strict surveillance and monetary penalties work jointly to produce docile migrant labourers. Pun and Smith[45] argue that the collective dormitories, which serve just-in-time production, mean that workers' living spaces

41 Cao 2010, 66.
42 Huang 2014.
43 Huang 2015.
44 Casanova 2007.
45 Pun and Smith 2007.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

are merely an extension of workshops, and it is common for migrant workers to feel incarcerated and alienated because they are deprived of the support of family and communal life. Moreover, the state–capital coalition is engaged in the cultivation of a docile and productive migrant labour force. The discipline of the labouring bodies of migrant workers is conducted not only through bureaucratic, sometimes coercive management and the intense pace of work dictated by assembly-line facilities and machinery, but also the propagation, via workplace discourses and public media, of hard work and compliance to rules as virtues and manifestations of high personal quality.[46] Pun Ngai, for example, provides an intriguing narrative of how the gendered quality of being submissive was linked to the making of qualified workers.[47] Thus, an important objective of this article is to examine how such normativities and politics of migrant labour are constitutive of lived religiosity among migrant workers.

In sum, as E.P. Thompson once suggested,[48] the formation of the working class was not determined in a linear manner by social and economic structures, but instead was "an active process, which owe[d] as much to agency as to conditioning." In congruence with this view, studies of Chinese migrant workers need to examine how socio-economic processes are negotiated and resisted by means of cultural, and in the case of this study, religious discourses and practices implicated in the making and performing of working-class consciousness and subjectivity. Evident in Thompson's work are the reasons why Methodism became widespread among working-class communities in early nineteenth-century England. Defined as "a system of symbols,"[49] religion is argued to provide individuals with an imagined cosmos of a general order of existence and to shape their attitudes towards life, which make life's hardships more acceptable. Notwithstanding Methodism's emphases on discipline and compliance, which served as a "moral machine" that exhorted workers to willingly sell their labour to master-manufacturers, workers still exhibited deep-rooted allegiances to this belief system because religion provided them with a sense of community and a framework of interpretation vis-à-vis exploitation and displacement. This article follows Thompson's spirit, and examines how Christian faith not only negotiates social and cultural dislocation wrought by industrialization but indeed becomes the animus of orders of existence *inside*, not outside, capitalist modernity.

Methodology

This research is based on fieldwork that we conducted during two phases (March to June 2015 and September 2017 to March 2018). It involved 9 Protestant

46 Pun 2005, 2016; Sun 2014.
47 Pun 1999.
48 Thompson 1963, 9.
49 Geertz 1973, 90.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Table 1: **Proportion of Migrant Christians to Total Churchgoers**

Church name	Location	Percentage of migrant Christians
Sanzhuli (TSPM)	Shiyan 石岩	90%
Langkou (TSPM)	Longhua 龙华	80%
Guanlan (TSPM)	Guanlan 观澜	80%
Meilin (TSPM)	Futian 福田	n/a
Bantian (TSPM)	Bantian 坂田	n/a
Foxconn House Church A	Longhua 龙华	85%
Foxconn House Church B	Guanlan 观澜	80%
House Church C	Guanlan 观澜	90%
House Church D	Futian 福田	n/a

Sources:

The figures for Sanzhuli Church, Foxconn House Church A and B and House Church C were calculated based on lists of registered church members. The figures for Langkou Church and Guanlan Church were estimated by pastors at our request.

churches in Shenzhen, including 5 Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) churches and 4 house churches (Table 1). While the churches did not claim to belong to a specific denomination, the pastors prefer identifying themselves as evangelical. Seven of the 9 churches are located in the *guanwai* 关外 (outside the Special Economic Zone) area[50] of Shenzhen, where manufacturing factories and migrant workers are discernibly concentrated.

The methods utilized in the fieldwork included participant observation and in-depth interview. We followed Christian migrant workers' everyday routines and practices in the churches, factories and living spaces, and participated in sermon sessions, fellowships and other religious activities in and outside the churches. We also conducted 30 interviews of Christian migrant workers during the first phase and another 52 during the second phase. Extra interviews were conducted with 3 pastors and preachers in TSPM churches, and 5 leaders of house churches. In total, the migrant worker informants consist of 48 males and 34 females, with ages varying between 16 and 65. Among them, 47 are rural Christians who were converted before migrating to the city, while the remaining 35 were converted in urban churches. Each interview lasted between 40 minutes and 3 hours. All names appearing in this research are pseudonyms.

Contextualizing Christian Migrant Workers in Shenzhen

In Shenzhen, Christian migrant workers, be they rural Christians or new converts, constitute a significant proportion of the churchgoers. As we see in Table 1, migrant workers constituted more than 80 per cent of the church attendance in these churches.

50 Until 2011, there was a vague borderline used by the state to separate Shenzhen's less-developed areas (*guanwai*) from the urban core (*guannei*). *Guanwai* refers to the current Baoan, Longgang and Nanshan districts of Shenzhen.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

There are many factors contributing to the predominant role of migrant workers in church attendance. First, rural-to-urban migration plays a crucial role in both the translocal mobility of religiosity and in situ religious conversion. This is particularly the case in Shenzhen's two "gospel villages,"[51] Sanzhuli and Langkou. In these two rapidly urbanizing villages, Christian beliefs inherited from Basel Mission in the late 19th and early 20th century have gradually lost hold in the local communities because of villagers' disinterest in spiritual pursuits. However, the inflow of rural migrant workers has substantially re-invigorated the local churches: migrant workers constitute approximately 90 per cent and 80 per cent of registered churchgoers in Sanzhuli Church and Langkou Church, respectively.

Second, the relatively relaxed religious policies in Shenzhen provide room for evangelizing migrant workers. Church leaders and local officials often negotiate with each other pragmatically and, hence, implement the state's religious policies in a practical way in terms of, for instance, tolerance towards evangelizing in public spaces and house churches. As one TSPM church preacher remarked, they sometimes invited foreign clergymen to preach without prior application to the local authority. The local government also exhibits a somewhat tolerant stance towards house churches, which are technically illegal and unapproved by the state. Foxconn House Church A, for instance, suggested that they had long enjoyed the government's acquiescence. The government has neither responded to their application for registration nor taken coercive actions to shut down the church.

Third, both TSPM churches and house churches tend to target migrant workers for evangelizing, and the competitive relationship between the TSPM churches and house churches has further reinforced evangelizing aimed at migrant workers. Foxconn House Church A, established by some Taiwanese senior managers in 2011, largely targets Foxconn workers in response to the 2010 Foxconn tragedy. According to their records, 55.4 per cent (72 of 130) of the churchgoers are Foxconn workers. With migrant workers from outside Foxconn added, approximately 80 per cent of the churchgoers are migrant workers. The saliency of migrants also applies to Guanlan Church, a TSPM church, which is largely sponsored by a "boss Christian"[52] who owns a plastic factory located next to the church. The "boss Christian" donated 3 million yuan to re-establish the church in 1999. Thus, a significant proportion of its churchgoers are workers from his factory. Likewise, House Church C was organized in a factory by a "boss Christian" who introduced Christian activities as a form of communal life and leisure. Foxconn House Church B was originally a small congregation spontaneously organized by Foxconn workers, but it has developed into a church with more than 100 members, most of whom are migrant workers.

51 Here, "gospel village" refers to villages in Shenzhen that have widely accepted Christian beliefs due to the work of Western missionaries, with more than fifty per cent of the population being Christians.
52 Cao 2010.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Migrants in Urban Churches: Emotional Space and Negotiated Empowerment

Church as an emotional space: building working-class subjectivity and community

For Christian migrant workers, the urban churches are used and constructed as an emotional space where vibrant migrant communities and a working-class subjectivity have emerged. Moreover, the urban churches provide these workers with emotional shelters into which they can escape from their oppressive social realities.

The churches serve as "migrant hubs" that maintain rural religiosity, provide networks of social support and communal life, and help migrants integrate into the local society through friendships with local Christians. Many newcomers who have been converted in rural areas intuitively look for a church near their workplaces. This is not only propelled by their spiritual needs but also because the church helps them adapt to the host context. Xiaolong, a 25-year-old construction worker from Henan Province, explained that he felt a sudden sense of certainty and safety when he found the Sanzhuli Church: "Thanks to my *lao-xiang* [老乡 fellow townsman], I managed to find out this place … I feel very settled in my heart now."[53]

Notably, the urban churches offer communal life that permeates into many aspects of everyday practicality of migrant workers, such as mutual help, leisure, finding spouses, marriage consultancy and childcare. Foxconn House Church B is affectionately described as a "workers' home," which provides free accommodation for workers waiting for jobs, facilitates the sharing of information about jobs and housing, and donates money to workers with serious illnesses. Moreover, the churches serve as important hubs for forming intimate relations. It is common that young Christian workers find a spouse/boyfriend/girlfriend in the churches. For example, Zhicheng, a 35-year-old worker, as well as father of a five-year-old child, got to know his wife in one fellowship.[54] As Zhicheng recalls, while he first indicated interest to his future wife, other church members helped him to elicit response. Once relationships are made public, the churches would arrange a fellowship themed on love affairs/marriage, offering guidance for marriage and family relationship. Apart from marriage, the church also provides childcare service, namely *zhurixue* 主日学 (Sunday school), for migrant workers' children on worship days.

Besides, in House Church C, the Christianity congregation is celebrated as a form of communal leisure, decorated by singing and dancing. The pastor has introduced "square dance" (*guangchang wu* 广场舞) into the church as an entertainment particularly for women workers. Given *guangchang wu* in China is often stigmatized as vulgar and uncultivated, the pastor has requested professional dancers to modify the dance, attributed religious meanings to it, and renamed

53 Interview with Xiaolong, May 2015.
54 Interview with Zhicheng, October 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it "gospel dance." In all, a sense of solidarity is cultivated due to the formation of working-class community and the mutual help provided within this marginalized group.

The churches are also conceived of as emotional shelters that enable migrant workers to escape social inequality and factory discipline. In contrast to factory life, which is characterized by noisy and polluted workplaces, excessive workloads and crowded living conditions, the churches offer a sense of relative freedom. Many Christian workers conceive of their churches as a place in which they can unleash their feelings, talk freely to fellow believers and express private emotions that they do not share elsewhere. For example, Xiaoyue, a 36-year-old woman at Guanlan Church, mentioned the women's fellowship which offered her a comfort zone to confide in about her distress inflicted by family conflicts, while she was ashamed to share such feelings elsewhere.[55]

In addition to mutual support, working class subjectivity is also shaped by a "ruralized" religiosity characterized by embodied practices and emotional narratives. Christian migrant workers often construct their religiosity in ways that are not congruent with the stereotype of "authentic" Christians versed in scripture and liturgies. A large proportion of migrant workers are peasants who are much less educated and literate than urban Christians. This means that most of them do not know much about the actual contents of the Bible and Christian theology. Instead, they make sense of their religious activities and commitment to God through embodied practices and emotionally laden narratives that orthodox theological vocabularies find hard to explain. This is exemplified by practices such as sharing experiences of miraculous healing of their bodies or God empowering them to survive life's difficulties. The joy arising from these occasions is usually expressed via passionate prayers with shouting and tears. Such outbursts of faith and emotion bear the legacies of a Pentecostal-style charismatic Protestantism that emerged in rural areas during China's Cultural Revolution.[56] For example, Zhijun, a young Henan migrant at Langkou Church, suggested that he was passionate about God despite being uninterested in reading the Bible.[57] He remarked that he often felt an indescribable touch from inside himself, and he believed that this was when the Holy Spirit was filling his body. It is these bodily impulses that make him believe that God is within him.

Huang[58] suggests that there are two distinct epistemological approaches adopted by Chinese Christians: the inward, emotional and practice-centred style rendered often by rural Christians and a more outward, intellectual and text-centred approach adopted by urban and educated Christians. Huang further notes that rural Christians in urban churches are often caught in a conundrum

55 Interview with Xiaoyue, April 2015.
56 Kao 2009.
57 Interview with Zhijun, October 2017.
58 Huang 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

between the two styles. Somewhat divergent from Huang's findings, the rural Christians in our study did not express any struggle or ambivalence, but felt comfortable with intense emotional outbursts, which are in turn contingent on their experiences of living and working in the city. Neither do they worry about being despised by pastors or local Christians because vernacular religious narratives, which make abstract Christian doctrines accessible and intelligible in specific ways, are accepted, and in fact are prevalent, in the churches.

Faith-based community participation and negotiated empowerment

Access to local communal participation also empowers migrants. Echoing Cao's[59] research on migrant workers in Wenzhou's churches, the migrant workers in this study acquire symbolic power through religious participation. In Cao's ethnographic work, migrant workers obtain a certain level of upward social mobility through interactions with "boss Christians," but their position is nevertheless conditioned by the local-migrant dichotomy – migrant workers cannot enter the power core of Wenzhou's churches. In contrast, many churches in Shenzhen are more inclusive in the sense that migrant workers play a crucial role in the church organization and operations. This is particularly evident in Sanzhuli and Foxconn house churches; in these churches, migrant workers have largely taken over responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the churches. In Sanzhuli Church, because of local villagers' disinterest in religious activities, some senior and more educated migrant Christians have been involved in church management with regard to organizing religious activities and evangelizing. For instance, in 2012, a senior migrant Christian, Wang, was appointed one of the six church board members as well as the sexton of the church in Sanzhuli.[60] Wang is responsible for running the church's daily affairs and officiating the Sunday worship session, and he is widely considered the second-most senior leader in the church, next only to the pastor. Hui is one of the leaders of Foxconn House Church B, which was established by Foxconn workers themselves. Hui suggested that taking charge of the operations of a house church not only cultivated migrants' organizational, preaching and musical skills but also offered an outlet for the development of their spiritual life. In 2016, he quit his job as an assembly worker at Foxconn for a full-time commitment to the church; he also noted that co-supervising a church with more than 100 adherents propelled him to improve himself in terms of knowledge of the Bible and public-speaking ability.[61]

Moreover, a faith-based community also carves out an ethical space built upon the notions of brotherhood and equality, which contrast the bureaucratic and hierarchical management of the factories. For example, in Foxconn House

59 Cao 2010.
60 Interview with Wang, April 2015.
61 Interview with Hui, October 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Church A, it is counterintuitive to see Foxconn staff members, assembly-line workers and senior managers alike chat harmoniously with each other during the same fellowship. Compared to factory managers, migrant workers take even greater responsibility for the churches' daily affairs, such as cooking, cleaning and equipment maintenance. Although the church is a hierarchical institution by virtue of the division between shepherds and sheep, it is nonetheless not based on social-political divisions. Therefore, it is a consensus in the church that all faithful people, regardless of their social status, share one and the same grace of Christ. The worker Zhiqiu expressed his opinion regarding equality in the church:

> The church has created an atmosphere in which we love and cherish each other because we not only meet at the church in temporal life but also meet in heaven, where we worship God together. No matter how you dress, in a business suit or in ragged clothes, we should call each other brother and sister.[62]

Through church involvement and services, migrant Christians gain recognition from faith communities. Active participation in the day-to-day operations of the churches has empowered migrant workers and facilitated their transition from what Li Zhang calls "strangers in the city"[63] to loyal, participatory members of social collectives composed of Christians with varying social statuses.

Between the Profane and the Sacred: Industrial Capitalism through the Mirror of Migrant Workers' Religiosity

Faith under a regime of labour

Outside of the religious communities, however, people have qualitatively different experiences in a highly secularized and rationalized world. In this section, we will elaborate on how migrant workers construct and perform what Christianity means to them vis-à-vis contextual conditions effectuated by the alliance of state and industrial capitalism.

Migrant Christians are subject to a series of labour discipline standards. For example, as one Foxconn worker stated, a slogan reading "Outside the laboratory, there is no high-tech but only the execution of discipline (*zouchu shiyanshi, meiyou gaokeji, zhiyou zhixingde jilü*走出实验室，没有高科技，只有执行的纪律)" was posted on the wall of his shop floor, which vividly expressed the management philosophy at Foxconn.

Jinlong, a 35-year-old assembly-line worker, described his experiences after he started work at Foxconn:

> When I started at Foxconn, I felt it was good. The canteen meals were good. The shop floors were clean and equipped with air-conditioners. But the feeling of newness quickly dissipated. I couldn't adapt to their management culture, the militarized management … If I wanted to go to the toilet, I had to ask the line head's permission. Sometimes the line leader would reply impatiently, "wait a minute, wait a minute," because you have to wait for the line leader

62 Interview with Zhiqiu, December 2017.
63 Zhang 2001.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

to take over your stand … On the assembly line, you have to finish every action in seconds, the time carefully calculated, and repeat it again and again … I felt very depressed at that time. I felt I had no dignity, acting like a robot.[64]

Jinlong also told us that it was not the hardship of the job that made him depressed but that he was overwhelmed by a sense of incarceration, of working like a prisoner. However, he felt profound relief after his conversion to Christianity in 2013 because labour discipline is re-interpreted through religious values and discourses. He thus presented an alternative reading of work in which the problem was deflected from labour discipline per se:

You know, when your mind is not strong enough, the evil spirits will invade your body. That's why I felt depressed before. But I am not afraid of this any longer because God is with me now … Now I realize that I am working for God. When you realize this, you feel peaceful and joyful, though the job is still tedious.[65]

Similarly, many workers regard themselves as "God's workers," meaning that they are working for God, not for capital. Another worker Liu told us that he never cared about the rules and regulations in the factory as the "world" was dominated by foreigners (*waibangren* 外邦人) but ultimately it was under God's control. For Liu, a kind of humanity is even acceptable: "The purpose of work is to glorify the Lord. If you have this attitude, you can keep peaceful no matter how they treat you."[66] Nevertheless, the reality that their bodies are coercively disciplined and constrained by the capitalist labour regime remains unchallenged, as theological interpretations only sequestrate and bracket material power structure, not alter it.

Ironically, migrant Christians cannot simply bypass their secular identity as "capital's workers." Indeed, the dual identities of God's workers and capital's workers are often irreconcilable, particularly regarding the allocation of time – religious time prioritizes non-utilitarian, phenomenological encounters with a divine being and order, while capital time emphasizes the scientific management and calculation of time.[67] Given the strict control of workers' time in factories, it is not surprising that many Christian workers have limited time to go to church, particularly when they must work compulsory overtime. Xiaohui, a female worker from a small factory, sadly said that the intensive workload often kept her from attending church. Because of this, she suggested, some workmates who were converted in rural churches had gradually stopped their religious activities. The incongruence between secular and religious time is viewed as a threat to her religious beliefs as well. She frankly admitted that she had to feed herself first. Even though she might have one or half a day off, she is often extremely tired and does not go to church but falls asleep. In most cases, she can only pray in the dormitory, and she hopes that God will pardon her.[68]

64 Interview with Jinlong, October 2017.
65 Interview, Jinlong.
66 Interview with Liu, September 2017.
67 Glennie and Thrift 1996.
68 Interview with Xiaohui, March 2015.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In his article, "Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism," E.P. Thompson argued that the emergence of industrial capitalism fundamentally changed individuals' perception of time by introducing the measurement of clock time, which replaced the earlier temporal experience imposed by religious authorities.[69] The development of industrial capitalism has relied on synchronic forms of time (such as just-in-time production). Indeed, the economic reforms in Shenzhen have produced a new conception of time that is manifested in the slogan, "time is life, efficiency is money." This is manifest in the human-machine interface in factories, where workers have to work night shifts to keep the machines working uninterruptedly in order to maximize productivity. One worker complained to us in a self-demeaning way, "My life is not as valuable as that machine … If I become ill, the overtime allowance isn't enough to pay my medical expenses."[70]

Benfen and suzhi: migrant workers' request for meaningful lives

Although Christian migrants are highly constrained by labour discipline, they are not entirely negative recipients of the dominant arrangement, as they are capable of tactically drawing from Christian vocabularies and discourses to constitute their subjectivity and meaningful lives. Religious doctrines and teachings are appropriated in the context of work and everyday life, and migrant workers simply believe that it is hardworking, honest and obedient bodies that put religious teachings into practice. We suggest that migrant workers use Protestant teachings and ethics to reconcile with their powerlessness and find consolation, while faith also partakes in the construction of selfhood, self-value and moral superiority in workplaces.

In their workplaces, they neither seek to conceal their religious identity nor do they isolate themselves from non-Christian workers and managers. Instead, they attempt to construct and perform the image of hardworking, self-regulating, virtuous and trustworthy Christians. In our interviews, the word *benfen* 本分 (obligation or duty) frequently appeared. Christian workers believe that it is their *benfen* to work heartfully, since they are working for God and all will ultimately appear before the judgement of Christ; moreover, it is also their *benfen* to evangelize so that non-Christian workers can be brought under God's refuge and oppressive factory environments can be ameliorated. For example, the core aim of the evangelical work of one Foxconn house church is to transform the "atmosphere" at Foxconn through love and to bring peace to workers and managers. However, this religious subjectivity appears to be non-radical and uncritical of material inequalities, by virtue of its moral emphasis on self-discipline and obedience to the logics of industrial capitalism, thereby serving as what E.P. Thompson described as a "moral machine."

69 Thompson 1967.
70 Interview with Feilong, October 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Prior to being appointed the sexton of Sanzhuli Church, Wang worked in Shenzhen's factories for 15 years. He explained a Christian worker's *benfen* to us: whether your wage is calculated by the length of work or the number of products, and whether or not the managers engaged in surveillance, Christian workers ought to work with full spirit because "you need to make a confession before God one day." As a senior, devout Christian, Wang has often taught young migrant workers that they should exhibit the virtues of a Christian worker, such as being hardworking, trustworthy and helpful, and that Christians should embrace peace and tolerance rather than rage and complaint.[71]

It is therefore common for many Christian workers to cover other workers' shifts or willingly undertake a greater amount of work to reduce colleagues' workloads. Many non-Christian workers, in turn, think of their Christian colleagues as reliable and honest. For Wang, performing *benfen* is not only congruent with his religious commitment but also a means to receive God's blessings (for example, getting promoted):

> If you want to make your factory life better, just behave the way that a Christian should – working hard and treating your workmates and superiors kindly. We let them realize that having Christian beliefs is a good thing … I once worked in two factories where all the superiors trusted me a lot. They thought I was sincere, and they even appointed me as the line head.[72]

Compared to hard work, some Christian workers regard evangelizing as a more direct way to fulfil their *benfen*. Evangelical work is not only a cornerstone of their faith but also an effective means to connect with non-Christian workers. The worker Fuqiang described his motivation for undertaking evangelical work:

> I found that many workmates were very distressed due to the onerous workload. Therefore, I have tried to evangelize them and lead them to God's grace. If they convert to Christianity, they won't feel distressed. If there are more brothers and sisters, the factory won't be such a spiritless place.[73]

Fuqiang was fully aware that the current labour conditions would endure; yet, for him, Christianity could influence the ways in which workers make sense of factory life and enabled them to come to terms with the existing conditions and transcend their immanent realities via theological discourses and emotional practices. In this vein, the Christian discourse of *benfen* gives rise to a new selfhood which overlaps and works in tandem with instrumental rationality in the factory regime: it is not the workers' labour but commitment to God that determines the value and meaning of their work, deflecting the issues of structural inequality and exploitation.

Apart from *benfen*, migrant workers' self-making is also evident in their performing of the discourse of *suzhi* 素质 (quality). In the interest of the state's project of social control and engineering, the vast majority of the rural population is often discursively labelled as of low *suzhi*, literally meaning low quality,

71 Interview with Wang, March 2015.
72 Interview with Wang, March 2015.
73 Interview with Fuqiang, May 2015.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

which poses a barrier to China's modernization project.[74] Although the Chinese state has been enthusiastic about raising the quality of the rural population, the discourse regarding the low *suzhi* of migrant workers is paradoxically manipulated as a means to legitimate the exploitation of cheap labour.[75]

For Christian migrants, however, Christianity enables them to keep the label of "low *suzhi*" at a safe distance through self-transformation to morally superior subjects. First, migrant workers utilize Christian ethics and discourses to re-imagine themselves in contrast to others. As Cao[76] and Yang[77] both note, in sharp contrast to popular religion that has been stigmatized as feudal superstition and a synonym of backwardness, Christianity is associated with the developed West and cosmopolitan modernity. In this research, many Christian migrants repeated the view that Christian beliefs and doctrines distinguished them from non-Christian migrant workers, who were of low *suzhi*. In other words, they negotiate the label of low *suzhi* by discursively constructing a socio-religious distinction within the migrant workers group. For example, Li, a 50-year-old female worker, associated *suzhi* with specific behaviours and manners that Christianity encouraged, which distinguished her from other female workers:

> I am very different from the other female workers. You don't know women's affairs. They often slander each other. When they gossip behind people's backs – for example, who just got divorced, or what is wrong with whom – I will avoid participating in these topics and immediately walk away. I think we Christians should not encourage gossip.[78]

Likewise, the factory worker Lijun explained to us:

> Every time they (non-Christian workers) ask me to go to a massage or nightclub with them, I refuse. Because I believe in Jesus, I am different from them. I will never talk dirty or gamble, in contrast to what *waibangren* often do. They love the world, so they are more likely to be occupied by the flesh.[79]

Christian migrants assume a moral and spiritual high ground in comparison to other non-Christian workers because of, as they claim, their obedience to Christian ethical principles and their pursuit of transcendent ends. Nevertheless, their interpretation implies an unwitting acceptance of the discourse of low *suzhi*. In other words, they do not challenge the hegemonic state and the public discourse but rather fend off such discourse by projecting it exclusively onto non-Christian migrants. Second, migrant workers invoke Christian ethics to formulate and justify a new interpretation of the self. Many Christian workers equate *suzhi* with self-discipline and good manners, for example, talking in a soft voice, politeness, and avoiding quarrels with others. In both Shenzhen's TSPM church and house church, Christian teachings regard the world as a place

74 Anagnost 2004.
75 Jacka 2009; Sun 2009.
76 Cao 2009.
77 Yang 2005.
78 Interview with Li, December 2017.
79 Interviw with Lijun, October 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of temptation and therefore it is the practice of self-constraint and self-mastery that largely determines one's spiritual quality and commitment to God.

He Dong, a 35-year-old worker and veteran soldier, thought that self-cultivation (*suyang* 素养) could be attained by harnessing vitalist and emotional impulses (*xueqi* 血气).[80] As a veteran, he previously could not tolerate anything that he thought was unjust, and he often quarrelled with others. However, after his conversion to Christianity, as he remarked, his bad manners were under control, which subsequently transformed him into a person with self-cultivation. In this sense, Christian migrant workers adhere to an alternative interpretation of quality to the state's discourse, which emphasizes self-disciplined bodies, in tandem with their reading of Christian ethics and doctrines. Indeed, Christian workers are often seen as of high quality by factory managers, which can give them a more favourable place in the factory production regime. This is particularly the case after the Foxconn tragedy, in which workers with good "psychological quality" became valuable assets in the eyes of the managerial staff. For instance, a Taiwanese senior manager at Foxconn, a Christian himself, commented on Christian workers:

> Christian workers are high-quality workers. You know, many peasant workers don't have many pursuits, except smoking, drinking, gambling and surfing the internet. I think it (the Foxconn tragedy) has something to do with this spiritual void. But Christian workers are very different. First, if a worker has faith in God, their behaviour will surely change. They no longer feel bored and meaningless when they have spiritual pursuits … Second, they are hardworking and rarely argue with or offend their line heads.[81]

In this sense, the self-transformation of Christian migrant workers who aim to discursively and corporally present themselves as modern, civilized and disciplined subjects, appear to be co-opted by the same neoliberal forms of governance that produced their marginality in the first place. In other words, Christian migrant workers' negotiation of the *suzhi* discourse does not challenge mainstream framings of sociocultural differentiation and inequality but instead reinforces the state's promotion of disciplined and productive bodies.[82]

Migrant workers' adherence to the discourses of *benfen* and *suzhi* is reminiscent of E.P. Thompson's[83] description of the deep-seated allegiance to Methodism among the industrial working class. Thompson argues that Methodism, with "its elevation of the values of discipline and of order as well as its moral opacity," served as an ideological self-justification for the capitalist mode of production, which requires enforcing the productivity of human labour through work discipline. Thompson describes Methodism as the "moral machinery" that could turn a worker "into his own slave driver" through an imposed "inner compulsion." For Methodist workers, work was undertaken as a "pure act of virtue … inspired

80 Interview with He, September 2017.
81 Interview with Foxconn Manager, October 2017.
82 Anagnost 2004.
83 Thompson 1963, 355.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

by the love of a transcendent Being."[84] For Thompson, Methodism is part of the social-psychic process of counter-revolution that thwarts workers' struggling impulses with a reactionary and quietist religious ideology. Our study offers a comparable story to that narrated by Thompson. While Christianity is a source of emotional comfort and communal solidarity for migrant workers, the theological interpretation of *benfen* and *suzhi* appear to bracket, even re-legitimize, rather than contest, the realities of the political economy. In this sense, the institution of Christianity in Shenzhen coincides with the project of the state and capital to produce docile and productive workers. Nevertheless, unlike Thompson's thesis, Christianity in this study is not simply an ideological superstructure that implants false consciousness in the workers' minds. Rather, faith works more akin to what Foucault theorizes as the logics of governmentality:[85] it enables migrant workers to exercise agency, claim specific selfhoods and meaningful lives, and present themselves as conscious moral subjects, even though such selfhoods and subjectivities dovetail, in evident ways, with rationalities upholding industrial capitalism and an exploitative labour regime.

Conclusion

This research presents an empirical study of the ways in which rural-to-urban migration and industrial capitalism have created a social niche for new situated religiosities in Shenzhen. We have witnessed a contradictory dual process in Shenzhen – the ascendancy of secular capitalism and simultaneously, the noticeable religiosity flourishing among the new working class. The capitalist model of production, and in particular the factory regime, regulate and discipline migrant bodies to achieve increased productivity. It is this structural context that has created the existential conditions for migrant religiosity to emerge. By teasing out relationships between industrial development, politics of labour and religious revival through a grounded examination, this study advances two contributions to the study of religion in China.

First, this article brings migrants' religiosities into dialogue with existing theses on religious revival in China, which theorize new religiosities as responses to perplexing social changes, or a coping mechanism under oppressive conditions. Rural-to-urban migration has re-mapped urban religious scenes through the translocal mobility of religiosity and situated religious conversion. Christianity provides migrant workers with material, cultural and symbolic resources, which not only enable them to negotiate the existential conditions of uprootedness, labour alienation and incarceration, but which also empower community participation by this marginal group. Migrant workers' religiosity is neither of rural Pentecostal nor urban evangelical style in a strict sense but instead a situated, lived response to secular modernity and industrial capitalism.

84 Ibid., 356.
85 Foucault 1982.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Second, however, this article has demonstrated that this Christian faith is better theorized as a transformative imaginary that constitutes, rather than simply counteracts, the transition towards lived experiences based on instrumental rationality and a disciplinary labour regime. Migrants' religiosity is assembled by embodied and affective practices yearning for health and happiness in a new socio-economic environment, efforts of self-transformation through *benfen* and *suzhi*, and theologically mediated interpretation of alienation and social inequality. In this vein, we argue that there are mutually constitutive and reinforcing relationships between religion and capitalist secularity. Our point is that questions on faith are not simply about becoming more or less religious but rather how religion is implicated in the project of cultivating moral subjects suited to development aspirations and new zeitgeists. Resonating with Cao Nanlai's argument,[86] faith is rather contested and hybrid, which cannot be simply reduced to a symbolic universe that is inherently anti-secular and anti-hegemonic. Religious flourishment in this form, as Wang Gungwu suggests, does not indicate that China's social transformation is shifting from a secular state to a religious one but rather from militant secularism to a more hybrid form of secularism that integrates secular ideologies with new formations of identities and subjectivities, with people seemingly acting as free subjects commanding self-governance and self-cultivation.[87]

Hence, in the case of Shenzhen, while Christianity is a source of emotional comfort and communal solidarity for migrant workers, we do not consider it a harbinger of an alternative, critical class consciousness. Instead, faith among migrant workers is better understood as a dynamic process through which Christianity is implicated in the existing social exclusion and domination. For example, migrant workers' theological interpretation of *benfen* and their definition of *suzhi* only obfuscate, and even re-legitimize, the hegemonic power and ideologies perpetuated by the state–capital coalition. While the theologically mediated notion of *benfen* overlaps with the production of migrant subjects who exercise agency through being industrious and productive, the discourse of *suzhi* obfuscates class consciousness even further by creating fault lines of identities between Christian and non-Christian workers.

Above all, this article has argued that religiosity is not merely a residue of tradition for people to cope with perplexing social changes, if only in vain. Rather, religiosity is integral to, and even constitutive of, local political and economic conditions. This is not to argue that China's emerging secular modernity produces "inauthentic" forms of religiosity. Rather, we contend that there are hybrid cultural formations in current Chinese society, whereby people make sense of the religious by making reference to the secular, and vice versa. It is cultural formations of this nature that give rise to new aspirations for, and discursive formulations of, Protestant faith among migrant workers in Shenzhen.

86 Cao 2010.
87 Wang 2004.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Acknowledgement

The authors would like thank professor Hong Zhu of Guangzhou University for inspiring and motivating this research. We are also grateful to the two anonymous referees for their insightful comments. Funding for this research came from the National Natural Science Foundation of China (Grants: 41630635 and 41401139).

Biographical notes

Quan GAO is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography at Newcastle University. His research focuses on religion, migration and homelessness, and his PhD thesis looks at the religious beliefs and practices of rural migrant workers in Shenzhen. His recent publications have appeared in *Cultural Geographies* and *Area*.

Junxi QIAN is an assistant professor in the Department of Geography, the University of Hong Kong. He has published widely in both English- and Chinese-language journals, and his works are sited at the intersection of geography, urban studies and cultural studies. His recent research focuses on urban public space, urban China, indigenous people and frontiers, and religion.

摘要: 在后改革时代，中国似乎被卷入一个矛盾的双向转变过程–不断巩固的世俗价值与显著而全面的宗教复兴之间的交织。然而，现存的文献对宗教信仰与世俗现代性和资本主义如何相互构建和共同演进仍缺乏理论化。本文将移民、劳动以及工业资本主义引入对宗教信仰和实践的考察，由此进行重新的理论化。我们的实证研究关注了深圳市农民工的基督教信仰形成的过程。我们研究了农民工如何将宗教运用为一种文化、符号和话语的资源去与国家管制和劳动关系共建的双层剥削达成协商、妥协，甚至在某些情况去质疑和抵抗这种剥削关系。然而，本研究同时认为农民工试图通过"本分"和"素质"的话语以及对异化、劳动剥削和社会不平等的神学解读，实现对自我的转化；但这种自我转化部分嵌套于，并且强化了，国家-资本联盟对驯服、生产性的移民身体的生产。本研究对资本主义世俗性与宗教价值如何相互塑造提供了新的理论视角。

关键词: 宗教性; 世俗现代性; 资本主义; 乡-城移民; 移民主体性; 新教

References

Anagnost, Ann. 2004. "The corporeal politics of quality (suzhi)." *Public Culture* 16(2), 189–208.

Ashiwa, Yoshiko, and David Wank (eds). 2009. *Making Religion, Making the State: The Politics of Religion in Modern China*. Redwood City: Stanford University Press.

Bays, Daniel H. 2003. "Chinese Protestant Christianity today." *The China Quarterly* 174(2), 488–504.

Cao, Nanlai. 2007. "Christian entrepreneurs and the post-Mao state: an ethnographic account of church–state relations in China's economic transition." *Sociology of Religion* 68(1), 45–66.

Cao, Nanlai. 2009. "Raising the quality of belief: suzhi and the production of an elite Protestantism." *China Perspectives* 4, 54–65.

Cao, Nanlai. 2010. *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power, and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Casanova, José. 2007. "Immigration and the new religious pluralism: a European Union/United States comparison." In Thomas Banchoff (ed.), *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 59–83.

Casanova, José. 2013. "Exploring the postsecular: three meanings of the 'secular' and their possible transcendence." In Calhoun Craig, Eduardo Mendieta and Jonathan VanAntwerpen (eds.), *Habermas and Religion*. Hoboken: Wiley, 27–48.

Chao, Emily. 1999. "The Maoist shaman and the madman: ritual bricolage, failed ritual, and failed ritual theory." *Cultural Anthropology* 14 (4), 505–534.

Chau, Adam. 2006. *Miraculous Response: Doing Popular Religion in Contemporary China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

China Family Panel Studies (CFPS). 2012. Institute of Social Science Survey, Peking University, http://dx.doi.org/10.18170/DVN/45LCSO.

Feuchtwang, Stephan. 2000. "Religion as resistance." In Elizabeth Perry and Mark Selden (eds.), *Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance*. London: Routledge, 161–177.

Foucault, Michel. 1982. "The subject and power." *Critical Inquiry* 8(4), 777–795.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Glennie, Paul, and Nigel Thrift. 1996. "Reworking E.P. Thompson's 'Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism'." *Time & Society* 5(3), 275–99.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2006. "Religion in the public sphere." *European Journal of Philosophy* 14(1), 1–25.

Habermas, Jürgen. 2010. *An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-secular Age*. Cambridge: Polity.

Hackworth, Jason. 2012. *Faith Based: Religious Neoliberalism and the Politics of Welfare in the United States*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

He, Guanghu. 2014. "Dangdai zhongguo de guojia mubiao – yizhong jidujiao jian feizhongjiao shijiao de sikao" (The national goal of contemporary China: a reflection from Christian and non-religious perspectives). *Daofeng: jidujiao shenxue pinglun* 41, 71–101.

Huang, Jianbo. 2014. "Being Christians in urbanizing China: the epistemological tensions of the rural churches in the city." *Current Anthropology* 55(S10), 238–247.

Huang, Ke-Hsien. 2015. "Segmented yet entangled, interdependent faith revivals: rural migrants' lived religion in urban Chinese Churches." *Taiwanese Sociology* 30, 55–98.

Hunter, Alan, and Kim-Kwong, Chan. 2007. *Protestantism in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jacka, Tamara. 2009. "Cultivating citizens: suzhi (quality) discourse in the PRC." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 17(3), 523–535.

Ji, Zhe. 2012. "Chinese Buddhism as a social force: reality and potential of thirty years of revival." *Chinese Sociological Review* 45(2), 8–26.

Jing, Jun. 1996. *The Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Kao, Chen-Yang. 2009. "The Cultural Revolution and the emergence of Pentecostal-style Protestantism in China." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 24(2), 171–188.

Kipnis, Andrew. 2016. *From Village to City: Social Transformation in a Chinese County Seat*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Lee, Joseph Tse-Hei. 2007. "Christianity in contemporary China: an update." *Journal of Church and State*, 277–304.

Liang, Yongjia. 2014. "Morality, gift and market: communal temple restoration in southwest China." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 15(5), 414–432.

Palmer, David A. and Fabian Winiger. 2019. "Secularization, sacralization and subject formation in modern China." In Kenneth Dean and Peter van der Veer (eds.), *The Secular in South, East, and Southeast Asia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 83–105.

Pew Research Center. 2011. *Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population*, 19 December.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Potter, Pitman B. 2003. "Belief in control: regulation of religion in China." *The China Quarterly* 174, 317–337.

Pun, Ngai. 1999. "Becoming dagongmei (working girls): the politics of identity and difference in reform China." *The China Journal* 42, 1–18.

Pun, Ngai. 2005. *Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Pun, Ngai. 2016. *Migrant Labor in China*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Pun, Ngai, and Chris Smith. 2007. "Putting transnational labour process in its place: the dormitory labour regime in post-socialist China." *Work, Employment and Society* 21(1), 27–45.

Qi, Gubo, Zhenhua Liang and Xiaoyun Li. 2014. "Christian conversion and the re-imagining of illness and healthcare in rural China." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 15(5), 396–413.

Siu, Helen. 1990. "Recycling tradition: culture, history, and political economy in the chrysanthemum festivals of South China." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (4), 765–794.

Sun, Wanning. 2009. "Suzhi on the move: body, place, and power." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 17(3), 617–642.

Sun, Wanning. 2014. *Subaltern China: Rural Migrants, Media, and Cultural Practices*. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Szonyi, Michael. 2009. "Secularization theories and the study of Chinese religions." *Social Compass* 56(3), 312–327.

Tapp, Nicholas. 2014. "Religious issues in China's rural development: the importance of ethnic minorities." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 15(5), 433–452.

Thompson, Edward P. 1963. *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Victor Gollancz.

Thompson, Edward P. 1967. "Time, work-discipline, and industrial capitalism." *Past & Present* 38, 56–97.

Wang, Gungwu. 2004. "State and faith – secular values in Asia and the West." In Gregor Benton and Hong Liu (eds.), *Diasporic Chinese Ventures: The Life and Work of Wang Gungwu*. London: Routledge, 103–123.

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

Williams, Andrew. 2015. "Postsecular geographies: theo-ethics, rapprochement and neoliberal governance in a faith-based drug programme." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40(2), 192–208.

Yang, Fenggang. 2004. "Between secularist ideology and desecularizing reality: the birth and growth of religious research in communist China." *Sociology of Religion* 65(2), 101–119.

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.

Yang, Fenggang. 2011. *Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui (ed.). 2008. *Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Zhang, Li. 2001. *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks Within China's Floating Population*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Zhao, Litao. 2010. "Religious revival and the emerging secularism in China." In Michael Heng Siam-Heng and Ten Chin Liew (eds.), *State and Secularism: Perspective from Asia*. Singapore: World Scientific, 301–317.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0305741019000766 Published online by Cambridge University Press