Investigating postsecularity in urban China: Christianity, lived religion, and the intersectional experiences of migrant Christians in Shenzhen

XIAOCHEN YU

Investigating postsecularity in urban China:

Christianity, lived religion, and the intersectional experiences of migrant Christians in Shenzhen

Xiaochen Yu

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Geography, Durham University

2025

Abstract

This thesis contributes to geographies of secularity and postsecularity by examining Christianity and the experiences of rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen, China. In the post-reform era, China appears to be caught in a contradictory dual process – the entrenchment of secular values and, simultaneously, the notable revival of Christianity. Bridging existing postsecularity literature with the discussion of the migrant experience, this thesis focuses on the everyday construction of religiosity and subjectivity of rural-urban migrants within the secular world and possible urban faith-based support for them. Drawing on in-depth ethnographic data collected in Shenzhen, I argue that rather than being an active social movement, the emerging postsecularity in China works as an ethical and self-reflective project involving hybrid subjectivities in response to the conditions of being in post-reform China. Four empirical chapters develop this argument further. The first elucidates the emerging young migrant Christian group in Calvinist churches in Shenzhen and argues that neoliberal principles inevitably influenced their attitude toward Christianity. Meanwhile, Calvinist Christian resources and ethics also engage in the process of mediating with, and even counteracting neoliberal secularity, showing that religiosity as praxis is negotiated and ongoing, and that neoliberalism and emergent Calvinist theology in urban China provide new maps for us to reconsider the interaction of religiosity and secular metrics. The second chapter examines urban Christian churches and the lived experience of migrant workers within them, showing how these faith-based communities become emotional spaces and social infrastructures for migrant workers and how theo-ethics emerge within and then reshape these urban infrastructures. The third chapter explores young migrant women's religious agency and their subjectivities of nonconfrontational negotiating within gendered social norms, foregrounding an intersectional approach to the study of post-secular feminism and women's religious agency. Drawing on Peter Sloterdijk's sphere theory, the final empirical chapter focuses on the development of spheres of online religious community and examines how Chinese Christians use the social app WeChat for religious practices. Examining how these foam-like online religious communities developed, and finally disappeared, on WeChat during the COVID lockdown, this chapter explores the changing spatiality of online religious communities and how senses of possibility and connection are forged during this process. To conclude, I show how the findings not only contribute to the discussion of the geographies of secularity and postsecularity in a non-western context but also highlight the value of the everyday and of intersectional perspectives toward rural-urban migrants'religiosities and subjectivities within the neoliberal secular condition.

Table of Contents

Abstract **2**

List of Figures and Tables **6**

List of Abbreviations **7**

Statement of Copyright **8**

Acknowledgements **9**

Chapter1. Introduction **10**

1.1 Reconceptualizing Christianity in post-reform China 12
1.1.1 Religious revival and changing rural-urban religious landscapes 12
1.1.2 The possibilities of postsecularity among migrant Christians 16

1.2 Mapping migrant Christians in Shenzhen 19
1.2.1 Towards an intersectional framework 19
1.2.2 Experiencing the intersectional inequalities in the city 22

1.3 Being a Christian: lived religion and rural-urban migrants' everyday faith 24
1.3.1 Lived religion in Human Geography 25
1.3.2 Lived Christianity: embodiment, emotion, and social interaction 27

1.4 Research themes and questions 30

1.5 The structure of the thesis 30

Chapter 2. Literature review **32**

2.1 Introduction 32

2.2 Secularization theory and postsecularity 32

2.3 Geographies of postsecularity 36

2.4 Dialogue with (post)secularity in the Chinese context 40
2.4.1 Secularity and secularism in China: the state-led projects 40
2.4.2 Religious vitality in the post-Mao China 42
2.4.3 Mapping the possible postsecularity in Shenzhen 47

Chapter 3. Christianity in practices: religious policies, the official church, and the house church in China **52**

3.1 Introduction 52

3.2 The official church and the house church 52

3.3 Policy, regulation, and law on religious affairs 57
3.3.1 Institutions for implementing religious policy and regulation 57
3.3.2 Religious policy and regulations 57

Chapter 4. Research context and methodology **62**

4.1 Introduction 62

4.2 Contextualising the research: Christianity in Shenzhen 62

4.3 Interpreting Christianity through a reflexive ethnography: the ethnography of religion in the Chinese context 65
4.4 Research methods and procedures of this research 68
4.4.1 Access 68
4.4.2 Sample 69
4.4.3 Collecting data 72
4.5 Multiple positionalities and reflexivity in this research 76
4.6 Ethical dilemmas 84
4.6.1Informed consent and the ethics of covert research and social media 84
4.6.2 Confidentiality and anonymity 86
Chapter 5. Faith, neoliberalism, and postsecularity : the rise of Calvinist Christianity among young migrant Christians in Shenzhen 87
5.1 Introduction 87
5.2 Postsecularity, migration, and the reconfiguration of Calvinist ethics 90
5.2.1 Rethinking the religious and the secular through a postsecular perspective 90
5.2.2 Postsecular reinterpretation of Calvinist ethics in urban China 92
5.3 The rise of the urban intelligent gospel and relocating Calvinism in Shenzhen 93
5.4 Migrant workers' religiosity in post-secularity Shenzhen 97
5.4.1 The pursuit of "rational" Christianity 97
5.4.2 Calvinist ethics under a regime of labour 101
5.5 Conclusion 104
Chapter 6. Mapping the lived theo-ethics within emergent social infrastructure in Shenzhen 108
6.1 Introduction 108
6.2 Urban churches, social infrastructure and the possibility of theo-ethics 110
6.2.1 Rethinking the urban church as infrastructure 110
6.2.2 Theo-ethics and different expressions in China 112
6.3 The social infrastructure as a space of duality: sacredness and social care 113
6.3.1 Sacred space and otherworldly care 114
6.3.2 Social supporting space and this-worldly care 118
6.4 Negotiating sacred space and social care space with theo-ethics 122
6.5 The limits of caregiving as the social infrastructure 124
6.6 Conclusions 126
Chapter 7. Re-examining femininity within church and family : an intersectional approach to the agency of female migrant Christians 129
7.1 Introduction 129
7.2 postsecular feminism, agency, and intersectionality 129
7.3 Positioning female migrant Christians' Subjectivity in Modern China 133
7.4 Reclaiming femininity within the church and family 137
7.3.1 Church as "Women's Community" 137
7.3.2 Constructing a "Christian family" 141
7.5 Conclusion 146
Chapter 8. Spheres in WeChat: framing the 'WeChurch' during COVID-19 in China 148

8.1 Introduction 148
8.2 Rethinking online religion in China 148
8.2.1 Religion on digital media in China: WeChat 148
8.2.2 Towards a spherical understanding of the online religion agenda in WeChat 151
8.3 The WeChat group as bubble and foam 153
8.3.1 Working as a bubble: the online church during the COVID 153
8.3.2 The expansion of foams nationwide 157
8.4 WeChat Groups under Stricter Religious Regulation 160
8.5 Conclusion 163
Chapter 9. Conclusion 166
9.1 introduction 166
9.2 Main arguments and critical contributions of this research 166
9.2.1 Main arguments 166
9.2.2 Mapping secularity and postsecularity in the urban Chinese context 168
9.2.3 Bring lived religion to Chinese religion studies 171
9.2.4 Re-envisioning religious geographies in urban China 173
9.3 Critical reflections on this research 173
9.4 Potential directions for future study 176
9.4.1 New understandings of postsecularity in the post-pandemic era 177
9.4.2 Faith in social caring 178
9.4.3 Digital postsecularity 180
Bibliography 182

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 4-1 The front door of Pious Virgins Girls' School—p.63
Figure 5-1 The poster of Bible doctrine learning of Zhendao Church—p.95
Figure 5-2 The Calvinist theology class in Zhendao Church—p.99
Figure 6-1 Migrant Christians in the prayer meeting—p.116
Figure 6-2 Migrant Christians in the prayer meeting—p.116
Figure 6-3 Love Feast in migrant church—p.120
Figure 6-4 Love Feast in migrant church—p.120
Figure 8-1 Online worship of Zhendao Church during the lockdown(16th, Feb, 2020) —p.155
Figure 8-2 The notification from LH House Church WeChat group—p.155
Figure 8-3 The WeChat account of Reformed Christianity Home was blocked—p.162
Figure 8-4 The content in the link the church posted before has been deleted—p.162

Table 4-1 Demographic information of respondents—p.70
Table 4-2 Information about the churches of this research—p.72

List of Abbreviations

CCC	China Christian Council
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
PRC	People's Republic of China
RAB	Religious Affairs Bureau
SARA	State Administration for Religious Affairs
TSPM	Three-Self Patriotic Movement
UFWD	United Front Work Department

Statement of Copyright

Acknowledgements

My doctoral journey has, for me, been a path through a dense forest in search of the final exit. Although I encountered many twists and turns along the way, I am fortunate to have finally reached this point. It has been a long and challenging road, and I owe my deepest gratitude to many individuals who have made this journey possible. Without their selfless support and unwavering assistance, this accomplishment would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to the research participants who shared their stories and experiences during my fieldwork in Shenzhen. Speaking about one's beliefs can be deeply personal and sensitive in China, yet many migrant Christians and church leaders opened their hearts and allowed me to hear their stories. These stories have formed the foundation of this thesis. Some of them actively assisted me in reaching out to churches and introduced me to new communities. Although their identities remain anonymous or are represented by pseudonyms in this thesis, I will always carry their generosity and trust in my heart.

Secondly, I would like to express special gratitude to my supervisors, Mike Crang and Jonathan Darling, for their endless support throughout the PhD journey. Mike has offered me the most patient guidance and encouragement for my work and helped significantly in developing my critical thinking. Jonathan has also brought fresh ideas to the thesis and always provides helpful advice in writing. Their vast knowledge, invaluable advice, and insightful critique have greatly contributed to the improvement of my thesis. Their kindness and empathy, especially during difficult times, have given me the courage to continue.

Thirdly, thank you to all my friends, Liping, Brug, Yukai, Eva, Anna, Ivo, and Maria (and too many to name) in the Durham Geography department, who have been so kind and generous and have brought me so many precious memories. I am particularly grateful to Qiao Yu, as a friend and academic partner, who has provided me with inspiration and emotional support throughout my PhD study and particularly during the pandemic. And thanks to those friends outside the Geography department, without your help, my life and study in Durham would not be so smooth and colourful.

Finally, but importantly, thanks to my parents, who constantly gave their understanding, support, patience, and care that was much needed. Thanks also to their tolerance of my absences as an only child to go to a foreign land to pursue an academic career. Their love and comprehension have given me the confidence to reach this juncture.

Chapter1. Introduction

In an unassuming office space within an industrial district, approximately two hundred chairs were arranged for the annual conference of A Church. As a seeker, I received a gracious invitation from the pastor of A Church to participate in this conference. This opportunity was invaluable for gaining a deeper understanding of the church's organizational structure and how individuals engage in decision-making processes. Notably, only formal members of the church are eligible to participate in these decision-making activities during the assembly. On that day, about 230 members from various gathering sites of A Church around Shenzhen attended this significant event. From 9 in the morning until 4 in the afternoon, congregants witnessed the baptism and initiation of new believers, the announcement of significant church decisions, the appointment of new employees, and votes on budget proposals. During this process, members actively engaged in discussions on these matters and exercised their voting rights with due diligence……For many members, the congregational meeting evoked a deep sense that the church was not merely a place for worship where they embrace their faith, but a genuine shelter for them in an unfamiliar urban environment.

Fieldwork notes on 2019/11/17

Within "one of the most secular societies on earth," Christianity appears to hold a very marginal place in Chinese public life under the governance of a totalizing party-state fundamentally built on secularist and communist ideologies (Casanova, 2013, p.42). However, as shown in the field notes above, in Shenzhen, migrant Christian churches appear in a vibrant and dynamic condition that contrasts with this traditional perception, as they increasingly draw in rural-urban migrants and build up grass-rooted faith-based communities. In the post-reform era, China seems to be experiencing what religious sociologist Yang Fenggang describes as a "desecularizing reality" under state-led secular ideologies (Yang, 2004, p.102), namely the simultaneous entrenchment of secular values and state-sanctioned neoliberal-capitalist ideologies alongside a significant revival of various forms of religiosity and faith (Cao, 2010; Gao & Qian, 2020; Yang, 2005). Rather than being dismissed by secular neoliberalism, the flourishing of Christianity among rural-urban migrant communities has created a vivid scene in Shenzhen. This unusual phenomenon containing more broad-based spatial, political, economic, social, and cultural processes provides a new opportunity for geographers to engage in rethinking Christianity in post-reform China.

Located in the southern part of Guangdong Province in China, Shenzhen is a vibrant and rapidly growing city that has transformed from a modest fishing village to a bustling metropolis in just a few decades. Since being declared a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to attract foreign investment in the 1980s, Shenzhen has established the alliance of the state and capitalism and enforced the economic and profit-centred governance of migrant workers that created the new urban phenomenon of migrant workers in Shenzhen, the economic growth of whose SEZ was propelled by those rural-urban migrants forming around two thirds of the city's 17.8 million inhabitants[1]. On the one hand, these migrants experienced the institutional discrimination inflicted by China's urban-rural duality and the *hukou* (household registration) system,outlined in the next section, that denied them rights to the city and threw them back upon the land if times got hard (Chen & Fan, 2016; Zhang, 2001). 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. In contrast to urban areas with a well-established Christian cultural heritage, such as Wenzhou, Beijing, and Shanghai, the Christian revival among the rural migrants in Shenzhen will demonstrate a distinct focus on the dynamic and intricate interplay between religious beliefs and the prevailing neoliberal ideology and capitalism that are currently shaping urban China.

Therefore, this thesis develops a more comprehensive understanding of this religious revival among the rural-urban migrants by focusing on these phenomena: the rising social support from urban churches to rural-urban migrants and the interaction of rural-urban migrants' religious subjectivities, ethics, and agency with new theological interpretations and the complex experience of Christianity in highly secular China. In order to achieve it, this thesis draws on the burgeoning literature on postsecularity in geography aiming to provide new insights into the role of Christianity in contemporary urban transformations and the lived experiences of migrant communities in a rapidly changing socio-political environment.

Given that, the rest of the chapter will introduce the context and theoretical background of this thesis whilst providing the research questions and framework of the thesis. It is organized into three main sections: firstly, a critical review of the revitalization of religious practices and changes in the religious landscape in post-reform China, providing a foundation for understanding possible postsecularity among rural-urban migrant groups in the city, aiming to develop a more comprehensive understanding of emerging faith-based activities within urban migrant churches. Secondly, in conjunction with the geographies of postsecularity, this chapter presents two additional theoretical registers—intersectionality and lived religion—that this research will

[1] According to the statistical bulletin released by the Shenzhen Municipal Bureau of Statistics in 2024, the number of inhabitants in Shenzhen in 2023 was approximately 17.79 million. Among them, migrant residents accounted for about 11.73 million, representing 65.9% of the total population.
For more information, see: https://tjj.sz.gov.cn/zwgk/zfxxgkml/tjsj/tjgb/content/post_11264245.html

engage with, examining how rural-urban migrants' religiosities and religious subjectivities interact with the complex, everyday secular world they inhabit. Thirdly, based on the arguments above, the research questions are clarified, and the structure of the thesis is presented.

1.1 Reconceptualizing Christianity in post-reform China

1.1.1 Religious revival and changing rural-urban religious landscapes

There is now a noticeable renaissance of all forms of religious faiths and practices in the post-reform era of China. Economic reforms, along with significant ideological relaxation, have led to a shift in religious policy, creating some space for the resurgence of various religions and belief systems (F. G. Yang, 2011). Within this nationwide religious resurgence, we observe distinct and diverse religious landscapes. For instance, the large coastal cities in eastern China have displayed a variegated and varying religious fabric (Cao, 2007; Hingley, Vermander & Zhang, 2016), while the Islamic faith has gained renewed vigor in the north-western regions of the country (Stewart, 2016). Additionally, the model of local development that integrates tourism with the cultural heritage of Buddhism has become more prevalent (Qian, 2019), and various forms of folk religion continue to thrive in rural areas (Chau, 2008; Liang, 2017). Even Confucianism has experienced a notable resurgence, particularly in the cultural sphere (Fan & Chen, 2015).

Notably, a Christian revival has emerged in the south-eastern city of China—Shenzhen, providing both spiritual care and social services to those in need, particularly a large number of rural-urban migrants. The relatively relaxed political environment and flexible implementation of religious policies in Shenzhen have created enough room for the growth of Christianity and in particular for evangelizing among migrant workers. Official reports indicate that by 2018, Shenzhen was home to approximately 380,000 Christians, second in number only to Buddhists of those declaring a religious belief[2]. The majority of these Christians were rural-urban migrants. This growing phenomenon in Shenzhen insofar as reflects a broader trend of "Christian fever" in post-reform China (Aikman, 2006; Fiedler, 2010; Johnson, 2017). Since the reopening of churches in the late 1970s, Christianity, and specifically Protestantism, in China has been growing rapidly and, especially at the beginning, grew "markedly faster than other religions" (Fiedler, 2010). According to the White Paper titled "China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Belief," released in April 2018 by the Information Office of the State Council, there are approximately 38 million Protestant Christians in China today. As a result of an "advantageous" religious situation, including the official churches, the number of house churches, religious organizations, and religious NGOs has increased rapidly in recent years.

More specifically, the noticeable revival in Shenzhen highlights the changing dynamics of rural-urban Christianity as hundreds of millions from the rural population have migrated to cities in search of a livelihood

[2] http://www.szzx.gov.cn/content/2018-04/09/content_18840727.htm

over the past three decades (Zhang, Cui & Sheng, 2022; Duan, 2014; Gao, 2011). Before the 1970s, it was generally believed that the majority of Chinese Protestantism was in rural areas, where the state's surveillance found monitoring challenging and was driven by the hardship and poverty of the Chinese countryside (Huang & Yang, 2005). The substantial rural-urban migration fuelled by the drastic urbanisation and industrialisation over the last four decades in China has generally shifted the traditional geographical distribution of Christians. China's National Bureau of Statistics shows that the number of rural migrant workers has reached 297.53 million in 2023[3]. Urbanization brought not only a shift from rural to urban but also a large amount of cheap labour relocating to the eastern cities of China, enabling China to become the "workshop of the world" during the last three decades (Pun, 2016). It also profoundly impacted the spread of Christianity in China as more and more rural migrants were moving into the cities to seek better job opportunities and improved livelihoods. Some of these are rural Christians who now participate in urban churches or organize their own Christian congregations in the cities, while others are new converts seeking spiritual coherence (Huang, 2012; 2014). This religious renaissance, in conjunction with massive rural-to-urban migration fuelled by urbanization, has therefore profoundly influenced the landscape of Christianity in China.

Within the changing rural-urban religious landscape, two characteristics are especially significant. First of all, this movement has given rise to a distinctive religious group of migrant Christians[4]. China's rapid industrialization and urbanization have established precarious and disciplined labour regimes, exacerbating inequalities posed on the vast population of rural-urban migrants. Although rapid urbanisation brings geographical mobility and better job opportunities, the assimilation and acceptance of rural-urban migrants remains the core issue troubling them, which relates to the *hukou* system in China. China's *hukou* (household registration) system, which divides the Chinese population into the privileged urban and marginalized rural, is widely portrayed and understood as a significant tool for obstructing internal physical movements employed by the state (Chan, 1994; Chan & Zhang, 1999; Chan, 2009) or a source of rural-urban disparities (Chen & Fan, 2016). More recently, it is increasingly aware that the *hukou* system has worked as a social control mechanism pegging to the urban welfare and service system, meaning that most basic urban social and economic benefits provided by the urban governments have hardly been extended to rural-urban migrants and their accompanying family members (Chan & Ren,2018; Liu, He & Wu, 2008). In this sense, excluded as "strangers in the city" (Zhang, 2001), most of the rural-urban migrant grassroots classes, on the one hand, experience the institutional discrimination inflicted by China's urban-rural duality and the *hukou* system. On the other hand, they suffer from a sense of uncertainty and uprootedness, disembeddedness from

[3] https://www.stats.gov.cn/xxgk/sjfb/zxfb2020/202404/t20240430_1955166.html

[4] The term "migrant Christians" in this thesis refers to rural-urban migrants who have been baptised as Christians or who self-identify as Christians. They can be primarily classified according to the timing of their conversion: roughly two-thirds were converted before their move to the city, while the remaining one-third were converted after their migration.

social networks, and the discontinuity between urban and rural lifeworlds, which left a huge void of spiritual needs and social support for adapting to new forms of urban living.

It is against this background that many urban churches, especially migrant churches, provide some social services and spiritual shelter to the rural migrants, aiding members to fashion life in the city. In Ley's (2008) studies of immigrant Christian churches in Vancouver, the immigrant churches have served as an urban service hub, providing a wide range of personal and social services, such as counselling and language training, significantly aiding co-ethnic or even different ethnic new members to adapt to their new conditions. Similar cases also happen in urban Christian churches in China, as they increasingly see rural-urban migrants as important targets for mission work and social services (Cao, 2010; Huang 2014; 2015). Sharing a similar social background and religious interests, members of migrant churches can generate a "sense of home" and belonging to the religious community in the process of religious praxis. In other words, these churches offering social cohesion and security for migrant members have become one of the hubs welcoming those strangers moving from rural areas to Shenzhen.

Meanwhile, the massive influx of migrant labourers from rural areas has re-invigorated the church. As Gerda Wielander (2013, p. 17) posits urban young people "who have grown up with Christianity and have attended churches with their parents, are now uninterested and are leaving the faith behind, being lured by the pleasures and entertainment offered by the secular world." However, migrant workers have subsequently replenished church membership and re-invigorated these almost defunct churches. Christian faith has become an anchor of identity and community for rural migrant workers alienated by a highly exploitative and precarious regime of labour (Gao, Qian & Yuan, 2018; Zhu & Guo, 2009). As a result, the proportion of migrant Christians in urban churches has grown as there are more and more rural-urban migrants in the city churches. Believers from different education and income backgrounds owning different understandings and practices of the same faith create new social-cultural encounters in migrant churches. Against this background, Christian values and fellowships can provide a sense of safety, identity, and community for many rural-urban migrants in negotiating social inequalities and alienation in a new and volatile socio-economic environment.

Secondly, this population relocation has also resulted in a shift in rural-urban Christian theological discourse. Debates about the urban-rural contrast in Chinese Christianity are not new (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011, p. 123). Madsen (2012) posits a polarization between "traditional" rural/underground churches and "modern" urban/official churches, suggesting that rural churches are more traditionalist and resistant to modernity than their urban counterparts. Similarly, Cao (2010, p.61) identifies a typological contrast in Chinese Christianity, characterizing urban Christianity as "Christian—modern—elite masculine" and rural Christianity as "superstitious—backwards—rural feminine." The differences in theological discourse are embodied in the expansion of history and socio-cultural backgrounds. Historically, the Christian movement's

epicentre was in rural areas rather than urban ones (Lee, 2007). The rural churches tend to present a kind of quasi-Pentecostalism form which features a belief in miracles, divine intervention in people's lives for physical and spiritual healing, and certain direct communications with God and Jesus, including speaking in tongues, dreams, and vision (Wielander, 2013,p.14). This "grassroots" expression of rural Christianity embodies a practical folk piety that aligns more naturally with rural life than the more intellectualized forms of urban Christianity.

However, the theological scenario is now beginning to be re-mapped within this Christian revival as so-called "liberal" or "modern" theology has been more accepted by urban churches (Kang, 2016; 2019). When the migrant Christians were entering the city, their original rural theological thinking encountered the urban religious discourse, which was evident in Huang Jianbo's (2014) research on Christian urban migrants' beliefs and how they adapt their lives and relationships to city dwelling. In his study, Huang suggested that urbanization has changed the church structure from the pre-existing dualism of rural and urban churches to a third type of church, which stands somewhat between rural and urban, and can be called the "rural church in the city". Although the members from rural villages are not satisfied with the highly intellectual understanding of the faith of urban Christianity, which emphasizes more rational thinking and the solemn order of meetings, they have to find a feasible way to make some adjustments in the city. Although sometimes still influenced by their original rural theology, they always seek to access the urban-modern religious system to adapt to the cities' brand-new social and religious networks. Cao Nanai's (2010) work equally recalls this trend, arguing that urban-oriented Christian groups are distinguished from rural Chinese Christians in Wenzhou City because these Christians serve "more as a symbol of Western modernity than as a symbol of salvation or a medium of resistance" (Cao, 2010, p.35). By "distancing themselves from traditional rural Christianity", Wenzhou Protestants have successfully solved the conflict between a professional role in pursuing economic growth and enhancing their religious commitment (Cao, 2011). In fact, many migrant Christians from rural areas increasingly develop their beliefs and behaviour to adjust to modernized urban life, in anticipation of negotiating the spiritual and personal crises they would encounter as urban dwellers.

Moreover, with the rise of more educated and younger rural-urban migrants becoming new believers, it will be easier for them to accept the systematic urban theological discourse (Cao, 2010; Huang, 2015; Yoo, 2021). Compared to the earlier wave or their parents' generation of migrant workers, whose primary concern was to seek a livelihood, today's young migrants with better-educated backgrounds and more variety of employment options are strongly motivated to seek socioeconomic success and have an increasing demand for equality, and a strong desire for upward mobility and integration into urban life (Luo & Wang, 2003). Just as Kang Jie (2016) suggested in her ethnographical research of foreign missionaries and indigenous Christians in Linyi City, China's policies of rapid urbanization and accelerated capitalist development have created conditions for the emergence of an urban-based "rational" Christianity, which might refashion the migrant Christian identity as they empower themselves by obtaining theological training. Especially currently the neoliberal transition

in the post-reform era, on the one hand, involves a reconfiguration of the politico-socio-economic complex, and the refashioning of individual selfhood on the other hand. Youth migrants' religious subjectivities and ethics are more engaging in articulating and co-evolving with these secular conditions of beings. For example, spiritual experiences and practices help migrant workers to come to terms with vicissitude, but also sometimes to resist hardships and state discourses in the economy and society in the new and volatile socio-economic environment (Gao & Qian, 2020). Meanwhile, Christian values and theology provide the vocabulary for young believers, helping these migrants to reconfigure the capitalist logic of work, success, and prosperity during daily work (Yoo, 2021).

With these foundations in place, this thesis focuses on the Christianity revival among rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen and aims to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving religious landscape by focusing on two key phenomena: the increasing social support provided by urban churches to rural-urban migrants and the potential interaction of these migrants' religious subjectivities, ethics, and agency with new theological interpretations and the complex experience of Christianity in a highly secular China.

1.1.2 The possibilities of postsecularity among migrant Christians

A substantive body of research has been documented to interpret this remarkable revival in the post-reform era, which includes the moral and spiritual vacuum caused by a drastic social change (Bay, 2003; Lee, 2007), alternative or antidote to problems caused by modernization (Yang, 2005), the change of state-society relations (Feuchtwang, 2000; Potter, 2003; Yang M, 2008), and the well-known triple religious market theory (Yang, 2006). F.G. Yang (2006) develops a triple religious market model arguing that religion in China often functions according to a market mentality and that the religious market can be divided into the red (officially recognized area), gray (ambiguous legal area), and black (legally suppressed black area) markets. His analyses intriguingly reveal that the strong regulative power imposed by the state apparatus "cannot effectively reduce religion;" rather, it "complicates the religious market by pushing religious organizations and believers into the black and gray markets" (F.G. Yang, 2011, p.117).

Though these explanations indeed provide a general overview of revivalism in reform-era China, they may lead to specific theoretical difficulties in understanding the role of religion among rural-urban migrants within the context of rapid modernization and neoliberal ethics. Each of these theoretical reflections does not move beyond a macro-structural narrative of religious revitalization under state dominance, lacking a more nuanced understanding of how the complex spaces and subjectivities of religion are lived out in the everyday practice of ordinary life. Indeed, while religious resurgence can be viewed as part of macrosocial changes, religion operates more at the micro-level within daily praxis, being felt, performed, and even negotiated at the local and everyday levels (Chau, 2008; Cao, 2010; Kang, 2016). Moreover, these reflections presuppose a separation between state ideologies and the sacred, attempting to map out discrete, mutually exclusive

spheres. In this sense, religion is often reductively interpreted as a "preconceived system of meanings and cosmologies" that naturally opposes the hegemonic state-capital coalition (Gao & Qian, 2020, p.2). This is particularly the case for those rural-urban migrants as Shenzhen is the city experiencing entrenchment of secular modernity and simultaneously Christian revival, therefore such interpretations leave a significant gap in understanding how religion contributes to the formation and consolidation of new socio-economic relations, values, and experiences, and what possible new religious subjectivities emerge in this process.

In light of this, the recent rise of postsecularity in geography may offer new perspectives for understanding the current religious revival among rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen. The geography of secularity and postsecularity has emerged as a burgeoning field over recent years as a normative description of the re-emergence of religion in public spheres and as a critique of the secularization thesis (Beaumont & Baker, 2011; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Olson *et al*., 2013; Gao, Qian & Yuan, 2018; Tse, 2014; Cloke *et al*., 2019). As Habermas (2006; 2010) posits, the postsecular present marks a notable shift towards the resurgence of a public, collective consciousness of religiosity and the heightened visibility of religions in the public sphere. Postsecular theories do not assume the cessation of secularization; rather, they underscore the necessity of critically re-examining secularist ideologies and the secularization paradigm to accommodate new religious realities (Olson *et al.,* 2014). In other words, the postsecular approach serves as a self-reflective, critical rethinking and reformulation of the secularization theory revisiting religion as an ethical and self-reflective project that supplies key building blocks for the values and ideologies of secular modernity, rather than merely advocating for the revival of religious practices (Cloke *et al.,* 2019). Within this geographical research into postsecualrity, two analytical paths can be applied to examine the interplay between Christianity and secular modernity in urban churches for rural-urban migrants and how Christianity shapes migrant Christians' everyday subjectivities, embodied experiences in the city, and the meanings of living.

One line of inquiry, informed by Habermas's postsecular critiques, investigates the increasingly prominent role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) as a sign of emerging postsecualrity (Beaumont, 2008; 2019; Cloke, May & Williams, 2020; Williams, 2015). While many FBO activities operate within the religious-secular divide, they actively create new spaces for care and welfare and protest against poverty, social marginalization, austerity governance, and neoliberal capitalism. On the one hand, faith-based organizations could negotiate neoliberal economy and governance through the provision of social welfare and care to people in need but sometimes are co-opted into the latter. The state not only channels the risk and responsibility of welfare provision into enlisted FBOs but also extends its control of marginalized and socially excluded people through theologically mediated discourses of social equality and institutional arrangements (Hackworth, 2012; Williams, Cloke, & Thomas, 2012). Moreover, recent studies have focused on the examination of postsecular rapprochement, reflecting a particular form of "crossing-over" in the public arena between the religious and the secular(Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Williams, 2015), as religion provides ethical impulses (for example, universal love) that subvert, resist and rework neoliberal forms of care, thus restoring

ethics and hopes beyond the logics perpetuated by the state and the market (Cloke *et al*., 2019). In some cases, it is suggested that these spaces of postsecularity have not only blurred boundaries between the religious and the secular but have also opened up alternative imaginaries and practices with a capacity to generate the possibility for new kinds of ethical spaces and subjectivities.

Another critical path in the critique of secularization explores postsecular ethics as a self-reflective project, shedding light on how postsecular subjectivities are formed and embedded within secular contexts. This approach aligns with Taylor's (2007) notion of the "disenchantment" of secular societies, which makes way for hybrid and flexible religiosities. This body of literature highlights the emergence of new forms of ethicality—both spatially and subjectively—in which specific postsecular technologies operate, thereby re-examining social relationships between the sacred and the profane (Olson *et al*., 2013). In this sense, religion is understood as subjectivity shaped by and embedded within a field of diverse social meanings. Such analyses draw on poststructural and feminist contributions to ethics (Braidotti, 2008; Vasilaki, 2016) to challenge liberal conceptions of the subject as a self-contained moral agent, instead emphasizing the relationalities that shape the process of becoming ethical subjects. In doing so, they frame ethicality and religion as something people "do," not merely a demographic category. Overall, this focus on ethicality foregrounds an analysis of the spaces, technologies, and contested politics through which ethical sensibilities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed. Crucially, it explores how ethical subjectivities connect to political mobilization. In this context, postsecularity offers a conceptual tool to discern how subjectivities are shaped by neoliberal logic in late-capitalist societies, as well as how more hopeful and insurgent ethical sensibilities can emerge through religious and secular collaboration (Cloke & Williams, 2018). Moreover, the experience of religious migrant labourers suggests postsecularity could be found in the interstices of austere neoliberalised governance and popular state-led atheist ideology, where subjectivities of religious individuals negotiate between the secular and the religion, and in this case, secular conditions are not the antecedents to postsecular impulses, but rather co-exist and co-evolve with the latter, relying on secular conditions to frame religious interpretations, ethos and identities (Gao *et al*., 2018).

Grounded on the theories mentioned above, the central aim of this thesis is to open up a new paradigm in China's studies of religion by bringing existing research on religious revival in China into dialogue with the emerging scholarship of postsecularity. Broadly speaking, central to the scholarship of postsecularity is the common concerns approach about how new religious subjectivities, theo-ethics, and agency are made possible under the secular condition of being. In this thesis, I carefully examine the possibilities of postsecularity in Shenzhen from the following two theoretical perspectives. First, as urban churches, particularly migrant churches, have increasingly assumed the role of providing social services and care amidst the state's neoliberal reforms, I interrogate the possible theo-ethics within migrant churches and examine how migrant workers interact with Christian Churches through the lens of lived religion, which

present the lived enactment of Christian theo-ethics (in **Chapter 6**) and potential encounters of migrant Christians off/online within the religious community (in **Chapter 8**).

Second, the rise of Christianity among rural-urban migrants opens a path for us to explore the malleable and hybrid religious subjectivities and agencies co-produced by the religious and the secular. Alongside the trend that migrant Christians increasingly turn to theological discourses and interpretations, as well as spiritual experiences, to constitute their everyday, lived, and embodied subjectivities. Religions supply ordinary people with a system of vocabularies to make sense of and negotiate intersectional secular processes, such as changing economic conditions, gender, family, mobility and migration, and multicultural encounters. By focusing on the recent rise of Calvinist theology among young migrant Christians, this research examines how these postsecular subjectivities, ethics, and agency are formed and re-configured in the intersectionality of state ideologies, capitalism, and religious sensibilities (in **Chapter 5**). For example, in **Chapter 7**, I focus specifically on the non-confrontational religious agency of female migrant Christian groups through a postsecular perspective, exploring the embodied and emotional interacting process of religious agency and the intersectional power matrix.

Building on this contextual and theoretical foundation, this thesis contributes to the geographies of secularity and postsecularity, moving beyond the normative trajectory of Western modernization by examining the potential emergence of new forms of religiosity, subjectivities, agency, and networks among rural-urban migrant Christians within China's neoliberal secular context. Additionally, this research addresses recent scholarly calls to investigate "lived religion" and adopt an intersectional approach in the study of religious groups. This allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the multifaceted and complex everyday lives, as well as the embodied experiences, of these groups within highly secularized social environments (as will be elaborated in subsequent sections).

1.2 Mapping migrant Christians in Shenzhen

1.2.1 Towards an intersectional framework

Notwithstanding this thesis's focus on the discussion of postsecularity in post-reform China, I do not presuppose postsecularity as an ontological condition. Instead, I carefully examine the spatial conditions and multiple layers of power relations, lived experiences, and identities in which new religious subjectivities and agency are conditioned and engendered. Rather than taken-for-granted singular categories of "ethnic communities" or "marginalized subgroups," the migrant Christian communities are experiencing the social construction of multiple identities, including rurality, ethnicity, and gender, which shapes how social inequalities are experienced and manifested in migrants' everyday lives. These communities arise from the complex interplay of various opposing social forces, such as the nationwide "Christian fever," substantial rural-to-urban migration driven by China's reform policies, and the state's regulatory barriers concerning

religion and rural migrant labor. These intersecting power structures have interlocked and produced a productive and governable body (Cao, 2010; Gao & Hopkins, 2022; Pun, 2005). Simultaneously, their multiple identities and subjectivities, particularly their religious identities, continually negotiate and interact with social inequalities in their urban daily lives (Gao *et al*., 2018; Gao & Qian, 2020). This phenomenon calls for a more nuanced analysis of the complex and contingent intersecting power relations migrants experience within situated social contexts in their daily lives (Collins, 2019). In this thesis, I argue that the intersectional approach provides a vigorous analytical tool to address and advance the understanding of postsecular subjectivity within secular conditions by acknowledging how different forms of powers and lived experiences mutually constitute.

Over the past decade, the concept of intersectionality has worked beyond being a merely abstract concept to offer a framework for understanding and analysing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences (Anthia, 2012; Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016; Hopkins, 2019). Drawing from and carrying the legacy of academic black feminism and social movements (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991), intersectionality now has engaged in the discussion of the dynamics of difference and sameness, facilitating consideration of gender, race, and other axes of power in a wide range of political discussions and academic disciplines such as history, sociology, feminist studies, anthropology, as well as geography. Within the field of human geography, recently, we have seen significant growth in work employing intersectionality in varing fields, such as masculinities (Hopkins & Noble, 2009), gender and race (Fisher, 2015), the experiences of young people (Gutierrez & Hopkins, 2014), the family migrant (Gao & Hopkins, 2022), feminism and animals (Hovorka, 2015). These contributions to intersectional geographies have widely engaged in the issues of sexuality, gender, race, and other matters of inequality and politics.

Yet, as Knapp (2005) contends, intersectionality often becomes a term without being concretised, "a formula merely to be mentioned, being largely stripped of the baggage of concretion, of context and history" and a "fast-travelling concept" (Knapp, 2005, p.255). Although this is a noteworthy perspective and one with which I concur, Hopkins asserts that "geographers are permitted to use intersectionality but must do so ethically and with care" (2019, p. 939). As a cultural geographer, I attend to the theoretical framework intersectionality would provide in interpreting the complicated phenomenon that contains multiple identities and social divisions within specific geographic settings. Following this, I will elucidate the necessity and importance of employing intersectionality in research on migrant Christian communities in Shenzhen.

Firstly, utilizing the framework of intersectionality provides a valid approach to look into the interconnectedness of various social categories relating to migrant's experience (Cho *et al*., 2013). Rather than seeing the social inequality as unconnected to categories such as race, gender, age, and citizenship, an intersectional lens posits that differences in social justice reflect interlocking systems of power. As an analytical tool, intersectionality considers categories such as race, class, gender, sexuality,

nationality, ethnicity, and age, while often invisible, to work together and mutually shape one another, providing a powerful way of analysing how intersecting power relations produce social inequalities migrants meet. As Patricia Hill Collins (2000) states, identity categories intersect with one another to create an interlocking structure of inequalities and power that she calls the "matrix of domination." In this way, intersectionality provides insight into the intricate nature of social inequality, emphasizing that "when it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.2).

Although intersectionality engages in the exploration of the multi-faceted nature of identities, it does not reduce the complexity of power constructions into a single social division, as has been customarily the case in stratification theories (Yuval-Davis, 2015). Lesley McCall (2005) conceptualizes the intersectionality as anti-categorical, intra-categorical, and inter-categorical complexities, which presents the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories within the intersectional methodology. In light of it, McCall (2005) suggests the unevenness of the forms of inequality, in which some forms of inequality are more salient than others, rendering visible the central role in shaping the experiences of oppression. Meanwhile, she also points out that different social inequalities mutually shape and interact with one another thus intersectional inequalities are not additive as some forms of inequality might condition other forms (McCall, 2005). In this sense, as Yuval-Davis (2015, p.94) argues, within the framework of intersectionality, different social divisions may "constitute each other" and, at the same time, be "irreducible to each other". As such, intersectionality is a lot more than simply multiple identities.

Secondly, intersectionality is not simply about identity politics; it also provides a relational and situated context to understand the ways migrant Christians inhabit and navigate their multiple subjectivities (Collins, 2015; 2019). Collins and Bilge (2016) discuss the key ideas that underpin intersectionality and identify six key characteristics: social inequality; power relations; relationality; social context; complexity; and social justice. By social context, they refer to the examination of intersecting power relations, specifically emphasizing the importance of considering the different historical, intellectual, and political contexts that shape these relations. In light of this, "attending to social context grounds intersectional analysis" (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 29). Anthias (2002, 2008) also uses the notion of "translocational positionality" to theorize intersectionality in migration studies, which emphasises the intersections of different social positions of migrants, which may vary and be reconfigured in translocational contexts. A migrant may be in a contradictory position of advantage and disadvantage, exclusion and inclusion, simultaneously at different locations (Anthias, 2012). In this sense, intersectionality serves as a tool that is "highly sensitive to the geographical, social, and temporal locations of particular individual or collective social actors" (Yuval-Davis, 2015, p. 95), aiding in framing migrant studies "within a contextual, dynamic, and processual analysis that recognizes the interconnectedness of different identities and hierarchical structures" (Anthias, 2012, p. 102).

Ultimately, these arguments suggest that intersectionality enables a deeper exploration of the complexities of the migrant experience, embodied within social context and relationality, particularly in understanding the role of place, space, and scale when working with intersectionality (Hopkins, 2019). In studying migrant Christians, we also pay attention to situate rural-urban migrants within a specific social setting in which they are affected by, or negotiate with, marginalised policy settings, highly secular values, and the neoliberal labour regime in Shenzhen.

1.2.2 Experiencing the intersectional inequalities in the city

In this section, I will list three major social injustices that migrants, Christian or otherwise, will encounter in their urban life: *hukou* system, neoliberal governmentality, and the gender issue.

Hukou system

The *Hukou system*, as an institutional legacy left from the former socialist system, still works as the most important institutional mechanism, rendering most basic urban social and economic benefits provided by the urban governments inaccessible to rural-urban migrants in the present (Solinge, 1999; Chan, 1994; 2009; 2019; Chen & Fan, 2016). The Chinese *hukou* (household registration) system used to serve as a significant state tool for restricting internal physical movement (Chan & Zhang, 1999), and has now become one of the most important mechanisms, determining entitlement to public welfare, urban services and, more broadly, full citizenship. Under this system, population in China was divided into the privileged urban-*hukou* and marginalized rural-*hukou*. Even while bearers of rural-*hukou*, through rural-urban migrations, became the backbone of the manufacturing sector and basic service industries, they are treated as second-class citizens, without the right to settle in cities as permanent residents or access to most public benefits and welfare enjoyed by urban residents (Chan & Ren, 2018; Chen & Fan, 2016). In this sense, with the implementation of the *hukou* system, current urbanization, which counts those migrants working in the city as urban residents in the statistics, but deems them as "temporary" by law, is *de facto* a "limited urbanization" or "semi-urbanization" for it has not achieved long-term settlement (Wang, 2006; Chan, 2009). This is signified by the term for rural migrant laborers "*nongmingong,*" which translates as "peasant worker." This system, as Pun (2005) trenchantly criticizes, facilitates the creation of a highly exploitative mechanism of labour appropriation, as it justifies the extraction of migrant labour without obligating the state and employers to secure migrants' survival and welfare in cities. Because of the existence of an institutional regime and the absence of radical reform addressing this institutionalized marginality, excluded as outsiders in the cities, most of the rural-urban migrants have lacked social supports that are vital in helping them settle and make a living in the modernized city.

Neoliberal governmentality

In the post-Mao era, the neoliberal narrative generated by economic reform has extensively expanded into wider socio-economic aspects of life, significantly impacting rural-urban migrants. Within this trend, migrant labourers have increasingly become the "object targets" for neoliberal governance that facilitate and justify the global division of labour and the transnational movement of capital (Buckley, 2013; Ong, 2007; Pun & Lu, 2010). Regulating the bodies of migrant labourers, viewed as one of the primary mechanisms of neoliberal governance, not only works on the utility and bodily needs of human beings but also involves the process of subjectivization through which neoliberal ideologies are articulated.

First, the alliance of the state and capitalism enforces economy-centered governance on rural-urban migrants to accommodate and govern migrant workers' everyday lives, thereby obtaining a large amount of cheap labor thus diminishing capital's costs. Though the spatial-temporal processes of neoliberalization are variegated, the core emphasis on market utility justifies the curtailment of social welfare, the dismantling of public services, and the persistent disregard for labour rights claims (Brenner & Theodore, 2002). In China, the state compels rapid economic growth by prioritizing the market in policymaking, creating a much more flexible and precarious labour regime. This coalition of the state and global capitalism has imposed coercive regulation and discipline on migrant laborers to shape their neoliberal adaptability. For instance, the intensive expansion of factory dormitories encouraged by the local government has created a "factory dormitory regime," which accommodates the large number of low-skilled and low-paid migrant workers yet simultaneously detaches them from the urban welfare system to minimize the burden on urban public housing (Pun, 2005; Smith & Pun, 2006). This modern dormitory regime also implemented a series of strict disciplines and sophisticated surveillance technologies of everyday lives to effectively manage migrant workers and enhance their productivity (Smith & Pun, 2006).

Second, the hegemony of neoliberalism can also circulate and reproduce at the micro level, refashioning new subjective forms and manipulating belief, desire, and affect, which may be more evident among migrant Christians. The Chinese notion of *suzhi* (quality), for example, has been analyzed as emblematic of the state's agenda of cultivating personal quality. Kipnis (2007) posits that the state-endorsed discourse of *suzhi* embodies the neoliberal logic of class differentiation. Typically, *suzhi* is equated with an individual's economic utility, determined by market value and human capital. Consequently, the *suzhi* discourse is perceived as a "blame the victim" governance strategy, which by categorizing rural-urban migrants as possessing low *suzhi,* the discourse ascribes their marginalization to individual quality, thereby actually depoliticizes class and other hierarchical differences that legitimate institutional marginalization through neoliberal ideologies (Anagnost, 2004; Jacka, 2009). Meanwhile, neoliberal discourses of development and competition have been "internalized as a fable of self-making" (Anagnost, 2004, p. 197), replacing Maoist class vocabularies. Individual bodies are now regarded as sites for educational investment and human capital development. In this sense, individual success and improvement mean self-improvement, continual attainment of human capital, and the realization of one's economic potential (Anagnost, 2008). Overall, neoliberalism in China has

served as "a set of malleable technologies and practices," operating within a local socio-economic environment (Zhang, 2012, p. 660), and has had a profound impact on rural-urban migrants at both macro and micro levels.

Gender

The inequalities experienced by rural-urban migrants in China are not only institution-based but also gendered. Female rural-urban migrants endure "double exploitation" in the urban labour market, as they are doubly marginalized due to their identities as both women and rural residents (Fan, 2004; Wang, 2015). Despite the Mao era's efforts to integrate women into public labor for socialist economic development, patriarchal relations remained intact, primarily perpetuated through the unequal sexual division of domestic labor within families (Zhang, 2014). This patriarchal inequality has persisted into the post-Mao era. Moreover, outside the family, traditional gender expectations and the division of labour have continued to impede women's career development (Fan, 2004; Jacka, 2006; Wang, 2015). As they age, women face worsening disadvantages in the labor market. Pun's (2004; 2005) study of Chinese "*dagongmei*" (working girls) reveals that young, single women are more congruent with the neoliberal factory regime, which relies on docile, productive, and flexible young labor. Given that, compared with males, female migrants are burdened with the "double burden" of labour, working both outside and inside the home and simultaneously suffering from discrimination in the job market.

Overall, an intersectional approach to migrants attends to the multiple social structures and inequalities that interact to shape the specific positions and identities of migrants within the social context (Anthias, 2012). Given the multiple identities and social injustices on migrant Christians, in this study, rather than abstractly conceptualizing the group of migrant Christians experiencing various social injustices as a singular oppressed entity, we adopted a more grounded approach by employing intersectionality to examine the range of social issues they encounter within lived experience. In the subsequent empirical chapters, I will elaborate on how this "power matrix" interplays or even shapes their subjectivity and religiosity through their everyday religious practices.

1.3 Being a Christian: lived religion and rural-urban migrants' everyday faith

In this thesis, I also draw upon the concept of lived religion to further explore and capture migrant Christians' sensual, affective, embodied, and other nuanced complexities of their daily religious practice within or outside Christian communities. As mentioned above, the migrant Christian community in Shenzhen is experiencing intersectional social injustices in their daily lives. To deeply understand how their belief is "lived" and practised within the context of a highly secular city, and to provide a grounded narrative of the potential postsecularity among them, an approach regarding their emotional and personal life, embodied and

various practices that compose everyday religious life is required. Given this, a lived religion approach presents a useful analytical lens to understand how their religious world-making has been practised and embedded in their lived experience in Shenzhen. In this section, I do not intend to offer an extensive overview of the history and trajectories of the concept but rather highlight a few central ideas on lived religion and bring them into conversation with the religious geographies of migrants, looking for what this approach can offer scholars interested in migrant Christians in China, and more broadly identity-making, religion, and place in the rural-urban migrant's everyday lives.

1.3.1 Lived religion in Human Geography

Over the past two decades, the concept and approach of lived religion has spread from the discussions of scholars based in North America (Ammerman, 2007; Hall, 1997; McGuire,2008; Orsi,2010) into work across many countries and continents. Rather than receding into the fragmentation of a differentiated society under secularization theory, lived religion—as identity, belief, practice, and cultural process— continues to create meaning in everyday life. This shift goes beyond standardized survey questions about beliefs and memberships to the everyday experiences of ordinary people, particularly those previously excluded and marginalized, such as women, populations of color, and people in the Global South, who may not necessarily rely on any religious group or institution for support (Ammerman, 2014). The study of lived religion also emphasizes the necessity of understanding the complexity, diversity, and fluidity of religion-as-practiced by real individuals (see Ammerman, 2007; McGuire, 2008), as "religion comes into being in an ongoing, dynamic relationship with the realities of everyday life" (Orsi, 1997, p. 7). In line with this perspective, increased attention has been paid to the embodied, emotional, and other aspects of everyday religious practice in the real world. Overall, a focus upon the lived religion signifies an epistemological shift towards the everyday world of material culture and spiritual practice (Ammerman, 2014).

Since Kong's (2001) call to study religious practices beyond the "officially sacred," geographers of religion have contributed significantly to understanding the lived, embodied, and affective dimensions of religion (Hopkins, 2009; Hopkins, Kong & Olson, 2013; Olson *et al*., 2013; Taylor, Falconer & Snowdon, 2014). Geographic approaches to lived religion have been applied to the investigation of a wide array of topics, ranging from digital prayer (Gao *et al*., 2021), Christian therapeutic worship (Williams, 2016; 2020), and veiling practices (Gökariksel, 2009). Within this body of work, geographers have turned to material, embodied, emotional, and sensory geographies, focusing on the affect, smell, sight, sound, and materiality of worship and seeking to delineate the spatial dimensions involved in how individuals imagine, construct, negotiate, perform, and experience religion and religious spaces, identities and practices. In geographical studies, considering the concept of lived religion expands the scope of inquiry beyond institutional domains to explore novel forms of religious experience. Geographical analyses of lived religion have primarily concentrated on embodiment and affect, highlighting that religiosity is not merely dictated by institutional beliefs and teachings but is instead shaped by emotional processes and embodied practices (Olson *et al*.,

2013; Holloway, 2013). A non-representational and phenomenological approach has been employed by religious geographers to advance the understanding of the performative and affectual nature of personal religious experience and to consider the "poetics" of place (Finlayson, 2012; Holloway, 2006). Within this trend, many interests also turn to new spiritualities, such as New Age, yoga, and Taoist tai chi (Finlayson, 2012; Rose, 2010) that emerged in everyday modern life and function as critiques of the homogeny of secular rationalities (Bartolini *et al.,*2017; Finlayson, 2012; Holloway, 2006). Moreover, capturing the emotional and everyday aspects of lived religion does not equate to abandoning discussions on institutional religion; rather, it calls on a more comprehensive analysis of religious practices that happen in daily life. Recent advancements in the sociology of religion advocate for moving beyond the binary opposition of institutional versus everyday religion to provide a more nuanced understanding of the lived religious experiences of ordinary individuals (Ammerman, 2016; Bender et al., 2012; Edgell, 2012). As Edgell (2012,p. 254) argues, institutionalized religion supports everyday religious practice by offering "the resources (e.g. organisational infrastructure) as well as the cultural coherence (e.g. norms and doctrines). Similarly, Ammerman (2016) highlights the overlap between everyday religion and institutional religion, emphasizing the need to incorporate an institutional layer of analysis into the study of lived religion. In this way, the focus shifts to "the substance of lived religious practice, rather than what it excludes" (p. 9). This study, therefore, seeks to depart from the traditional research perspective of binary oppositions of the everyday and the formal organization by examining migrant Christians' religious practices in both mundane practices and religious organizations, encompassing their practices and interactions with and within religious organizations. In doing so, I investigate how sacred experiences are produced and negotiated in the context of real urban life.

Meanwhile, the emphasis on the practised aspects of religion in lived religion studies has enabled geographers to expand their understanding of religion in the world. This approach moves beyond transcend the clear-cut distinction between immanence and transcendence by positioning religion within "a field of diverse social meanings to re-examine social relationships between the sacred and the profane" (Olson *et al*., 2013, p.1432). As Tse (2014, p. 209) argues, the current manifestation of lived religions can be understood as what Taylor (2007) describes as the "nova effect"—the emergence of new religious subjectivities made possible by secular conditions of belief. Lived religions, therefore, are integral to these new religious subjectivities within the modern moral order, reflecting the fragmentation characteristic of a differentiated society. In this sense, studying lived religion involves recognizing the agency of individuals within religious communities to construct their own intersectional (religious or secular) identities (Tse, 2014). Against this backdrop, lived religion, by emphasizing the embodied and practiced nature of religion (see Ammerman, 2014, 2020; Edgell, 2012; McGuire, 2008; Neitz, 2011), challenges the certainties of traditional religious categories and their assignment to clearly fixed spaces and sheds light on the fluidity of the boundaries between sacred and secular, or rather, on the complex coexistences and intersections between the two, at the same time, urges geographers to pay closer attention to the social contexts in which lived religion is constituted and embedded (Gao *et al*., 2021).

Given that concerns with lived religion delve into the intricacies of how religion is "lived" in the everyday lives of individuals, I argue that a lived religion approach is essential for examining the religious experiences of migrant Christians in China. Their lived religiosity represents a situated assemblage of neoliberal social order, embodied and affective practices, subaltern subjectivity, and church teachings, which yearn for spiritual experiences and fulfilment in response to, or mediation of, the highly secular world in which they live (see Cao, 2010; Gao *et al*., 2018). Previous studies on religious house churches and migrant Christians in China have primarily focused on analyses of church-state relations, religious policy, or the roles of church leaders (Dunch, 2008; Feuchtwang & Wang, 2001; Goossaert & Palmer, 2011; Huang, 2014; Qu, 2011). In this study, I focus on the emerging postsecularity among migrant Christians in Shenzhen—manifested mainly in their everyday practice and the construction of religiosity both within and outside the church. Therefore, it is significant to provide nuanced understandings and sophisticated accounts of diverse embodiment, intersectionality, practices, and encounters in their everyday religious lives through the lens of lived Christianity.

Against this backdrop, in this research, I place emphasis on the notion of lived religion and enquire into the complex and dynamic dimension of religious identity through the lens of lived Christianity. The term "lived religion" has long been criticized for often lacking explicit definition and relying on assumed shared understandings among scholars; therefore, scholars need to critically assess the scope of lived religion scholarship in their research (Ammerman, 2016; Knibbe & Kupari, 2020). In this research, the scope of the investigation into the lived religion of migrant Christians in Shenzhen primarily includes their participation in various church activities (including online ones). I also pay special attention to exploring unofficial spaces and alternative modes of daily religious praxis, such as workplace, home, WeChat, and other social media, which are crucial for us to reveal how religion is encountered and experienced in everyday among migrant Christians. Moreover, I primarily elucidate two aspects of the lived religion of rural-urban migrants: (1) the examination of the emotional and embodied aspects of daily religious life, focusing on experiences of immanence within migrants' embodied transcendence; (2) the investigation of the social interactions that facilitate lived religion, analysing how religion is (co-)produced and utilized in urban-rural migrants' social context. By doing so, I explore how migrants' sacred experiences are produced and negotiated in urban life. These two dimensions will be further elaborated upon in the subsequent section.

1.3.2 Lived Christianity: embodiment, emotion, and social interaction

In lived religion studies, a particularly important characteristic is a focus on the embodied, affective, and emotional aspects of the spiritual and the transcendent (McGuire,2008;2016; Orsi,2010). Geographers of religion have noted that religious subjects "are (re)produced through a variety of embodied acts and bodily practices," with the body understood as both a subject and an agent of religious practice (Holloway & Valins, 2002, p. 8). Meanwhile, affective experiences participate actively in the expression and production of

religious spaces and subjectivities through, for example, experiencing "inner warmth" or breaking down in tears during prayer, which serves as "physical marks of the Holy Spirit at work" (Williams, 2016, p. 50). A study of lived religion can contribute to a better understanding of migrant-lived religious practices through, for instance, examining participation in the performance of rituals (such as comportment during prayer) and by considering emotion and affect within this sacred experience. I specifically focus on the female migrant group, as well as their emotional constructions both within and outside the church, and their embodied religious practices. Moreover, this new understanding of religion through embodiment and emotion may present a promising avenue for re-evaluating the traditional dichotomy of sacred versus profane spaces, as it emphasizes the relational nature of spatial construction, challenging dominant religious categorizations and disrupting assumptions about the "wholly sacred or wholly profane" of particular sites (Olson *et al*., 2013, p. 1424), which helps us to better analyse the variegated and "unofficial" religious spaces for migrant churches within urban everyday life.

Alongside embodied and affective thinking in lived religion, attention also needs to be paid to the social contexts in which religious individuals' lived religion is constituted and embedded. The examination of lived religion not only involves examining how individual practices contribute to the construction and reshaping of religious spaces and authorities, but perhaps more is needed on simultaneously, how everyday realities influence individuals' understanding of faith per se through daily religious practices.

The relationship between the sacred and everyday social reality has been fruitfully elaborated in theoretical and empirical writing in religious scholarship. McGuire (2008), for example, points out the multifaceted nature of religion and argues that it comprises "diverse, complex, and ever-changing mixtures of beliefs and practices, as well as relationships, experiences, and commitments" (p.185), underscoring its foundation in social reality. According to Taves (2009), the process of sacralization does not arise spontaneously from experiences of awe, and the objects or concepts that become sacralized are not merely idealized representations of society. Instead, the act of designating something as sacred is embedded within a broader framework of social practices.

Among these discussions, the elaboration of historian Robert Orsi on the interaction between lived religion and everyday life is particularly noteworthy. In his interpretation (1997; 2010), the lived religion approach regards religion as intricately embedded within the 'life-world' framework of existentialist philosophy and phenomenological anthropology (Knibbe & Kupar, 2020), and religion is "the juncture of intimate experience with political and social realities" (2003, p.173). For Orsi (2003), the study of lived religion needs to pay attention to the "ongoing" and interactive nature of religion. Lived religion is inseparable from everyday practices and the relationships constructed around them, and therefore sacred spaces must be understood in the context of real specific sites and relationships (Orsi, 2003).

Similarly, Ammerman (2014) contends that the concept of lived religion denotes the interweaving of religious practice with the everyday lives of people, suggesting that "if finding religion requires finding places where there is only religion, then there is little for us to do" (p.195). In this sense, lived religion cannot be reduced to either simply the grounded enactment of embodied or emotional practices of religion; rather, it is articulated, perceived, negotiated, and renegotiated in the different relationships and social interactions and thus understanding the presence of lived religion depends on recognizing it in the social processes where it is created and deployed (Ammerman, 2014, 196). Recently, social and cultural geographers have also taken note of these interactions, particularly in migrant daily religious practice. For example, the study of the lived religion of migrant workers in South China examines how workers practice their belief as a form of communal life and leisure and, especially, how this daily "religious leisure" interacts with the neoliberal labour regime reality (Gao *et al*., 2021). A new example from McGinty (2023), drawing on two young American Muslim women's everyday lives, shows how migrants' religiosity is integral to different kinds of nonreligious identities and practices in different secular and nonreligious spaces within specific social and political contexts. For these Muslim women, Islam is lived through traditional religious practices like prayer and fasting, but also through activities like painting, teaching art, and participating in political and social activism for social justice and reproductive health, all of which create religious worlds in and through various everyday spaces.

The articulation above encourages an understanding of lived religion not merely as a separate sphere or category, but as inherently intertwined with various everyday practices and social environments. When examining the everyday religious practices of rural-urban migrants, it becomes imperative to take into account the surrounding social context. Their religiosity is often overlooked or underestimated, while simultaneously, these migrants find themselves amidst intersecting pressures within urban life (as mentioned above), which continuously compel their religiosity to negotiate between the sacred and various neoliberal values in this highly secular society.

Therefore, in this study, our analysis will include the vivid words of migrants themselves as narrators and interpreters of their own experiences and histories, expecting those stories to be "both sacred and profane" (Ammerman, 2014, p.201) at the same time, and carefully recognizing that social relations and power structures existing in the varied stories they tell of themselves (Ammerman, 2014; Orsi, 2003). These collections aim to present a grounded and comprehensive landscape of religious practices of migrant Christians, which is not only deeply personal but embedded in specific social and cultural contexts.

Drawing on the approach of "lived religion," this analysis explores the everyday religious practices of migrant Christians in Shenzhen, moving beyond a focus solely on formal religious structures and doctrines to capture the affective and embodied ways in which migrant Christians navigate their faith within the complex urban environment of China. Through our empirical analysis, I contribute to two areas of theoretical development

that are of interest to geographers. Firstly, this research aims to contribute to the religious geographies of migrants and feminist geographies by grasping the affective, emotional, and embodied dimensions of daily religious practices among rural-urban migrants (in **Chapter 6**) and women migrant Christians (in **Chapter 7**). Simultaneously, by providing an empirical description and analysis of the religious practices of rural-urban migrants interacting with the social context they encounter in urban everyday life, I offer a detailed depiction of how their religious subjectivities are shaped and reshaped through the Calvinist theology learning (in **Chapter 5**). Secondly, this research also contributes to recent discussions about rethinking religious space, moving from formal and institutional spaces to everyday practices (Holloway, 2006; Kong, 2010), especially in the digital realm (Gao *et al*., 2024). By examining online worship, I demonstrate how digital prayer blurs institutional boundaries between individuals, religious groups on social media, and the dynamic micro-spatial politics of online religious communities within this process (in **Chapter 8**).

1.4 Research themes and questions

Based on the arguments above, there are two main themes concerning the possible postsecularity of China in this thesis. First, is how to comprehend the complex and lived process of faith-making and subjectivity-making among rural-urban migrants within intersectional secular conditions of being, religious values, and nation-secularization. Second is what exactly the configurations of secularity and possible postsecularity look like in urban China and the extent to which these are shifting in response to migration and other social pressures. Given that, the following research questions are examined in an effort to address the research themes of this thesis:

(1) What are the distinctive configurations of secularity and postsecularity in post-reform China?
(2) How do migrant Christians articulate and construct their religious subjectivities within the neoliberal transition in Shenzhen?
(3) How do urban churches contribute to the social inclusion of rural-urban migrants, and in what ways might postsecularity emerge from this process?
(4) How can an intersectional approach and the concept of lived religion offer new insights into the study of postsecular subjectivity in China?

1.5 The structure of the thesis

Following this introductory chapter, **Chapter 2** presents a theoretical outline concerning the geography of postsecularity, reflections on the secularity and postsecularity of China, and the spatial conditions of postsecularity in Shenzhen. **Chapter 3** provides the essential political background and policy environment of Christianity in China. In **Chapter 4**, the research context, including local history and political-economic

conditions, is discussed, along with methodological reflections on research methods, procedures, positionality, and reflexivity.

The following four chapters describe and analyze empirical material, each focusing on distinct phenomena that collectively represent a comprehensive picture of the religious lives of rural-urban migrants. These chapters are organized around four prominent themes: Calvinist theology, care infrastructures, female religious agencies, and online religious communities. Each empirical chapter can be read independently, with its specific theoretical framework.

Chapter 5 examines the growing popularity of Calvinist theology among young migrant Christians in Shenzhen, demonstrating how Protestant Christianity provides opportunities for migrant Christian believers to construct "new narratives" that enable them to reconcile their faith with secular pursuits within the context of their new and uncertain urban lives. Through the discussion of complex relationship between theological discourse, neoliberal ethics, and the labor regime, this chapter sheds light on the increasingly blurred religious-secular boundary within the spiritual landscape of postsecular China.

Chapter 6 provides an in-depth look at the social infrastructure of migrant churches in Shenzhen through the lens of theo-ethics, exploring how urban churches function as social infrastructures in a neoliberal megacity and how Christian theo-ethics offer care and justice to marginalized migrant workers through their lived religious practices.

Chapter 7 focuses on the lived experiences of female Christians, examining their participation in church life, choice of marriage partners, and family dynamics. It offers a detailed investigation of women's religious agency, specifically "non-confrontational" agency, within the intersection of secular values, traditional culture, and church teachings in Shenzhen.

In **Chapter 8**, the research perspective shifts to the online realm. Using Peter Sloterdijk's sphere theory as a conceptual framework, this chapter elaborates on the development of online religious communities and the use of the social application WeChat by Chinese Christians for religious practices during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis by summarizing the key research findings, central arguments, and contributions of this study.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework of this thesis by offering a grounded dialectical analysis of secularity and postsecularity, examining their geographical implications, and mapping the emergence of postsecularity within the context of China. By grounded dialogue with critiques of the secularization theory and discussion with postsecularity theory, I argue that the postsecularity in this study can serve as a critical, self-reflective reconsideration and reformulation of the self-assured secularization thesis within the specific social-cultural context. The boundary between the religious and the secular become more fluid and constantly re-produced. I propose two possible theoretical registers relevant to this inquiry within geographical studies of postsecularity. The first draws on Cloke et al. (2019) to examine how postsecularity is spatially, affectively, and performatively contextualized through the interactions between religious actors and the non-religious within faith-based spaces in order to deal with neoliberal welfare and ethical crisis. The second framework focuses on postsecular subjectivity, emphasizing the need to analyze the "conditions of belief" that underpin the compatibility of postsecular practices and subjectivities within specific socio-cultural and spatial contexts. After mapping the Chinese context of secularity and possible postsecularity, I argue the exploring postsecularity in the city of Shenzhen will focus on the theo-ethical praxis of urban migrant churches and the rural-urban migrants' religiosity and subjectivity within their intersectional experience.

2.2 Secularization theory and postsecularity

Classic secularization theory describes three key ways in which religion interacts with modern society (Casanova, 1994; 2007): the decline of religious beliefs and practices; the privatization of religion; and the differentiation of the secular spheres (state, economy, science). However, this theory has faced growing criticism in the academic community in recent years. As Beaumont and Baker (2011, p. 5) observe, "globalized societies on all continents find themselves caught in a series of contradictory dynamics, including simultaneous and dialectical processes of secularization alongside the growing deprivatization of faith and its re-emergence as a shaper of cultural, political, and economic processes."

Some scholars have sought to reformulate the secularization thesis and redeem its explanatory value instead of dismissing it. Charles Taylor's (2007) *A Secular Age* is one of the most widely cited attempts to critically reframe secularism, offering a nuanced exploration of its historical development and contemporary

manifestations. Taylor (2007) focuses on the cultural conditions of secularity; in his view, secularization does not mean the end of religion but means the redefinition and recreation of faith, as faith in modern society is a complex process involving multiple factors, such as the individual's inner life, social culture, and historical traditions. Taylor (2007) argues that we are living within the "immanent frame," in which individuals make sense of the world entirely or mainly based on a secular worldly order, devoid of transcendent knowledge and values. Rationalization, democracy, market economies, and disassociation from religious authority together create new cosmic, social, and moral orders. Modern subjects—religious or otherwise—are constrained by a "stadial consciousness," focused on rational calculation and this-worldly concerns. Therefore, secular modernity creates a system of phenomenological conditions that lead individuals, including religious ones, to adopt non-transcendental mindsets, values, rules, and practices. Meanwhile, he posits that modern individuals are encountering a "cross-pressure" situation, where there is a lived experience of striving to establish new modes of existence within or beyond the "immanent frame." Therefore, in this secular age, we can interpret the rise of individualized spiritualities as a manifestation of what Taylor refers to as the "nova effect," which is the simultaneous emergence of personal spiritual quests and novel religious subjectivities, facilitated by the cross-pressures of secular existence (Tes, 2014).

For Casanova, secularization involves three dimensions: the decline of religious beliefs and practice for individuals, the privatization of beliefs, and the differentiation of the religious from other social spheres (Casanova, 2006). As shown in many social situations, modernity does not always lead to the decline and privatization of religion. For this reason, Casanova (2006, p. 9) agrees with the idea that secularization is "a process of functional differentiation and emancipation of the secular sphere—primarily the modern state, the capitalist market economy, and modern science—from the religious sphere." This idea is still widely accepted in social science. However, the decline in institutional functionality and the trend toward individualization do not necessarily indicate that religion loses influence and relevance either in the political arena and the culture of a society or in the personal conduct of life (Casanova, 2013). Phenomenologically, the religious and the secular are always and everywhere mutually constituted: they are mutually competitive in some cases and reinforce each other in others (Casanova, 2011, p. 54). Meanwhile, rethinking the secularization theory needs to transcend the European core and embrace global comparative perspectives (Casanova, 2013). A proper rethinking of secularization and secularity will be more critically reflexive of the stadial consciousness built into our "secular self-interpretation of modernity" (Casanova, 2013, p.89), which requires "a critical examination of the diverse patterns of differentiation and fusion of the religious and the secular and their mutually constituted across all world religion" (Casanova, 2006, p.10).

In addition to Charles Taylor and José Casanova, Jürgen Habermas has made significant contributions to the discourse on secularity and religion, particularly emphasizing the gradual re-emergence of religion as a relevant force within the public sphere (Habermas, 2006; 2008). Habermas (2010) notes that the differentiation of functional social systems in the twentieth century led churches and religious communities

to retreat to pastoral care and fostered individualized faith practices focused on private ritual, withdrawing from broader societal engagement. However, social changes have arrested and even partially reversed these privatization trends. In the context of postcolonial immigrant societies of the West, social integration of immigrant cultures has been at least partially tied to the question of how to achieve tolerant and hospitable coexistence among diverse religious communities. Furthermore, as Habermas argues, cultural and social modernization does not inherently necessitate depleting religion's public and personal relevance. Under these circumstances, he notes that religion is gaining influence in the public sphere at both national and local levels, both as a community of interpretation—contributing to public opinion on moral and ethical issues—and as a community of service and care, carrying out welfare tasks both without and outside of formal systems of governance (Cloke & Beaumont, 2012, p.36). Habermas (2008) underscores the role of religion in shaping public consciousness regarding immigration and asylum-seeking, addressing the integration of immigrant cultures into postcolonial societies and fostering the coexistence of diverse religious communities within urban spaces.

Overall, these perspectives fundamentally refute the idea of secularization as a singular and linear ultimate telos, detached from geographical and historical contexts. They acknowledge that the social relevance of religion has diminished in modernity to differing extents, although they do not perceive this as a uniform, uncontested phenomenon; instead, they believe there are more intricate and dynamic interactions between the religious and the secular within the current social context. This agenda also argues that scholars must go beyond the Eurocentric assumptions of secularization theory and embrace global comparative viewpoints.

Then, in light of these multiple critiques of secularization, how do we understand the terms postsecular and postsecularity? Currently, some scholars have entered into debates about secularization and the postsecular theory for geographical analysis. For example, Wilford (2010) has tried to rethink the social differentiation of secularization theory through a multidimensional perspective. However, the term "postsecular" has also received much criticism from religious geographers (see, for example, Beckford, 2012; Kong, 2010; Ley, 2011). Beckford (2012) critiques postsecularity, arguing that the concept risks simplistic notions of the secular, and reduces all intricacies and contestations of what counts as "religion" to a single bland category.

Although I agree with these observations, I propose that postsecular approaches might be better seen as critiques of the discursive, normative, and structural presuppositions of secular ideology, advocating for a reevaluation of the role of religion in secularised society and the spatial and categorical premises of secularisation theory. Here, I think Habermas's (2010) analysis of the postsecular offers valuable insight into the implications of the "post-" prefix in this context. Habermas has attempted to chart a middle path between the secular and the religious as potential resources for the normative principles of rights, justice, and freedom. Habermasian postsecular theories do not presuppose the end of secularization, but emphasise that secularist ideologies and the secularisation paradigm need to be thoroughly revisited in order to account for

new religious realities and moral landscapes (Harrington, 2007). In his framework, secular reason, on the one hand, must incorporate the ethical and integrative dimensions of religion as a means of social cohesion and reflective engagement, while refraining from positioning secularity as the ultimate arbiter of religious truth (Habermas, 2010).On the other hand, religious actors are also exposed to the dual pressures of secular and religious worldviews, necessitating to cultivate an epistemic stance reconciling both religious and secular knowledge, leading to "a more reflexive form of religious consciousness" (Habermas, 2008, p.28). Therefore, postsecularism will involve a "complementary learning process in which the secular and the religious sides involve one another" (Habermas, 2010,p.21). In a postsecular context, the boundaries between the religious and the secular are fluid and incessantly re-produced, and there is a mutual learning relationship between the secular and the religious: secular citizens are expected to be more self-reflexive, while religious actors are more sensitive to secular worldviews and concerns. In this sense, the cognitive dissonances between the religious and the secular need to be dealt with by secular and religious actors on equal terms. For Habermas, then, a postsecular society emerges through issues of "how public consciousness is changing as an adjustment to the continued existence of religious communities in a supposedly secularized societal setting" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p.36).

Given that, my engagement with postsecular theory in this thesis is grounded in three key considerations:

(1) The idea of postsecularity reflects an ethical politics and "a normative desire to bring religion and spirituality back into the centre of social concerns," directed towards developing the public and common good (Cloke *et al*. 2019, p.28). As Cloke *et al.* (2019) argue, the concept of the postsecular signifies efforts to comprehend the significance of the coexistence and potential collaboration between secularity and religion in perhaps new ways that relate to contemporary the context of neoliberal politics and affect.
(2) Postsecular theory is also concerned with understanding the coproduction of the religious and the secular in modern societies and the discourses, practices, and moral and political projects associated with this coproduction (Olson *et al.,* 2013). In this way, it emphasizes the need to understand the boundary between the religious and secular is becoming fluid and constantly re-produced. This approach resonates with Charles Taylor's (2007) account of secular conditions of belief – that is, how modern individuals inhabit secularity, and how the individuated quest for spiritual realisation and the formation of new religious subjectivities co-exist with the secular condition of being.
(3) Influenced by Casanova's (2009; 2013) call for global comparative studies of secularisation and secularity, this approach also engages with the geo-historical patterns and fusion of secularity in various institutional contexts (Wilford, 2010; Tse, 2014).

In general, the postsecular perspective in this study serves as a critical, self-reflective reconsideration and reformulation of the self-assured secularization thesis. Rather than simply framing the revival of religious

practices as a form of re-enchantment, it explores the broader possibilities for interaction between the religious and the secular, particularly in the domain of migrant care.

2.3 Geographies of postsecularity

With recent increasing empirical and theoretical engagements with the conceptual umbrella of postsecularity in human geography, there has been a growing examination of diverse empirical interests and approaches exploring the emergence of various spaces of postsecularity (Beaumont, 2008; Beaumont & Baker, 2011; Cloke & Beaumont, 2012; Williams *et al*., 2012; Olson *et al*., 2013; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2015; 2017; Williams, 2015; Bartolini *et al*., 2017; Sutherland, 2017; Gao & Qian, 2018; Qian & Kong, 2018; Cloke *et al*., 2019). Within these geographical scholarships, there are two strands of literature related to the examination of the potential postsecularity among the group of rural-urban migrants in urban China.

One line of scholarship represented by Paul Cloke (2010; 2019), Justin Beaumont (2012;2022), and Andrew Williams (2015) has engaged in "postsecular rapprochement" emerging in the contemporary city. Drawing on ideas from Habermas (2010) and Eder (2002; 2006) that religion is being released back into society in such a way as to reterritorialize public life in the areas of care, welfare and justice in the city, these researchers have charted the increasingly high-profile role of faith-based organisations (FBOs) in the public sphere (Cloke, 2010; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Williams *et al*., 2012), looking for how these arenas of care, welfare, and justice "have proved to be fertile ground for faith-motivated groups and individuals to forsake privatised forms of religion and to engage in more public advocacy and action on behalf of socially and economically marginalised people"(Cloke *et al*., 2019, p.37). The FBOs study in geography focuses on two main bodies of literature that embody emergent postsecular collaborations.

(1) *Spaces of care*

In studies of religious geography, a major focus on faith-based organizations (FBOs) and other religious actors is in relation to their role in welfare provision, civil services, and activism (Beaumont & Cloke, 2012; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013). FBOs are both religious communities and agents of social change which can not only be repositioned as an actor for combating social problems like poverty and social exclusion (Conradson, 2003; Conradson, 2008; Davelaar & Kerstens, 2012; Dierckx *et al*., 2012), but also supply immigrants with a feeling of a "second home" (Ley, 2008; Ehrkamp & Nagel, 2014).

Within these works, some studies have noticed the ambiguous and variegated interconnections between faith, secularism, and neoliberalism within the daily praxis of these care spaces (Beaumont & Dias, 2008; Hackworth, 2012; Williams, Cloke & Thomas, 2012). Although faith-motivated practices could be seen to embody pathways of resistance to the hegemony of neoliberal politics (Williams *et al*., 2012), some

organisations gradually develop some neoliberal tendencies, acting as neoliberal agents, viewing neoliberal values of marketplace efficacy as the criterion for evaluating (Beaumont & Dias, 2008). In some cases, although appearing to fulfil the criteria of "postsecular", faith-based actors merely serve to reinforce a characterisation of religion and even endorse socially regressive policies (Conradson, 2011). The Chinese examples of faith-based praxis also highlight the intricate and dynamic relationship between faith-oriented activities, secularism, and neoliberal politics of subject-formation (Gao, 2020; Gao & Qian, 2020). Faith-based organizations, in these cases, somewhat serve as an active resistance to exploitative labour practices and offer migrant workers support and relief, such as material support and emotional responses to alienation, but, in another way, act like a more humanist and hopeful neoliberal order that legitimizes social inequalities they suffer, thereby promoting they become durable, governable and self-reliant migrant bodies (Gao, 2020).

(2) *Spaces of postsecular rapprochements*

Alongside foci on non-statutory services of care and welfare offered by FBOs, currently, geographers have turned to examine the emergence of "postsecular rapprochements" in the urban spaces, which is the partnership between people of faith and secular individuals and organisations, seeking to come together to offer care, welfare and justice to socially excluded people, within the context of neoliberalism austerity "meantime(s)" (Cloke, 2011; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Cloke *et al*., 2019; Cloke *et al*., 2020; Williams, 2015). Rather than easily engaging in a ritualistic dismissal of faith-based organization (FBO) activity as inherently tied to the neoliberal subject formation(Cloke *et al*., 2020), the examination of postsecular rapprochement aims to highlight the potential within these partnerships "to embody both an expression of resistance to prevailing injustices under global neoliberal capitalism, and an energy and hope in something that brings more justice for all citizens of our cities rather than simply rewarding the privileged few" (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p.32). In these cases, faith-based practices have created spaces of postsecular rapprochement within urban settings, challenging the boundaries between the religious and secular (Williams, 2015; Williams *et al*., 2012), and also fostered alternative imaginaries and approaches, generating possibilities for new ethical spaces and subjectivities, thereby facilitating "shared citizenship, mutual tolerance, reflexive transformation, and crossover ethical narratives" that transcend both secularist and faith-based fundamentalism (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013, p. 41).

Within this line of work, the notion of "theo-ethics" (see Cloke, 2010; 2011), which refers to the significant theological shift in Western Christianity from orthodox theologies towards a more socially engaged faith, becomes crucial in articulating the role theological notions (e.g. around love in *agape* and *caritas*) play in shaping the behaviour of faith-motivated actors. Theo-ethics is not equivalent to conventional theologies or religious values; rather, "it follows an emerging post-phenomenological approach to religion which focuses on conceptualising the lived embodiment of religion" and highlights the way lived religiosity or spirituality is experienced and performed through faith-motivated praxis (Williams, 2015, p.195). Moreover, the articulation of theo-ethics opens up "crossover narratives" between the religious and the secular beyond both

religious and secular fundamentalism, particularly in spaces of care, justice, and protest, to present a more hybrid formation of faith-related identity and practice based on the pursuit of the common good in the process of religious and non-religious actors come together to provide care for excluded and marginalised people (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Cloke *et al*., 2019). Additionally, as Cloke suggests, theo-ethics holds the potential to counter neoliberal subjectification by promoting acts of unconditional love and care beyond rational calculation, thus cultivating an alternative politics of hope that challenges the "cruel optimism" inherent in neoliberal frameworks (Cloke, 2010; Cloke *et al.*, 2019). In general, theo-ethics offers an analytical framework for examining the intricate ways in which ethical action is shaped and motivated by narratives, rituals, and principles rooted in religious experience and tradition (Williams,2015) and emphasises the progressive ethical and political possibilities that reconcile religious and secular subjectivities, and meanwhile, promote alternative sets of virtues in respond to neoliberalised politics and ethics(Cloke *et al*., 2019). In **Chapter 6**, I provide a comprehensive empirical examination of Cloke's concept of theo-ethics, elucidating how "postsecular caritas" operates through faith-based practices and the supportive role that urban migrant churches play in addressing social inequalities within the rural-urban migrant community.

Another line of research within the geographies of postsecularity turns to examine the increasingly individualized and subjective changes in the daily practice of religious and spiritual belief, where ethical values are constructed through combinations of secular, spiritual, and religious frameworks (Holloway, 2013; Ley & Tse, 2013; Olson *et al*., 2013; Bartolini *et al*., 2017; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2010; 2017; Altay & Clark, 2023). This strand of work is deeply inspired by Charles Taylor's (2007) account of secular conditions of belief – that is, how modern individuals inhabit secularity, and how the individuated quest for spiritual realisation and the formation of new religious subjectivities co-exist with the secular condition of being. Bearing in mind this idea and drawing on McGuire's (2008) and Ammerman's (2006) work on lived or everyday religion, this approach moves away from institutional, doctrinal, and belief-centered perspectives. Instead, it emphasizes how religion is embodied and practised within everyday contexts, encompassing aspects such as affect, emotion, spirituality, and the material and relational spaces through which individuals construct and interpret their religiosity (Finlayson, 2012; Holloway, 2006; 2013). This emphasis on "religion as expressed and experienced in the lives of individuals" (McGuire, 2008, p. 3) recognizes, on one hand, that individuals form their religious subjectivity within the intersections of institutional religious spaces and "unofficial" religious spaces (Kong, 2010, p. 756); on the other, by focusing on affective registers and embodied sensibilities, it offers a new perspective for religious geographers to reconsider religious and spiritual belief beyond the dichotomy of secularity and religion within lived place-making processes (Olson *et al*., 2013).

Meanwhile, this focus on the subjective forming of religion foregrounds a conjunctural analysis of the spaces, theology, and a field of diverse social meanings where the religious subjectivities are constructed, deconstructed, and reconstructed, thereby promoting the re-examination of social relationships between the

sacred and the profane (Olson *et al.,* 2013). As Sutherland (2017, p.326) argues in the conceptualisation of theography, although religious subjects can be constituted through either institutional theologies or the affective and embodied presence of transcendence, it is through theology-as-praxis that religious actors can reflexively "engage in recursive theorizing of transcendence, negotiating between discursive and affective registers in order to make choices about and changes to practice." Tse (2014) uses the term "grounded theologies" to describe these kinds of new religious subjectivities that are formed within the interaction of different affective and discursive knowledges that are encountered in different times and places, which highlights the hybridity between the religious and the secular modern and recalls what Taylor (2007) calls the nova effect—the increasing pluralization and fragmentation of belief systems in modern secular societies. Continuing in this vein, there is increasing interest among religious geographers in the examination of the religious women's agency and subjectivity in the context of the postsecular world, and in particular, how embodied practices, theological ethics, and other secular orders constitute religious subjectivity, especially of Muslim women (Altay & Clark, 2023; Avishai, 2008; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2010; Secor, 2007). Drawing on poststructural and feminist contributions to ethics (Braidotti, 2008; Vasilaki, 2016), such analyses challenge liberal conceptions of the subject as a moral agent, instead emphasizing the relationalities that shape the process of becoming ethical subjects. In **Chapter 7**, by considering lived religion and intersectionality of female migrant Christians in Shenzhen, my attention is drawn to examining their religious agencies and their religious praxis within the church and their family in the context of the postsecular present.

Overall, the discussion of postsecularity within human geography has moved beyond employing "the postsecular" as a mere categorization to a more nuanced exploration of how postsecular possibilities arise in the construction of religious meanings and processes. In this way, postsecularity offers a conceptual tool to discern how subjectivities are shaped by neoliberal logics in late-capitalist societies, as well as how more hopeful and insurgent ethical sensibilities can emerge through religious and secular collaboration (Cloke & Williams,2018). In this thesis, I follow two key trajectories to investigate the emergence of postsecularity within the context of the dual process of the revival of Christianity and rapid urbanization, as explored in the following empirical chapters.

Firstly, following Cloke *et al*.'s (2019) work, this thesis offers a detailed exploration of how postsecularity is contextualized spatially, affectively, and performatively within the interactions between migrant churches, other faith-based institutions, and rural-urban migrants. Within these practices, postsecularity could serve as "a third space where the blurred boundaries between religious and secular belief, practice, and identity can undergo reflexive engagement and produce new ethical and political subjectivities" (Cloke *et al*. 2019, p.55). Secondly, following Taylor (2007), I argue that the postsecular turn in human geography needs to consider the conditions of belief with which postsecular subjectivities and practice are compatible. Accordingly, this thesis critically examines how postsecular subjectivities are articulated and co-constituted within rural-urban

migrants' lived religion and the intersectional power matrix of gender, class, migration, and other secular conditions of being in the world.

2.4 Dialogue with (post)secularity in the Chinese context

Following the previous arguments that post-secularity studies need to emancipate from "the European core" of the secularity theoretical system and adopt a global comparative perspective that rethinks postsecularity in the local context (Casanova, 2006; Kong & Qian, 2018), this section aims to further discuss the agenda of secularity/postsecularity in the context of modern China. One of the most salient characteristics of China's modernisation is that China appears to be caught in a contradictory dual process involving the entrenchment of secular values and state-sanctioned capitalist ideologies and simultaneously the notable revival of all forms of religiosity and faith (Gao & Qian, 2020). On the one hand, China has been perceived as an avowedly atheist state and, in Casanova's (2013) words, as "one of the most secular societies on earth." The assumptions that religion is not essential to the life of the Chinese and that the Chinese have always been secular, pragmatic, and rational as modernisation advances are generally accepted and prevalent among not only intellectuals but ordinary people. Yet, on the other hand, there is widespread interest in religious practices in response to the publicly accepted discourse of "moral and spiritual crisis" in the post-reform area. In this chapter, by illuminating the evolution and configuration of secularity and secularism, as well as the potential for postsecularity in China and especially in Shenzhen city, I intend to offer contextual knowledge for the upcoming chapters' analyses.

2.4.1 Secularity and secularism in China: the state-led projects

As many scholars have pointed out, the dichotomous boundary between the religious and the secular was historically absent from traditional Chinese belief systems (Kong & Qian, 2018; Madsen, 2010; C.K. Yang, 1961). The renowned sociologist C.K. Yang (1961) defined Chinese religiosity as "diffused religion," in contrast to "institutional religion," in which the complex of religious beliefs, rituals, and cosmology was deeply embedded within political, economic, and social institutions without a stand-alone organization. This intrinsic interweaving made any strict dichotomy between the secular and the religious inapplicable to Chinese history. However, this distinction gradually emerged as the Chinese state and political elites assimilated and disseminated Western discourses and theoretical frameworks in the process of modernization (M. Yang, 2011).

The process of secularization in China was more complicated than simply separation of religions and state, but more like a deliberate policy in this historical narrative (Yu, 2005; Szonyi,2009). Szonyi (2009), for example, characterizes the processes of secularization in China as a dual movement, to distinguish religion from superstition and to reshape those aspects of religious life by state intervention that meet the new

criteria, enabling them to benefit state development. The differentiation of secular from religious in China was derived from the early twentieth century by Chinese intellectuals and political elites who prompted a culture of self-critique to promote a new nationalism to counter the threats posed by the Western colonial power (Kong & Qian, 2018). The Chinese elite embraced elements of the Enlightenment to address the dire crisis of the nation, and they viewed traditional Chinese cultures, including religions, as the vital reasons leading to China's "backwardness." As Mayfair Yang (2011, p.10) bitterly criticizes, this effort "produced repeated waves of cultural self-laceration, religious destruction and state campaigns of secularization throughout the 20th century."

Accepting Western modernity as the model of civilization, indigenous elites in China initiated a project, aimed at bringing about the fundamental transformation by enforced secularization (M Yang, 2008), which in some way as "utopian" as the religion could be categorized and regulated(Szonyi, 2009). During this time, the term "religion" was translated from the Japanese word *shukyo* into Chinese as "*zongjia*"(宗教). The construction of religion as a category relied heaved on European ideas and the model of Christianity, leading to the notion of religion was closely linked with the notion of Christianity from the first uses of this term in China (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009; M. Yang, 2008). Thus, religion was conceptualized formally as the social organization associated with a coherent doctrine that expressed both "a cosmology and an ethical system."(Szonyi, 2009) Traditional folk religions, however, were devalued as "*mixin*"(superstition 迷信) to be denounced and eradicated. During this period, even institutional religions were gradually degraded to the private sphere of faith, and their influence in the social and cultural field had to be subject to science and industrial modernity (M. Yang, 2008; 2011). Although secularism in China weakened attachment to the supernatural message of the religion paralleled that taken in the West, there were important differences. First, the modernizing agenda in China did not go nearly as deep as it did in the West. In van der Veer's studies on The Chinese Protestant universities, hospitals, and YMCA associations, he argues that these organizations only touched the surface of Chinese urban life and had little impact overall on the terrible poverty and social disruption afflicting the vast rural population, albeit some genuine, admirable contributions have made to local rural development. Second, although secularity movements were deeply influenced by Western, enlightenment ideas, in this process, intellectuals played a crucial role in reinforcing the secularist project of nation-building, enforcing the stated-endorsed secularisation of everyday life. As Yang argues:

> *What made Chinese secularization different from the Western experience was the fact that it was a top-down process engineered by the educated elites and the modern state, and that it was part of a nationalist and centralizing process whereby local communities and their deity cults were shorn of their identities and autonomy. (Yang, 2008 ,p. 7)*

The case in China suggests parallels with that of the situation in the West outlined by Asad (1993; 2003). In Asad's (1993; 2003) work on the history of the West shows that religion and politics are inevitably implicated with, even mutually constitutive of, one another. Rather than being the natural byproduct of modernization pressures, the fortunes of Chinese religious life can be understood as part of the internal transformation of the state order—that is, as the effects of radical measures in the self-strengthening of the state. Against this backdrop, the Western missionaries proselytizing for Christianity took root in the late-Ching and Republic eras, as Christianity was conceived as a moral religion versus magic/superstition, in association with Western modernity.

During the Maoist period, this top-down campaign reached its apogee, and the communist regime added Marxist atheism as an extra layer into the meanings of secularization. Under this fundamental doctrine, the state officially identified religions as the "opium of the masses" and conspirator of internal feudalism and external imperialism(M. Yang, 2011; F.G. Yang, 2011). The anti-feudalism campaigns included Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam as targets for revolutionary cleansing, with these campaigns insisting on both eliminating feudalist exploitation and reducing the power and influence of the varied clergy. Some of the Buddhist, Daoist, and Muslim clergy were penalized either as landlords or as anti-revolutionary and reactionary elements (F.G. Yang, 2011). As part of the anti-imperialism campaign in the early 1950s, Christian churches and organizations were required to sever foreign ties completely and immediately in order to become self-ruling, self-supporting, and self-propagating ("Three-Selfs" principle). The Cultural Revolution witnessed the almost complete disappearance of religion from the public sphere under militant atheism. Instead, the enchanted cosmos and the spiritual life of the people were replaced by the sacralisation of communist utopia and particularly by the Mao-cult that the sacralisation of the party and Mao operated through a regime of truth that demanded that individuals should examine their inner world, emotions and attitudes through self-reflection or public confession, such that they could defeat any trace of feudal or bourgeois thoughts hidden within the inner self or unconsciousness (Duara, 1996; Goossaert & Palmer, 2011). In sum, the cumulative effect of the anti-superstition movement in the Republican and Mao eras was "one of the most dramatic secularization processes in the modern world" (M. Yang, 2011, p.7).

2.4.2 Religious vitality in the post-Mao China

In the post-Mao era, the situation has changed dramatically: China may now be one of the countries where religion is flourishing, in the sense that all types of religions, whether old or new, institutional or folk, are being revived and thriving (Cao, 2010; Overmyer, 2003; Yang, 2010), despite the continued strict regulation of religion.

After the Reform and Opening policy in 1979, the state's pursuit of market-oriented economic development during the post-Mao era resulted in a relative weakening of political control in the local society. Local officials were much more interested in demonstrating their capabilities in spurring economic development than

controlling religious activities. The Chinese state also comes to recognize religions' functions in socioeconomic development. To rally the Chinese people around the central economic development task, the CCP adopted a more "pragmatic" way of dealing with various aspects of social life and then began to loosen control over religious affairs (F. G. Yang, 2011). Under the leadership of Deng, "enlightenment atheism" prevailed over "militant atheism." As a result, beginning in 1979, under the auspices of the Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Committee, the China Christian Council (CCC), the Catholic Patriotic Association (CPA) and the Bishops Conference (BC), a limited number of Protestant and Catholic churches, Buddhist and Daoist temples, and Islamic mosques reopened for religious services(F. G. Yang, 2011). An increasing number of people tend to search for alternative spiritual support, such as Christianity, to negotiate disasters and misfortunes in their daily lives (Huang, 2014; Yang, 2004; 2005). Protestant Christianity, in particular, has attracted huge numbers of new believers in both rural and urban areas.

Given the amazing religious revival and practices in current China, scholars have taken various approaches to explain this change, including citing moral and spiritual crises caused by the drastic social change (Hunter & Chan, 2007; Yang, 2005; Bay, 2003), the renewal of traditional practices (Chao, 1999; Jing, 1996), changes in state-society relations (Feuchtwang, 2000; Yang, 2008), and the famous theory of religious market (Yang, 2006). In his religious economic interpretation of religious decline and revival in China, F. G. Yang (2006; 2011) contends that religious regulation restricts the "religious market" and suppresses market mechanisms of supply of and demand for religious goods. Nevertheless, this research suggests that China's political and economic reform in the past four decades has opened up new social spaces for religion, and there are more hybrid and mutually constituted relationships between the religious and secular. I discuss the possibilities for postsecular subjectivities to emerge from the political economy in post-reform China. Following the analysis in the **Section 2.2**, I consider postsecularity as an ethical and self-reflective project involving hybrid subjectivities in response to the conditions of being in contemporary China.

Currently, religions in China are well positioned in this new agenda that is to say religions have been incorporated into the state's mission of constructing a "harmonious society." The state emphasizes religions as sources of morals and ethics that benefit the maintenance of social stability. One of the prevailing explanations of the religious revival 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 have been affected by drastic social changes such as the collapse of Maoist ideology (Lee, 2007), the dismantling of traditional social, moral, and cosmic orders (Yang, 2008), and the intensifying sense of uncertainty among individuals in the face of overwhelming market forces. A spiritual anchor, therefore, is desirable. F.G. Yang 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" (Yang, 2005, p. 325). For example, a recent special issue of *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" (Liang, 2014, p. 394). Religion offers "a moral life devoid of state presence" for underprivileged villagers in rural communities who appropriate religious 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 the market (Liang, 2014; Qi, Liang & Li, 2014; Tapp, 2014).

As for Christianity, it has also obtained official endorsement considering its increasingly significant impact on spiritual cultivation and moral reconstruction of Chinese society (Zhuo, 2006; Wielander, 2013). Xinping Zhuo, Director of the Institute of World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Science, argues that the Christian notions of original sin and transcendence have opened up a new sense of the self and of transcendence beyond the Confucian and Taoist traditions, since Christian transcendence emphasises the ultimate transformation of oneself outside the bounds of this-worldly concerns, and therefore it serves as an important moral resource for the pursuit of goodness by the Chinese (Zhuo, 2006). In addition, Zhuo (2006) also points out that the Christian concept of agape based on Jesus Christ's self-sacrifice emphasises the unconditional nature of love, which is different from the Confucian understanding of love based on human relationships. 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 (2013) critically argues that Christian values in fact overlap with the party-state's project of maintaining power and moral legitimacy. 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 gaps in social welfare and services.

Despite loosening control over religion, it is critical to recognize that the state continues to play a fundamental role in determining what "activities are appropriate to the religious sphere" (Dobbelaere, 2009). The government has a bureau that is officially in charge of religious affairs—the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA). The state claims the prerogative of determining what counts as "true" and "false" religion and uses its police power to attempt the eradication of "false" religion (often termed, in the parlance of Chinese officialdom, "evil cults" or "feudal superstition"). For example, Falun Gong and other *qigong* or cultic groups were banned as "evil cults" by the "*Legislative Resolution on Banning Heretical Cults*" in October 1999. Likewise, the state has attempted to manage Islam by a nationality policy that recognizes certain Muslim communities as official minority nationalities, which tries to limit the spread of radical Islam, prevent separatism among Muslims on its northwestern frontier, and integrate its 21 million Muslims into the broader Chinese mainstream (Gladney, 2009). The state also chooses the leaders of approved religions and monitors many religious activities. In practice, the government's policies on religion have constantly been evolving, and unevenly implemented by the various local authorities, often resulting in inconsistency and the creation of spaces for negotiation between the local state and religious groups (Lim, 2020), a situation that is particularly evident in the case of Christianity. For example, in some southeast coastal areas, such as

Wenzhou, grass-roots Christian activities are highly flourishing due to the relatively loose policies on Christianity and the long-standing local Christian tradition (Cao, 2010); while, in some cities in northern China, the regulation of Christian missionary operations is quite stringent. In particular, under the latest religious principle derived from President Xi Jinping's attempt to sinicize religions, that "religions in China must be Chinese in orientation and provide active guidance to religions so that they can adapt themselves to socialist society,"[5] the Communist Party to a certain extent will now exert greater control over religion in China to conform to Chinese-style socialism. Vis-à-vis Confucianism or Daoism, the situation is quite different in that the state has taken cautious steps to promote them or even has taken advantage of them as resources for regional development. Not only have historical religious sites and shrines been opened to tourism to generate local revenues, but religions increasingly figure visibly in flagship projects of regional development and regeneration (Qian, 2019). Overall, just as the Chinese government actively intervenes to establish (rather than reduce) market mechanisms for economic development (Wu, 2008), the state oftentimes develops new elements and dynamics that shape, define, and direct religious markets to satisfy state requirements.

So, how might we define the emerging postsecularism in post-reform China? When examined more closely and through a comparative global lens, the transformation in China's religious landscape reveals striking parallels with developments in other regions, particularly the Muslim world and Eastern Europe. All three regions—China, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe—underwent dramatic forms of state-imposed secularisation: through communism in the Chinese and Eastern European contexts, and via postcolonial nationalist regimes in parts of the Middle East (Gauthier, 2025, p. 3). Following the ideological decline of these regimes and the onset of economic liberalisation, each experienced a notable resurgence of religious activity. As Gauthier (2025) suggests, these developments are best understood as part of a broader global transformation in which religion is being reconfigured in the shift from the "Nation-State" regime to the "Global-Market" regime. In this context, the transition from state atheism to religious pluralisation does not represent a simple return to tradition, but rather a complex and uneven process shaped by post-socialist transformation, global neoliberalism, and the rearticulation of religious practices under new socio-economic conditions.

Focusing specifically on the Chinese case, a closer examination of the post-Mao religious revival reveals two key characteristics of postsecularity in urban China. First, secularity should not be understood as either a macro-social process or a form of individual consciousness alone; rather, it operates simultaneously across multiple scales. This process of secularization involves not only macro-level dynamics—such as the continued dominance of atheist propaganda in the post-Mao era alongside corresponding religious policies and

[5] Xi Jinping, Speech to United Front Work Conference on Religious Work, April 23–24, 2015 (Xinhua News Agency)；Xi Jinping, Speech to 19th National Party Congress, Nov. 3, 2017 (Xinhua News Agency).

regulatory frameworks (which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter)—but also the growing influence and disciplinary effects of neoliberal rationalities(as mentioned in the introduction) on religious individuals, particularly among rural-urban migrant populations (Gao *et al*., 2018; Gauthier, 2025; Yoo, 2021). In the Chinese context, secularity does not function solely as an abstract, top-down project of governance; it is also lived and negotiated through everyday practices of place-making, identity formation, and moral reasoning. In this sense, secularity in the post-reform era operates as a political-economic ideological formation embedded in national institutions and imaginaries while also being embodied, enacted, and accommodated within the micropolitics of individuals' everyday life.

Second, this hybrid and dispersed nature of the secularisation process gives rise not only to disengaged belief and immanent consciousness but also to new aspirations for, and reconfigurations of, religiosity. Returning to Taylor's (2007) argument, modern individuals inhabit what he describes as a condition of "cross-pressure"—a lived tension in which people seek to forge new modes of meaning and being from within, or even against, the immanent frame. While the modern world is disenchanted, individuals nonetheless experience what Taylor refers to as the malaise of modernity—a pervasive sense of loss associated with the absence of transcendence. In this secular age, religion does not simply recede; rather, it persists and flourishes in new forms, giving rise to what Taylor terms the "nova effect": a proliferation of individualised spiritual quests and increasingly fragmented religious subjectivities. As Casanova (2013, p. 66) reminds us, "the religious" and "the secular" are always and everywhere mutually constituted. In the following empirical chapters, I examine how Christianity—within the neoliberal urban context of Shenzhen—is (re)interpreted by rural-urban migrants and gives care to them, not only as a source of meaning and empowerment, but also as a constitutive force in shaping secularity itself, becoming entangled in the formation and consolidation of new socio-economic relations, values, and experiences, and giving rise to emergent forms of religious subjectivity.

Similar to the experiences of the Middle East and Eastern Europe, the postsecular landscapes in these three regions reveal the complex entanglements between religion and the state outside the framework of Western secularism, while also reflecting distinct geographical and social contexts. In addition, it is important to recognise that the religious revival in China is largely characterised by fragmented, grassroots practices—such as temple reconstruction, spirit mediums, and geomantic services—which typically operate outside formal institutional frameworks and are embedded in the rhythms of everyday life (Gauthier, 2025, p. 307). Beyond the state's role in regulating religion, the nature of Chinese religiosity itself further complicates institutional assumptions. As C.K. Yang (1961) famously argued, Chinese religion can be understood as a form of "diffused religion," dispersed across social life rather than concentrated in clearly demarcated institutions. In this regard, Gauthier (2025) contends that religion in China should not be taken for granted as an autonomous institutional domain; rather, it functions as a "total social phenomenon" (p. 208), interwoven with kinship networks, local economies, moral orders, and modes of state governance. This stands in contrast to the Eastern European context, where religion has been largely re-institutionalised through strategic

alliances between the state and dominant churches. In Orthodox-majority countries such as Russia and Romania, religion serves as a vehicle for ethno-national identity and moral conservatism, having regained symbolic authority and public visibility after decades of Soviet repression (Gauthier, 2025, p. 188). By contrast, the Middle East presents a hybrid model, combining elements of bureaucratic control with market-oriented religiosity. The commodification of Islamic practices—such as halal industries, Islamic fashion, and faith-based finance—reflects the growing integration of religion into the logic of consumer capitalism (pp. 116–137).

What makes the Chinese case distinctive is the coexistence of a grassroots, decentralized religious revival with an increasingly assertive state apparatus that tightly regulates and reframes religion under cultural and developmentalist narratives. This produces a uniquely postsecular condition—marked by bottom-up religious vitality that remains subject to top-down governance and, in the post-reform era, increasingly shaped by neoliberal values (Gauthier, 2025). This complicated religious landscape provides an important social niche to ground and advance a discussion on secularity and postsecularity in a non-Western context. In this thesis, I am not concerned with the question of whether Chinese society is becoming more or less religious; instead, my focus lies on examining how religion is embedded in and interpreted within the fabric of an increasingly secularised context. Moreover, as outlined in the introduction, any meaningful analysis of postsecularity in urban China must attend to the dispersed, grassroots, cell-like Christian communities—most of which take the form of unregistered house churches—and their core constituency: rural-to-urban migrants. How these faith-based communities have actively positioned themselves within urban life—by filling gaps in social support and welfare provision—as well as how migrant Christians navigate and inhabit the space between "the secular" and "the religious" in their everyday urban experiences, are crucial to understanding how secularisation and postsecularisation unfold under the specific socio-spatial conditions of contemporary urban China. In the chapters that follow, I offer a detailed empirical analysis of both faith-based communities and the lived experiences of migrant Christians, through which the complexities of China's postsecular religious landscape are brought into sharper focus.

2.4.3 Mapping the possible postsecularity in Shenzhen

In five days' time, both the airport and the subway were completed…… Overnight, Explosion would become one of China's megalopolises.

(Yan, 2013, p.459)

Inspired by the Shenzhen experience in past 30 years, renowned Chinese writer and novelist Yan Lianke published the novel *Explosion Chronicles* (炸裂志 Zhalie Zhi)in 2013, ostensibly depicting a transition of the Zhalie (Boomtown), a fictional city in Northern China, from a small rural village to a leading "super-metropolis," but its underlying theme is a reflection on the deep logics of urban change in post-reform China

(Qian & An, 2020). In the past three decades, socio-economic changes in post-Mao China have gone hand in hand with changes in social norms and values. As an emerging economy in the global theatre of capital accumulation, China has been seen by many scholars as being on the path of neoliberalisation. Shenzhen, the first city in China to open to global capitalism, has been a pioneering city in experiencing the country's neoliberal reform (Pun, 2005) and is characterized by its upholding of secular values of economic rationality, pragmatism, progress, efficiency and development.

Shenzhen is situated on the Pearl River Delta, one of China's (and the world's) most prominent manufacturing and industrial hubs and economic engines. Back in the 1930s, Shenzhen, as a small town just across the Shum Chun River from Hong Kong, was a gambling centre that drew risk-seeking Hongkongers pouring across the river that separated the British colony from the mainland into the "Monte Carlo of the East" as they gambled, caroused, frolicked, and perhaps became wealthy quickly.[6] During the Maoist period, due to the misguided policies of the *Great Leap Forward* (which attempted to establish large collective units that turned out to destroyed incentives), Shenzhen stagnated and remained impoverished, causing a flow of refugees to risk their lives by swimming from Shenzhen across the border to Hong Kong. The situation changed after Deng Xiaoping earmarked it as ground zero in the spearheading of reforms in 1978. In 1980, Shenzhen was established as a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to attract foreign investment which not only provided an experimental space for the "reform" policies but served as a model for a series of political reforms in the post-Mao era, where Chinese high officials came to visit to study market economies and observe the introduction of modern architecture and industry (O'Donnell, Wong, & Bach, 2017). To facilitate transnational capital, the Shenzhen government provided industrial zones, factory compounds, workers' dormitories, and other privileged policies and measures aiming to gain ground in the grid of the global economy (Pun, 2016). Meanwhile, with the partial relaxation of the hukou system, which had previously restricted population mobility and reinforced the urban-rural divide, a large number of rural laborers were allowed—and even encouraged—to migrate to cities. Under these circumstances, abundant job opportunities, higher wages, and the openness associated with Shenzhen's status as a SEZ have attracted a large influx of migrants, particularly surplus laborers newly freed from the restrictions of the rural *hukou* system, seeking employment. As a result, during the 1980s, Shenzhen experienced ultra-rapid population growth with an average annual growth, with an average annual growth rate ranging between 10% and 35%, primarily driven by the influx of migrants from all over China. Taking advantage of governmental favours and its proximity to Hong Kong, both geographically and culturally, Shenzhen has undergone unprecedented economic growth over the past 30 years, bursting forth from a humble fishing village into the so-called "workshop of the world." [7] Most recently, Shenzhen surpassed Guangzhou in GDP, becoming China's third-largest economic power.

[6] https://www.scmp.com/magazines/post-magazine/long-reads/article/3117505/myth-busting-shenzhens-sleazy-past-short-lived?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3117505
[7] For more information, see: https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/may/10/story-of-cities-39-shenzhen-from-rural-village-to-the-worlds-largest-megalopolis

The reputation of Shenzhen as an open-minded, rich, and meritocratic city continued to attract new migrant workers for years, and Shenzhen has been characterised by a vast reservoir of rural-to-urban migrants. "Time is money, efficiency is life," proclaimed a famous billboard from the 1980s, Shenzhen was constructed as a space in which rural and urban youth might realize aspirations for social mobility and seek fortune at every level of the spectrum. Under these circumstances, throughout the 1990s, urban-rural migrant labour occupied an increasingly important position in the economic growth of the Shenzhen SEZ (Florence, 2017), and this "migrant labour regime" (Fan, 2004, p. 283) is highly flexible and precarious and adds to the attractiveness of China to global capital (Wu, 2010). According to the 2021 national census, Shenzhen houses a population of more than 17 million, approximately 70% of whom are migrants who do not hold local *hukou* status, which means legally migrants do not possess rights of urban citizenship and cannot access services in the city; socially, because of their rural origin, they might be discriminated against by residents; and politically they are excluded from participation in local elections. "Social alienation" is very common in these workers' urban experience (Yang, 2013). Pun (2005) has trenchantly criticized, the *hukou* system for creating a highly exploitative mechanism of labor appropriation, and this "migrant labour regime" (Fan, 2004, p.283) failed the "obligation to think the city a field of shared life and common rights" (Amin, 2013, p.477) but practically added to the attractiveness of China to global capital over the past few decades of rapid development (Alexander & Chan, 2004; Wu, 2010). Meanwhile, as we mentioned previously, *suzhi* discourse not only legitimates the fact that rural-urban migrants are second-class citizens because of their purported "*low suzhi*," but continues to work as the technique of the self for them in the process of becoming a "real" citizen (Zhang, 2012).

In addition to the *hukou* system and *suzhi* discourse, neoliberal values are also officially promoted in Shenzhen. An intriguing example is from the migrant worker museum in the city, as a state-sponsored project, that aims to shape a new representation of migrant workers and displays the achievements of 30 years of reform and opening up in Shenzhen. In the official migrant worker museum, instead of showing everyday discrimination and exploitation in the real world, migrant workers have been idealized and even heroized as hard-working, compliant social bodies who, on the one hand, contribute to the development of postreform China and, on the other hand, go through hardships to achieve self-realization and self-improvement. Although official discourses of the museum in parts recognize rural-urban migrant workers' contribution to urban development in contrast to earlier state and public discourses that stigmatized migrant workers for their incivility, vulgarity and criminality (Zhang, 2001), the migrant worker museum de facto reifies the development- and market-centred official discourse of Shenzhen that is far from criticizing *hukou*-based institutionalized marginality but aligns with ideas of economic rationality, individualistic pursuit of economic improvement, grassroots entrepreneurial freedom, etc., echoing neoliberal modalities of governance (Qian & Guo, 2019). In Shenzhen's context, the relative debasement of rural-urban migrants was mobilized within Shenzhen Spirit's narrative to both encourage rural migrants to improve their situation and

discipline urban migrants for having excessive expectations. Many of the values related to self-reliance (like "adaptation to competition," "self-confidence," or "autonomy") were emphasized among the migrants in the early years and later have turned into core societal values, constructing the identities for the SEZ or even the Chinese society, given the state is requiring that people from all social categories become self-supporting and find ways to provide for their own well-being—to adopt an attitude of acceptance (Florence, 2017).

Within the entrenchment of secular modernity, Shenzhen has also experienced a notable flourishing of religion. For instance, Fan *et al.* (2003) have documented an intriguing re-emergence of popular religions, traditional rituals and Confucianism values among both Shenzhen's residents and immigrants, for whom traditional religious values appear to help them to rebuild the mutual trust that was devastated in the Cultural Revolution and to establish a moral economy vis-à-vis capitalist forms of social life. In the case of Protestant Christianity alone, 27 TSPM (Three-Self Patriotic Movement) Churches have been re-opened or built in the past two decades, most of which have full attendance at Sunday worshipping sessions. There are also immense numbers of house churches or underground churches operating beyond the state's surveillance. It is noteworthy that rural-urban migrant workers became the main group of members of these official/non-official Christian churches in the past two decades. Zhu and Guo (2009), for instance, found that some official Christian churches in Shenzhen have been reviving with the continuous inflow of rural migrant workers re-invigorating the previously almost defunct local churches. Christianity, for rural migrant workers, has become an anchor of identity and community for them to escape from being alienated by a highly exploitative and precarious regime of labour (Zhu & Guo, 2009). Likewise, in recent years, the emergence of "factory churches" organized by factory managers also provide emotional or community support to migrant workers during their daily life in Shenzhen (Gao *et al*., 2018).

Bearing in mind these observations, I examine possible postsecularity in Shenzhen from the following two theoretical perspectives. First, faith-based organisations (FBOs), particularly Christian institutions, have increasingly filled the gap in social services and care left by the state experiencing neoliberal reform. For example, charitable work and other forms of social support conducted by faith organizations and religious NGOs in China co-opted by the government to relieve the increasingly sharp social conflicts in a diversifying and polarizing society(Tam & Hasmath, 2015). As rural-urban migrants suffering from the dual discrimination of *hukou* system and the *suzhi* discourse, this situation allows more space for NGOs and FBOs to participate in social delivery (McCarthy, 2013). By looking into the migrant churches in Shenzhen, I intend to examine the possible theo-ethics within the migrant church and consider how migrant workers interact with Christian Churches in their daily urban life and their potential encounters in/outside the sacred places.

Secondly, the rise of Christianity among the rural-urban migrant group opens a path for us to explore their malleable and hybrid religiosity co-produced by the religious and the secular as people increasingly turn to theological discourses and interpretations as well as spiritual experiences to constitute the everyday, lived,

and embodied subjectivities. Religions supply ordinary people with a system of vocabularies to make sense of or negotiate with intersectional secular experiences, such as changing political and economic conditions, gender, national identity, mobility and migration, and multicultural encounters. Under these circumstances, how do these migrant Christians practice their religious faith in the secular world, like the workplace, and how do they negotiate with work ethics and neoliberal values within this highly secular and neoliberal city? And correspondingly, what new religiosity and subjectivity might they (re)produce or (re)shape through their everyday and embodied religious practices?

Chapter 3. Christianity in practices:
religious policies, the official church, and the house church in China

3.1 Introduction

Before introducing the context of Christianity in Shenzhen, it is imperative to elaborate on the essential political background and policy environment of Christianity in China. Notwithstanding the primary research focus of this thesis does not centre on the state-church relationship and political interactions, the development of churches in this country is intricately linked to government policy on religion and the history of Christianity in China since 1949. This context is not only crucial for the remaining sections of this thesis but may also be unfamiliar to many non-Chinese religious researchers. Therefore, it is relevant to provide a brief overview of the official/unofficial church (the house church), religious policy and regulation, as well as the latest changes in the church-state relationship in China.

3.2 The official church and the house church

The issue of official churches and house churches in China, is unavoidably linked to the history of Christianity in China after the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC). I will, therefore, briefly review the history of Christianity relevant to the official/house church and the church situation in China today.

After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, Marxist-Leninist atheism occupied a central position as a fundamental doctrine within the ideological paradigm of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (F. G. Yang, 2011). In this context, religion is commonly regarded as the "opium of the masses," representing a contradiction to the interests of the people. It is intertwined with feudal society and is anticipated to be gradually eradicated as secular modernization progresses (F. G. Yang, 2011; Qu, 2011), even though religious liberty was defined as the right of every Chinese citizen by the first Constitution in 1954. Indeed, for the new-born power, a fundamental ideological opposition to religion and the goal of its elimination remained central to its doctrine. Practical experience, however, had shown that this goal could only be achieved in the very long term and was secondary to the more immediate objectives of defeating the CCP's enemies, establishing CCP control, and rebuilding the socioeconomic structure (Goossaert & Palmer, 2011; Ying, 2014).

Based on this ideology, the CCP's atheism-based regulation of religion underwent several distinct periods during the Mao period:(1) the co-optation and control period, (2) the socialist transformation period, and (3)

the eradication period (F. G. Yang, 2011, pp.65-74). In the first period, from 1949 to 1957, the Party-state suppressed various religions and co-opted the five major religions by establishing "patriotic" religious associations (F. G. Yang, 2011 ,p.65). Only Daoism, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism were officially recognized as "religions." Beyond these institutionalised and systematic official religions, a rich array of folk religions were characterized as chaotic, illegal, and immoral and further categorised as "heterodox" (*yiduan* 异端) or "feudal superstition" (*fengjian mixin* 封建迷信), thus perceived as a threat to social harmony and the construction of socialist civilization (Feuchtwang & Wang, 1991, p.263; M Yang, 2008). For Christianity, a significant challenge stemmed from its deep connection with Western imperialism. The CCP responded to this issue by adopting a strategy to sever all foreign ties. Foreign missionaries were, therefore, expelled from the Chinese mainland, although many had already left with their families before the start of the mass campaigns and church properties linked to the foreign missionary enterprise, such as Christian schools, universities, and hospitals, were also confiscated(Goossaert & Palmer, 2011; Kang, 2020; Yang, 2011). By 1953, nearly all foreign Protestant personnel had been expelled from the Chinese mainland, marking the end of the Christian missionary era in China (Tiedemann, 2020).

Meanwhile, the new government aimed to establish its own system of regulations over these religions. A party-led association came into being for Christianity— the government-sponsored Protestant Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) was set up in 1954, referring to self-governance, self-support and self-propagation of the Christian religion. The charter for the "Three-Self" movement underscores its submission to Party leadership, support for the authority of the state and the socialist motherland, and obedience to the Constitution, laws, regulations, and policies of the state (Wong *et al*., 2000). The TSPM movement, on the one hand, aims to "force the Christians to sever their institutional ties with foreigners in general" through the ostensible emphasis on the ecclesiastical autonomy and indigenization of Chinese churches (Lee, 2014, p. 181); on the other hand, the TSPM movement sought to achieve the goal of infiltrating "Christian institutions and to co-opt the autonomous Protestant denominations into the socialist order" (Chow & Lee, 2016, p.580). In other words, the formation of the TSPM exemplifies the CCP's "united front"[8] strategy in religious policy, as Protestants, by joining the alliance of non-Communists supporting the CCP, demonstrated their allegiance and support for the Party (Vala, 2018). It is noteworthy that TSPM, like the other four "patriotic" religious associations, though nominally independent of the government, was actually regulated by the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB) of the State Council, established in 1954 under the authority of the State Council of the People's Republic of China and renamed as the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) in the early

[8] The United Front operates as a political alliance, engaging in political work that primarily targets individuals external to the party, with a specific focus on their representatives. Throughout its endeavors, the United Front emphasizes the necessity of upholding the party's leadership, aligned with the party's direction, and guided by the party's will. The overarching objective is to foster unity and cohesion among the various components of the United Front, rallying them around the party.

2000s. The TSPM was also supervised by the United Front Work Department (UFWD) of the Communist Party of China Central Committee[9].

With the formation of these "Three-Self "Churches, correspondingly, independent "house churches" emerged. It should be noted that the TSPM is not welcomed by all Protestant church leaders. Many church leaders, such as fundamentalist preacher Wang Mingdao and independent church leader Song Shangjie, refused to join the state-approved TSPM and employed distinct approaches to managing their churches, where they collectively adhered to conservative theology and refrained from engaging in social and political issues and reforms (Cook, 2007; Kang, 2020). As a well-known church leader in China and founder of "The Beijing Christian Church (*Beijing Jidutu Huitang北京基督会堂*)," Wang Mingdao regarded the Christian Scripture as the only reference for preaching and evangelistic meetings and emphasized its inerrancy. In contrast to other TSPM leaders who advocate political agendas such as patriotism and opposition to imperialism, he maintained the position that individuals should "preserve the purity of the faith and resolutely refuse to cooperate with unbelievers" (Chow, 2018, p. 45). By focusing their beliefs and concerns solely on God and not on any other authority or ideology, Wang Mingdao and his fellow church leaders neither confronted nor actively collaborated with the CCP, emphasizing a non-combative stance and separation of political party and church (Kang, 2020, p.451). With the ongoing advancement of TSPM, these uncooperative church leaders faced suppression, leading most of their churches to transition into an underground state. These varied and diverse Protestant churches that are not affiliated with the TSPM/CCC are usually called "house churches" (*Jiating Jiaohui* 家庭教会) in contrast to "Three-Self/ TSPM Churches."

During the "socialist transformation" period, spanning from 1957 to 1966, the scale and activities of the five official religions were deliberately restricted. With the enforcement of the central planning system in 1958, the guiding principle for the distribution of consumer materials became "from each according to his ability, to each according to his labor (按劳分配)." It was mandated that everyone in the country participate in labor for material production. Consequently, the religious clergy were perceived as "parasites" contributing nothing but what was seen as the deleterious "opium of the people." To align with economic production goals, the socialist transformation aimed to diminish the clergy and reduce religious activities. As a result, many temples, churches, and mosques were either closed down or repurposed for non-religious use. Those that remained open for religious activities were compelled to reduce the frequency of such activities (F.G. Yang, 2011, pp. 69-72).

[9] The United Front Work Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee was created during the Chinese Civil War, working as the department that coordinates and carries out united front work.
For more information see: http://cpc.people.com.cn/n/2014/0422/c383919-24929231.html

Then came the eradication period (1966-1979). The Cultural Revolution's call to destroy the "Four Olds" (old customs, old culture, old habits and old ideas) directly targeted religion. All religious venues were closed down, public worship was banned, and religious buildings were repurposed for secular uses (F.G. Yang, 2011, p.73). Both the TSPM and RAB ceased to function during this tumultuous period. This, in turn, opened a somewhat precarious space for the house church to keep the faith alive as they were away from supervision and were convenient for gathering in clandestine, irregular and informal meetings in believers' homes (Kao, 2009; Ma & Li, 2018), attracting old Protestants as well as some new converts (Lambert, 1994, p.18). Particularly in rural areas, the house churches, although obliged to go underground, even found increased "religious space" to preserve their vitality due to the CCP's simultaneous suppression of Buddhism and Chinese popular religion. Miracles, healing, and the casting out of evil spirits became core activities in those churches, attracting a cumulatively large following (Kao, 2009; Kang, 2020, p.452). The house church continued to take shape and secretly grow during this time. Nevertheless, it still was a time of great suffering for most Chinese Christians, no matter whether they were members of the official churches or house churches.

After a period of severe crackdowns on religion, the party's perspective on religion gradually shifted following Deng Xiaoping's return to political leadership and the initiation of economic reforms along with an "open door" policy. Under his leadership, the CCP set new guidelines for country development, focusing on modernization and economic development, adopted a more "pragmatic" way to deal with various aspects of social life and began to loosen control over religious affairs (Fällman, 2010; Qu, 2011; F.G. Yang, 2011).

Official churches that had closed or been repurposed during the Cultural Revolution were now permitted to reopen for religious services. The TSPM was re-established as a state-sanctioned umbrella organization, serving as an intermediary between Protestant churches and the Party, and once again engaging in public religious activities. In October 1980, the first national TSPM congress in twenty years was held. It established the China Christian Council (CCC) as the organization tasked with implementing TSPM policies, fostering the life of official churches, overseeing theological activities, training future clergy, and printing Bibles and hymnals (Yang, 2017, p. 80). Consequently, with overlapping memberships, the TSPM and CCC are collectively known as the "Two Associations" (*Lianghui* 两会) of Christianity. They work closely together and constitute the leadership of the official Protestant church in China (Tiedemann, 2020, p. 409). As a result, church life entered a period of recovery, closely followed by a rapid increase in the number of Christian adherents and places of worship.

Although official churches have reopened under the auspices of TSPM, many house churches continue to stay underground and spread rapidly in both the cities and countryside. On the one hand, many house church members disagree with the TSPM church and CCC for its unconditional political submission, accuse the TSPM/CCC leaders of being theological liberals or nonbelievers, and criticize official churches for their lack of

freedom to evangelize outside church premises (Yang, 2017). On the other hand, their former underground religious survival, the spread of Christianity, and the wave of urbanization (as mentioned in **Chapter 1**) created tools and networks of communities for the later revival and and growth of these unofficial churches (Kang, 2020).

Even though house churches are illegal and vulnerable to much more coercive and punitive state action, house churches are too widespread for the government to eliminate them efficiently or easily. In Shenzhen, where the field research for my study was carried out, house churches adopt various strategies to avoid detection. Deliberately adopting a low-profile policy, most house churches prefer to establish multiple meeting points, which are often members' homes or offices in industrial zones. The number of members at every meeting point is thus limited to small numbers (no more than eighty or so). Normally, the government has tolerated this arrangement, reacting critically only when church members proselytize publicly or hold large gatherings reported by neighbours. Besides, many house church leaders maintain constant friendly links with pastors from official churches and keep "half-public, half-underground." Some even find ways to register their churches officially. To be sure, there is a great variety of house churches in Shenzhen, ranging from those attended by well-to-do "Boss Christians" to humble "migrant churches" frequented by migrant workers from rural areas.

Against the background above, as we saw on page 16, the sociologist of religion Yang Fenggang (2006) argued, along with the incongruence between the relatively strict religious policies and a thriving religious scene, there is, in fact, parallel existence of three realms within which the Chinese can practise religion, what he calls the "three-colored religious markets": the red market (officially sanctioned), black market (officially prohibited), and gray market (the fuzzy, ambiguous zone between the red and the black markets). According to this theory, the TSPM church, of course, belongs to the red market, as the state protects normal religious activities in government-sanctioned places. The red market, however, is not a free market because official churches are regulated by the RAB and the United Front, as mentioned above, and many restrictions are imposed on churches daily life, including mandatory political education for pastors and other religious ecclesiastics, specific limitations on acceptable topics for preaching and intervention in church personnel affairs (Bays, 2003, p.492). Moreover, as the party's reluctance to broaden the boundaries of the red market, religious activities have grown the fastest in the gray and black markets (F.G. Yang, 2011; Yang *et al*., 2021).

The situation of house churches is somewhat intricate. Traditionally, house churches are considered part of the black market, since their existence and operations are prohibited by law, and all their activities are conducted underground or in secrecy (Yang, 2006). However, in practice, as F.G. Yang (2011, p. 107) notes, if a religious group is unable to function in the open market and the possible consequences of being in the black market, such as facing penalty from the authorities, they would seek to operate in the gray market. As previously mentioned, many house churches maintain close ties with pastors from official churches. In fact,

some pastors within the TSPM church introduce their members to house churches for theological training, which is often restricted by the RAB and the United Front within the TSPM church. Due to the vague, flexible, and constantly shifting boundaries between these three markets, it becomes more challenging to document or collect data on the gray market (F.G. Yang, 2011). Indeed, not only have house churches vacillated among the three markets in response to regulation and social conditions, but some folk religious groups have also moved across the boundaries. Particularly, stringent regulations(as discussed in the following section) have contributed to the growth of religious gray markets(F.G. Yang, 2011). In this sense, there are many "shades of gray" (Yang *et al*., 2021, p. 3) within the constantly evolving religious markets in China, in which numerous religious organizations, including house churches, are active in them.

3.3 Policy, regulation, and law on religious affairs

3.3.1 Institutions for implementing religious policy and regulation

The Chinese legal system, characterized by the inseparability of politics and law, is referred to as the "political–legal" system (Chan & Carlson, 2005). In this system, the party's policies act as the guidelines for provisions and regulations, dominating decisions made by the State Council. Religious regulation is fundamentally derived from Party policies and implemented through law and administrative regulations (MacInnis, 1989; Potter, 2003). Regarding religious affairs, in the party system, the United Front Work Department (UFWD) is one of the most important divisions. The UFWD is charged with detailed policy formulation and enforcement, subject to general Party policy directives (F.G. Yang, 2011). In the state system, the main ministry of religious affairs is the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA), which is responsible for daily administration and supervision of religious affairs aimed at implementing Party policy (F.G. Yang, 2011; Palmer, 2009). The UFWD and the SARA have their central offices in Beijing, with branches extending to every province, city, and county. Thus, the UFWD within the party system and the SARA in the state system play crucial roles in formulating and enforcing religious policies that align with the Party's directives.

3.3.2 Religious policy and regulations

As mentioned earlier, the post-Mao era has witnessed a relaxation of Party policy on religion. The framework for the policies and regulations toward religion in China today was promulgated in 1982 in two documents, Article 36 of the revised Constitution of the PRC and Document 19 from the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

The official summary of the CCP's policy on religion titled "The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Question in Our Country's Socialist Period," known as "Document 19," issued in 1982 and outlined a fundamental approach emphasizing respect for and protection of the freedom of religious belief, anticipating a future where religion might naturally fade away. This pivotal document has remained the cornerstone of

religious policy in China since then (F.G. Yang, 2011). This document reaffirms the constitutional right to freedom of religious belief, asserting, "Every citizen has the freedom to believe in religion and also has the freedom not to believe in religion."[10] It officially recognizes only five religions—Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholicism, and Protestantism—with the intention of excluding folk religions, superstitions, and cults from legal protection (MacInnis, 1989). Document 19 explicitly prohibits the granting of "feudal privileges" to religious organizations and imposes limitations on their capacity for recruitment, proselytization, and fundraising. The Party assumes control over theological education and the administration of religious organizations, ensuring that religious leaders maintain allegiance to the principles of Party leadership, socialism, and national and ethnic unity (Potter, 2003).

In line with Document 19, the PRC Constitution of 1982 claims China values freedom of religious belief and guarantees its citizens this right. However, the term "freedom of religious belief" does not mean freedom of religion. This article clearly distinguishes between freedom of belief and freedom of religious activity, stating that freedom of religious belief is guaranteed, but religious activities must be carried out by laws and the interests of the public and the state (Qu, 2011). It implies that only "normal" religious activities are protected. In practice, what is counted as "normal" is decided by the administrators in position at the time, especially those of the United Front Department, the Religious Affairs Bureau, and the Public Security Bureau (Yang, 2011). Besides the Constitution, the statutory provisions enacted by the NPC regarding freedom of religious beliefs are scattered in different laws, including Organization Law of People's Courts, National Regional Autonomy Law, Compulsory Educational Law (2006), General Provisions of the Civil Law of 1986, etc. (Potter 2003; Qu, 2011).

If religion was not among the party's major concerns in the past, the 1990s witnessed a change (Potter, 2003; Dunch, 2008; Qu, 2011). The policy of the freedom of religious belief and social issues caused by rapid economic growth led to a fast growth in the number of religious believers, especially among rural-urban migrants (as mentioned in **Chapter 1**). They have become major participants in many new religious movements, including *Falun Gong*. Furthermore, the roles that Catholic and Protestant churches have played in overturning the communist powers in the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries shocked the Party (F.G. Yang, 2011). In response, the CCP Central Committee/State Council issued "Document No. 6" in 1991, outlining a policy approach that aimed to co-opt religious adherents while suppressing challenges to Party power (Qu, 2011). Subsequently, in 1993, Jiang Zemin, then general secretary of the CCP, articulated a significant statement on religion, often referred to as the "Three Sentences," highlighting the Party's main initiative to insist religion must "adapt to socialist society" under the "active guidance" of the Communist Party (Dunch, 2008). *Falun Gong* was officially denounced as an "evil cult" in 1999 and subsequently there

[10] The People's Republic of China: Document 19: The Basic Viewpoint on the Religious Question During Our Country's Socialist Period, available at: https://original.religlaw.org/content/religlaw/documents/doc19relig1982.htm

was a crackdown on it. Despite the repression campaign against the *Falun Gong* in 2000–2001, Party policy continued to sound a theme of cautious accommodation with religion in general, under the theme of adaptation between religion and socialism (Overmyer, 2003).

In 2004, the State Council promulgated a new set of regulations, "Regulations on Religious Affairs," which became effective March 1, 2005, largely consolidating previous regulations and policies. The document listed rules for religious personnel, sites, and activities. The government asserted that these new regulations are a "paradigm shift" and a "turning point" in religious affairs and will standardize disparate regional practice, provide more legal recourse for citizens whose rights have been violated, and generally "safeguard" religious freedom in China.[11] In this way, the regulations do signify a positive stride towards the rule of law in China in that they clarify the interaction between religious bodies and government organs, reducing the arbitrariness and abuses in the implementation of religious policy (Dunch, 2008), harness the vagueness of the regulations to achieve flexibility in accommodating religion (Palmer, 2009), and give additional legal protections in a few areas. However, these regulations still have strong characteristics of state supervision of religion, as they provide punitive and possibly arbitrary penalties for noncompliance and leave the interpretation of important yet vague provisions to bureaucratic discretion, which hinges on how government officials implement and interpret the regulations at the national, provincial, and local levels (Dunch, 2008). In general, the 2005 regulation opens up "more space" for religion in Chinese society in some respects (Dunch, 2008), but it seems like "a small step toward true religious freedom in China, but no more" (Carson, 2005, p. 2).

However, there has been a new change in the policy of religion since Xi Jinping assumed the position of general secretary of the CCP in 2012 and officially became China's president in 2013. Xi summarized his approach to religious groups in a speech in 2015 that called for the "sinicization of religions" (宗教中国化 *Zongjiao Zhongguohua*), urging all religious groups in China to adapt to socialism by integrating their doctrines, customs and morality with Chinese culture. The campaign particularly affects so-called "foreign" religions. Protestant, Catholic, and Islamic leaders are expected to align their teachings and customs with Chinese traditions and "pledge loyalty" to the state. Under the new policy, there has been a large-scale sinicization of mosque architecture in recent years, with Arabic architectural features being removed and, in some cases, replaced by traditional Chinese designs.[12] A notable development occurred in 2018 when China and the Vatican reached an agreement on the appointment of bishops in China within the framework of "sinicization of religions." Although the text of the agreement remains undisclosed, it is widely reported that it permits the CCP to select candidates for bishops, subject to the approval of the Holy Father. This arrangement ostensibly grants the CCP a significant role in the selection process while ensuring that all bishops remain in

[11] Rules Safeguard Religious Freedom in China, CHINA DAILY, Dec. 20, 2004, available at: https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/english/doc/2004-12/20/content_401602.htm

[12] Available at: https://ig.ft.com/china-mosques/

communion with Rome.[13] Despite the purported benefits of this agreement, practical conflicts persist, revealing underlying tensions between the CCP and the Vatican. For instance, in 2023, Pope Francis approved the appointment of a new bishop in Shanghai, but the Vatican condemned China for violating the bilateral agreement by transferring the bishop to Shanghai without prior consultation,[14] which reveals the potential power struggle and the difficulties in balancing religious autonomy with state control.

Nevertheless, this significant shift in religious policy has brought about many changes, the most notable changes are the following two. Legally, the new Regulations on Religious Affairs, drafted by the PRC government between 2014 and 2016, were ultimately signed on August 26, 2017, and came into force on February 1, 2018. Compared with the 2005 regulation, the General Provisions reproduce the language of the 1982 framework but emphasise the State's role in "actively guiding religion to fit in with socialist society"[15]. Additionally, the new regulation introduces more stringent measures concerning worship venues. It mandates that the construction of new places of worship using premises other than churches, mosques, or temples can only function as temporary religious venues after explicit government approval, thereby further constraining house churches. Administratively, in keeping with the Xi Jinping regime's efforts to tighten Party control over all aspects of government, the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA)— previously an independent executive agency directly under the State Council of the People's Republic of China, was melded into the United Front Department (UFWD) in 2018. SARA's local offices were subsequently absorbed into the UFWD.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy to observe several new regulations introduced during the pandemic concerning religious sites and online religious activities. In 2021, the government introduced a new regulation on online religious content titled "Administrative Measures for Internet Religious Information Services."[16] This regulation prohibits unauthorized religious activities and restricts unregistered religious groups from sharing religious content online. This measure significantly affected Christian churches, especially since most churches resorted to online services during pandemic-related shutdowns. Official churches have been attempting to meet the necessary requirements and obtain the permits, and some have succeeded. However, house churches have faced challenges such as WeChat account removal, website shutdowns, and imposed restrictions. These challenges will be elaborated upon in **Chapter 8**.

---

[13] Related reports on The New York Times (Sept. 22, 2018) and The Wall Street Journal (Sept. 14, 2018), available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/22/world/asia/china-vatican-bishops.html or https://www.wsj.com/articles/china-and-vatican-to-sign-landmark-deal-over-bishops-1536929831. According to the report, this secret agreement is renewed every two years and was renewed in 2020 and 2022(see report on Reuters, Oct. 22, 2022, available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/china/vatican-confirms-renewal-contested-accord-with-china-bishops-appointments-2022-10-22/).

[14] Pope approves Shanghai bishop as Vatican chides China for lack of consultation, Reuters, July,15, 2023, available at: https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pope-approves-shanghai-bishop-vatican-chides-china-not-consulting-2023-07-15/

[15] Religious Affairs Regulations, 2017, Article 4, available at: https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/religious-affairs-regulations-2017/

[16] Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services, available at: https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/internet-religious-information/

Meanwhile, in 2023, the government promulgated the new "Regulation on Management of Venues for Religious Activity" that has refined the registration requirements for religious sites based on the existing provisions and underscored that religious venues should adhere to the imperative of "supporting the leadership of the CCP, endorsing the socialist system, and diligently implementing Xi Jinping's new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics.[17]" The introduction of this regulation means further control and tightening of religious regulations, which will also have a certain negative impact on the development of house churches.

Overall, the history of Christian development and changes in religious policies show that church-state relations in China have long been a volatile situation. Since 1949, policies on religion in China have worked like a pendulum swinging between "hard" and "soft" ways of managing institutions, depending on social circumstances. Religious policies have consistently played a crucial role in the development and evolution of Christianity in China. The significance of these policies is particularly evident in the context of the unexpected and rapid growth of Christianity in recent years. In this thesis, I focus on this "foreign" religion—Christianity—by examining its revival among rural-urban migrants in South China. I pay particular attention to how urban Christian churches interact with religious policies and the resulting *modus vivendi* of these churches in daily life. Additionally, I explore how the daily religious practices of urban churches may be reshaped under the current context of stricter policies. The forthcoming empirical chapters will provide a detailed analysis of these dynamics.

[17] Regulation on Management of Venues for Religious Activity,Article 2, available at: http://www.gdpcc.org/jigou/fagui/657.html?wivafc=2t6161

Chapter 4. Research context and methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the research methodology adopted to investigate the rural-urban migrants' everyday religious practices in this research. It is divided mainly into four parts. The first two sections elucidate the research site, specific methods, and research procedures, which lay the methodological foundation for this research. The third section concentrates on the issue of positionality and reflexivity, highlighting the potential impact of the researchers' background and experiences on the study's findings. Lastly, the fourth section presents the ethical considerations that underpin this research.

4.2 Contextualising the research: Christianity in Shenzhen

There have been generally three periods in the growth of Christianity in Shenzhen. As one of the earliest areas in the Pearl River delta to be targeted by Western missionaries, Christianity was first introduced in Shenzhen, following China's forced opening to foreign trade and missionary activity after its defeat in the First Opium War in 1842 (Xue, Zhu & Chen, 2010). At first, Christianity was primarily embraced by the Hakka people, a migrant group from Northern China who were subordinated by indigenous inhabitants (Lutz, J. & Lutz, R., 2015). However, it was not until the early twentieth century that Christianity gained substantial acceptance among the Hakka people, largely due to evangelization efforts by the German missionary society, the Basel Mission (Cai, 2006; Chen, 2014)[18]. During this period, Western missionaries established missionary hospitals and schools, providing Hakka people with privileged access that mitigated the hardships of their lives. Western missionaries also founded the oldest Missionary school in Shenzhen, Pious Virgins Girls' School (虔贞女校), demonstrating the merging of Hakka and Christian cultures in Shenzhen a century ago (Tang & Wang, 2015; Wu, 2016). This period also witnessed the establishment of some significant churches with a lengthy history in Shenzhen, including the Baoan TSPM Church and Meilin TSPM Church.

[18] Also see the website of Chinese Rhenish Church Hong Kong Synod: https://www.rhenish.org/Common/Reader/Channel/ShowPage.jsp?Charset=big5_hkscs&Cid=23&page=0&Pid=2&Version=0

Figure4-1 The front door of Pious Virgins Girls' School
Source: photographed by the author

During the period preceding 1949, a gradual withdrawal of missionaries from mainland China occurred, resulting in their eventual departure or relocation to Hong Kong. After the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, all churches in Shenzhen were taken over by the local Communist government, and they soon experienced significant state disruption during the turbulent period between 1954 and 1978 under socialist extremism. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), all churches in Shenzhen were completely shut down. Some of the devout believers turned to the religious "black market" (Yang, 2006), conducting worship in places away from state surveillance.

With the economic reforms of 1979, the Chinese government has relaxed its laws regarding religion, and the right to religious belief was reinstated in 1984. In the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution, many people in China turned away from the discredited morality of Maoism, and resumed, or were converted to, religious belief as a way of filling the vacuum of faith (F.G. Yang, 2011). After 1984, underground worshippers started to reopen and re-establish Christian churches with the state's permission, while others refused to be involved into state regulation and continued to operate underground. During this time, Christianity in Shenzhen grew rapidly. According to official data, the Christian population in Shenzhen was 1790 in 1990, which increased to 10000 in 1998 and further rose to 25200 in 2000, making it the fastest-growing city for local Christianity in Guangdong province (Xue & Ma, 2012).

It is noteworthy that rural-urban migrants play a crucial role in the growth of Christianity in Shenzhen due to their trans-local mobility of religiosity as well as the conversion *in situ*. Apart from a few churches containing lots of local members, in Shenzhen, rural-urban migrant Christians, be they rural Christians or new converts,

constitute a significant proportion of the churchgoers. This is especially true in the "gospel village" [19]of Shenzhen, where more than fifty per cent of the population is Christian due to the efforts of Western missionaries. Within the rapid urbanisation, Christian beliefs gradually lost their hold in the local communities due to disinterest among villagers in spiritual pursuits. Whereas the arrival of rural-urban migrant workers has revitalized local churches, and rural-urban migrant workers currently make up the majority of registered churchgoers in local churches (Zhu & Guo, 2009). Moreover, the relatively relaxed religious policies in Shenzhen provide room for evangelising among rural-urban migrants. Despite the sensitivity of religious activities, factories, enterprises, and even the local government have tacitly supported the development of Christianity. During the Foxconn suicide tragedy[20], the founder Terry Gou invited pastors to settle in the factory area to address the psychological problems faced by grassroots employees. Although the Chinese government's religious policy has tightened in recent years, and the official control of Christianity in Shenzhen has become increasingly serious, the overall number of Christian believers is still increasing. As for the house church, the local government also adopted a relatively tolerant stance, which is technically illegal and unapproved by the state. According to the pastor of Zhendao House Church, they have received tacit approval from the local government; that is, local regulatory authorities typically do not take action against their gathering places unless their daily activities begin to negatively impact nearby residents. If neighbours submit complaints to the appropriate authorities, action will be taken to suppress these unofficial churches.In practice, the local government in Shenzhen has an ambiguous stance towards the extant large number of unofficial churches, refusing to either acknowledge their registration request or employ severe coercive measures to restrict the church's activities. Against this background, both TSPM and house churches have prioritised evangelisation targeting rural migrants in these years, which has further attracted migrant workers to become potential converts. For example, Baoan TSPM Church has newcomers welcome activity for new rural migrant workers. Likewise, Qiaoxiang House Church was originally a small congregation of around 20 people, but it has developed into a church with more than 100 members, most of whom are migrants from rural areas.

[19] Gospel Village is a unique community that emerged in China after the introduction of Christianity, with more than half of its inhabitants being Christians. In Shenzhen, Gospel Village developed after the introduction of Christianity, causing cultural shifts within the village and resulting in the majority of villagers becoming Christians. Presently, such villages, such as Kongkou Village, still exist in Shenzhen, but they are experiencing a significant decline in the Christian population under the background of rapid industrialization, urbanization and modernization in China.

[20] In the eleven months beginning in January 2010, 14 young rural-urban migrant labourers, ranging in age from 17 to 29, attempted or committed suicide at Foxconn facilities in Shenzhen, China. As the manufacturer of more than 50 per cent of the world's electronic products and the largest manufacturer of Apple products, Foxconn has been blamed for this series of tragedies due to its impossibly high production pressures and harsh dormitory conditions for migrant workers. In the name of economic growth, this tragedy also reflects the costs of a state-sponsored development model that sacrifices labour's dignity for corporate profit. Additional information is available at:
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/28/foxconn-plant-china-deaths-suicides, and
https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/jun/18/foxconn-life-death-forbidden-city-longhua-suicide-apple-iphone-brian-merchant-one-device-extract

Therefore, this research mainly focuses on the group of rural-urban migrant Christians. The study was conducted through fieldwork undertaken during three distinct phases, spanning from October 2019 to January 2020, June 2020 to November 2020, and February 2021 to July 2021. The phased approach was necessitated by the temporary closure of churches due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the fieldwork sought to investigate the possible postsecularity within the co-production of secular neoliberalism and religion in urban China, as demonstrated by the resurgence of Christianity among migrant communities in Shenzhen.

4.3 Interpreting Christianity through a reflexive ethnography: the ethnography of religion in the Chinese context

After two months of conducting fieldwork, I was invited to attend a Christmas Prayer Meeting at a local house church……As a volunteer, I participated in the church's welcoming work. Despite China's latest, more stringent regulations on religious affairs in 2019, I was surprised to see that the missionary enthusiasm of the house churches in Shenzhen remained undiminished. The venue for A House Church's Christmas Prayer Meeting was an office building in the industrial zone. The members transformed the rented space into a temporary church by rearranging the furniture, bringing in a preaching table from the church, and neatly arranging the chairs. Although this rented place is on the outskirts of the city, requiring a long commute for many members, the number of attendees on the day far exceeded the expectations of the church leader. As a result, many members had to give up their seats to new acquaintances or other church Christians……The prayer meeting lasted until 10 o'clock in the evening and attracted nearly 100 Christians and seekers.

——Fieldwork note of A House Church (24/12/2019)

The emergence of religious research in mainland China during the 1980s and 1990s was a response to the post-Mao postsecular reality. Over the past decade, Chinese religious research has witnessed great progress. The expansion of social science disciplines and the introduction of social science methods in the discipline of religious studies (宗教学 *zongjiaoxue*) in mainland China have led an increasing number of Chinese scholars to develop diverse and multifaceted approaches to the study of contemporary Chinese religious practices. While Chinese anthropologists have traditionally focused on less developed ethnic minority regions and rural hinterlands, an increasing number of China-based scholars are beginning to look outward from an urban, global perspective and explore Chinese religious life in metropolitan areas and even diasporic communities (Cao, 2010; 2013; 2018; Huang, 2014; Wielander, 2013). However, popular discourses surrounding urban Christianity, as portrayed by journalists, tend to politicize the issue of religious freedom in contemporary China rather than analyzing the hybrid local sociocultural environment in which the religious revival takes place (Cao, 2010). Researchers of Chinese religion have focused on the post-Mao revival of religion as a politically and ideologically charged process in which the local community resists the totalizing party-state (Anagnost, 1994; Feuchtwang, 2000; Jing, 1996; Mueggler, 2001; Yang, 2000; 2004). Some studies of Chinese

Christianity have even adopted a dichotomous perspective, viewing the religious issue in China through the framework of state dominance and church resistance (Huang, 2014; 2021).

The long-term investigation of the evolving relationship between the church and state has considerably enhanced our comprehension of the trajectory of Christianity's development amidst religious transformation in China. However, it is important to note that this politicization of Christianity in China can lead to a predetermined viewpoint, disregarding the intricacies of religious subjucts' everyday religious practice. As Cao (2010) suggests, this interpretation "is over-politicized, not only because things at the local level are much more complex and less directly observable but also because many local Christians defy this hegemonic framework for interpreting their religious experiences as acts of resistance" (p.7). Put differently, such politicized viewpoint risks oversimplifying religion in China into a dichotomy of state control versus religious adherents' compliance or resistance, thereby failing to capture the complexity of the religious landscape in China.

This is also illustrated in my fieldwork notes (24/12/2019) above. The fieldwork presented a discrepancy between the grand narratives of church-state relationships and the actual landscape of the postsecular urban, as evidenced by the everyday religious practices of migrants and the daily operations of urban churches. After moving to a new city, rural-urban migrant Christians may contemplate affiliating themselves with either the official church or the "more orthodox" house churches. However, these migrants' daily religious practices are primarily focused on finding a congregation that aligns with their spiritual requirements and fostering spiritual growth alongside fellow adherents. Notably, urban churches prioritize micro-level daily concerns over macro-level church-state interactions. Despite recent negative impacts on house churches resulting from changes in religious policies in China, mature house churches with established memberships prioritize attracting new adherents and expanding their religious activities in order to create a more stable and enduring religious community (such as A House Church). Indeed, the relationship between Christianity and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is inherently political, while local contexts exhibit complex intertwinements of sacred and secular boundaries.

More recently, some scholars of Chinese Christianity have tried to focus on individuals' personal spiritualities and everyday expressions. For example, Cao Nanlai's (2010) book on Wenzhou Christianity provides detailed ethnographic work of China's urban-oriented church members, who are mostly private entrepreneurs, and how they negotiate local cultural identity, gender relations, and social power. Huang Jianbo's (2012) examination of urban migrant churches in multiple places provides a systematic description vis-à-vis how urbanization and modernization influence the religious life of rural-urban migrant workers. Focusing on "nuanced firsthand accounts of multidimensional religiosity and the complex workings of religion" (Cao, 2018, p.156), these ethnographic and fieldwork-based studies of urban migrant Christian communities offer

fruitful avenues to interrogate everyday practices, mundane conversations and internalized unspoken dialectics that constitute these rural migrants 'daily life and religious practices.

Drawing on these ideas, instead of relying on the traditional framework of state-society relations, this research employed a critical ethnography approach. Mainly rooted in participant observation and interviews, the critical ethnography facilitated an in-depth understanding of the realities experienced by rural-urban migrants and church members over the course of approximately one year. Recognizing the embodied nature of knowledge, the ethnography method provides a way to understand in-depth the "real" life in domestic settings. As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) note, the core of ethnographic research is "first-hand participation in some initially unfamiliar social world and the production of written accounts of that world by drawing upon such participation" (p.1). It becomes *critical* when issues of representation, the legitimation of knowledge and the "exercise of power in culturally specific yet socially reproductive processes" (Lather, 2001, p.479) move to the fore. Breaking from the detachment of conventional ethnography, a critical approach takes a more activist stance, collaborating with oppressed groups to co-create knowledge (Lather, 2001; Bourgois, 2006). In terms of application, such collaboration enables the production of knowledge that is co-fabricated between researchers and researched. More importantly, however, the collaboration also "takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (Madison, 2005, p. 5). Simultaneously hermeneutic and emancipatory, this approach facilitates the production of knowledge that invokes social consciousness, criticism, and change (Carspecken, 1996).

By following a critical ethnographic approach to the rural-urban migrant Christian group, the data collection and analysis go beyond traditional academic discourses surrounding urban Christian growth, and critically explore Christianity and faith-based institutions that worked in rural migrants' embodied systems of beliefs and processes of meaning-making in daily urban life that led to enriching empirical thinking in the post-secularity of China under the neoliberal context. First, through a critical ethnography to rural-urban migrants' daily religious practices, it enriched the understanding of how faith actions can have more meaning to faithful subjects than may at first be apparent. Second, it provided a means to engage with religion in people's daily lives beyond sacred spaces and explicitly religious communities, exploring how macro-historical forces of social transformation have been concretized in the everyday practices of Chinese Christians. Third, it could facilitate a richer and inner understanding of emerging faith-based social action of Christian churches in urban China, specifically under the neoliberal context. Therefore, based on an ethnographic approach, this research aimed to present a nuanced narrative of the Chinese rural-migrant Christian group's everyday religious landscape and the intersection of their religiosity and the highly secular world.

Whilst undertaking an ethnography looking into urban Christianity and rural-urban migrants' faith, it is important to consider the particular issues of positionality that may arise. In nonreligious contexts, human

geographers have long discussed the issue of positionality and how researchers' identities influence relationships with participant communities (for example, Brydon-Miller,2004; Crang & Cook, 2007; Caretta & Jokinen, 2017). For religious researchers, the positionality may be more complex and fluid. The faith, gender or even atmosphere surrounding the researcher could impose influences on the interpretative reconstruction (Bailey, Brace, & Harvey, 2009; Denning, Scriven, & Slatter, 2022). As a non-Christian female researcher, during my fieldwork, I also encountered multifaceted positionalities and how they were highlighted, changed, and solved throughout the process of my fieldwork and even in the follow-up research stage need to be articulated. In the following section, I critically reflect upon my ways of thinking and the social and cultural environment in which I am situated, which is particularly important in a country whose citizens are dominated by atheist education.

4.4 Research methods and procedures of this research

4.4.1 Access

Gaining access to the "field" to collect data is crucial for ethnographic research as it concerns how the researcher enters a place and involves access to the social relations that take place there. In this research, the main problem of access is how to access the house church in Shenzhen. According to the previous chapter, in China, there are two types of Protestant churches that can be identified according to whether or not they are state-sanctioned: the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) Churches (official churches) subject to state registration and house churches or underground churches (unofficial churches) that operate outside of state surveillance. As the main category of "unofficial" Christian space in urban China, house churches catered to a large number of new migrants from the countryside (Huang, 2014)and thus became the main field site for exploring how urban faith-based institutions provide social aid to migrants in this research. However, concerning the legally ambiguous or illegal state of most house churches, they often operate underground and are only open to one's acquaintances or those deemed trustworthy, of which very little information is available in the public domain or online.

Because of the necessary official invisibility of house churches, this research first relies upon the gate-keepers, referring to those who are in a position to "permit" access to others to interview, as a route of initial access to participants. Based on my master's research of XM House Church[21], I have personal contacts and friends who still work in that house church. With the assistance of a key gatekeeper from this work, the pastor of the XM Church, I gained access to two other house churches (House Church A and House Church B), which closely connect with XM Church. After attending both House Churches' fellowship and Sunday worship for a month, I established basic mutual trust with church members. Having got the gatekeepers' permission, the relationship established with those people also influences the progress and subsequent course of the

[21] "XM" is the pseudonym of the real church name for security concerns.

research, and thereby how to facilitate the relationships with the relevant people looms large in the process of ethnography.

After establishing relationships with church members, the newly acquainted informants then became the new nodal points in my social network for this research, and through them, I gained access to other interviewees using a snowballing technique. This process is repetitive: "informants refer the researcher to other informants, who are contacted by the researcher and then refer her or him to yet other informants, and soon" (Noy, 2008, p. 330), enabling me to reach a wide geographical array of house church churchgoers across the city. Moreover, I also considered recruiting informants through the gatekeeper when the snowball process could not be carried out. In this case, I used the method of recruiting informants through the gatekeeper by explaining my research aim and describing the informants I needed. With the assistance of the gatekeeper, who contacted potential informants and gave them a brief introduction to my research and myself, I discovered a wider range of potential interviewees, which expanded the scope of my research participants in practice.

I also kept in mind that the role of gatekeepers or sponsors in shaping its trajectory and outcome cannot be overlooked, as the researcher may tend to be channelled in particular directions in line with their networks of friendship and territory. It was, therefore, essential for me to remain cognizant of potential limitations imposed by gatekeepers and to critically evaluate their own research practices accordingly. Additionally, a researcher is often expected to be an "expert" who should be extremely well-informed regarding the problems that arise and relevant solutions. In these circumstances, I tended to re-clarify the research purposes as well as the issue regarding whether my research can contribute to sorting out the problems of organization or community to both gatekeepers and participants.

4.4.2 Sample

This research investigates the postsecularity in urban China through ethnographic insights. In contrast to prioritizing statistical representativeness, the selection of interviewees is based on the typicality and diversity of the Christian community within rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen. Rather, it considers the typicality and diversity of the Christian community within rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen in order to conduct an in-depth analysis of the religious life and subjective construction of this particular group. To achieve this, 34 migrant Christians, 11 staff members from house churches (including pastors, co-workers, deacons, preachers, and church leaders), six staff members from official churches (including the pastor, minister, and co-worker), and an officer responsible for Christianity in the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Bureau (ERA) of Shenzhen were selected as informants, approached and interviewed (table 4-1). This study involved five house churches (A House Church, B House Church, Qiaoxiang House Church, Pingan House

Church, and Zhendao Reformed House Church)[22] and four TSPM churches (Meilin TSPM Church, Baoan TSPM Church, Fuyong TSPM Church, and Buji TSPM Church). The selected churches, whether official or house churches, were primarily located in the *Guanwai* area (关外地区 outside the Special Economic Zone) of Shenzhen, where factories and rural-urban migrants are highly concentrated. To protect the personal information of the informants, pseudonyms were used for all names referenced in this study.

Table 4-1 Demographic information of respondents

Number	Gender	Age	Place of origin	Category
1	Female	32	Hubei	Minister of official church
2	Male	55	Guangdong	Pastor of official church
3	Female	25	Hainan	Co-worker of house church
4	Male	23	Guangdong	Migrant Christians
5	Male	26	Henan	Migrant Christians
6	Female	43	Hunan	Leader of house church
7	Male	26	Hubei	Migrant Christians
8	Male	52	Shanxi	Migrant Christians
9	Female	24	Heilongjiang	Co-worker of house church
10	Male	27	Henan	Preacher of house church
11	Male	31	Henan	Preacher of house church
12	Male	20	Hunan	Migrant Christians
13	Male	35	Henan	Leader of house church
14	Female	56	Hubei	Migrant Christians
15	Female	22	Guangdong	Migrant Christians
16	Female	28	Shanxi	Migrant Christians
17	Male	30	Hebei	Migrant Christians
18	Male	29	Hunan	Migrant Christians
19	Female	28	Henan	Deacon of house church
20	Male	54	Henan	Pastor of house church
21	Male	45	Hubei	Government official of ERA
22	Female	55	Jiangxi	Migrant Christians
23	Male	56	Jiangxi	Migrant Christians
24	Female	43	Shanxi	Migrant Christians
25	Male	48	Henan	Migrant Christians
26	Female	24	Shanxi	Migrant Christians
27	Female	57	Henan	Co-worker of official church
28	Female	31	Sichuan	Migrant Christians
29	Male	42	Guangdong	Pastor of official church
30	Female	34	Jilin	Minister of official church
31	Male	35	Beijing	Pastor of house church
32	Female	24	Guangdong	Migrant Christians
33	Female	26	Fujian	Migrant Christians
34	Male	28	Gansu	Migrant Christians
35	Female	29	Fujian	Migrant Christians
36	Male	33	Guangxi	Leader of house church
37	Female	23	Anhui	Migrant Christians
38	Male	26	Hunan	Migrant Christians

22 In this research, two house churches are referred to as A and B, as their pastors requested anonymity for their congregations' names. Even though the remaining house churches may not have shared the same concern, pseudonyms are used for all house churches to ensure security reasons.

39	Male	27	Shanxi	Migrant Christians
40	Female	23	Guizhou	Migrant Christians
41	Female	33	Hubei	Migrant Christians
42	Female	34	Henan	Migrant Christians
43	Male	32	Henan	Preacher of house church
44	Female	26	Anhui	Migrant Christians
45	Female	27	Hunan	Migrant Christians
46	Male	31	Shanxi	Migrant Christians
47	Male	32	Hebei	Migrant Christians
48	Female	23	Guangxi	Migrant Christians
49	Male	34	Gansu	Preacher of house church
50	Female	22	Henan	Migrant Christians
51	Female	50	Henan	Migrant Christians
52	Female	64	Hubei	Migrant Christians

This research is based on fieldwork that I conducted during three phases (between October 2019 to January 2020, June 2020 to November 2020, and February 2021 to July 2021). The research began in October 2019, starting with Qiaoxiang House Church, and through the introduction of the pastor of Qiaoxiang Church, I was able to contact two other well-known house churches (A House Church and Zhendao House Church), which became my main research sites later. My research was interrupted from February to May 2020 due to the church shutdown caused by the COVID-19 epidemic. In June 2020, I continued my investigation and contacted the last two house churches (B House Church and Pingan House Church) through snowballing. For house churches, I selected those with a rural-urban migrant population as the main congregation, and with a church size of at least 50 people, medium-sized or large house churches. Along with the attention to the proportion, I also considered the diversity of denominations of house churches in selecting them as research sites. The mainstream Christian denominations in Shenzhen are evangelical. Even though most of the churches in this study didn't claim to belong to a specific denomination, the pastors preferred to call themselves evangelical. Nevertheless, some non-evangelical churches were included, such as Zhendao House Church, which is a Presbyterian church, B House Church with a charismatic background, and Qiaoxiang House Church transitioning to Presbyterianism. Regarding the official churches, except for Meilin TSPM Church, the largest official Christian church in Shenzhen, the rest of the TSPM churches were located near industrial areas, with rural-urban migrants accounting for more than 70% of the entire congregation. The research on TSPM churches started later than that on house churches, and the research time was not as long as that of house churches (as shown in Table 4-2). In addition to supplementing the study on house churches, the study on TSPM churches also aimed to explore migrant Christians' daily religious practices in official faith-based organizations in Shenzhen and the impact of religious policies on official faith-based organizations.

Table 4-2 Information about the churches of this research

Church name	Location	Research Period
Meilin TSPM Church	Futian District 福田区	Feb 2021-May 2021
Baoan TSPM Church	Baoan District 宝安区	Feb 2021-July 2021
Fuyong TSPM Church	Baoan District 宝安区	Aug 2020-Nov 2020; Feb 2021-Mar 2021
Buji TSPM Church	Longgang District 龙岗区	Feb 2021-July 2021
A House Church	Longhua District 龙华区	Oct 2019-Jan 2020; Jul 2020-Nov 2020
B House Church	Longgang District 龙岗区	Aug 2020-Nov 2020
Qiaoxiang House Church	Nanshan District 南山区	Oct 2019-Jan 2020
Pingan House Church	Longhua District 龙华区	Jun 2020-Oct 2020
Zhendao House Church	Longhua District 龙华区	Oct 2019-Jan 2020; Jun 2020-Nov 2020

The research period presented primarily refers to the period during which the researcher personally participated in church activities. Concerning the research on online churches, I began the study in May 2020, when many churches moved to online platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and conducted fieldwork until November 2020 (when the learning WeChat groups were closed). In addition, after the church had re-opened, I conducted in-person interviews with the WeChat group organisers.

4.4.3 Collecting data

Research path 1: interviews

The in-depth qualitative interview is the primary research method which I employed to collect first-hand qualitative data. The interview is generally believed to be a critical method for ethnographic researchers who have tried to obtain and understand the contexts and contents of different people's everyday social, cultural, political, and economic lives (Crang & Cook, 2007). As Eyles (1988) describes, "a conversation with a purpose," interviewing is fluid in its form, with each interview varying according to the interests, experiences, and views of the interviewees. In other words, the interview, as Valentine (2005) commented, is sensitive and people-oriented, which means interviewees are able to construct their accounts of their experiences through their description and explanation of their lives, allowing researchers to examine and discover as much as possible about why people feel or act in the ways they do. One of the additional strengths of this approach is that it allows respondents to raise issues that the interviewer may not have anticipated (Silverman, 2006). In this sense, in comparison to a questionnaire survey, the purpose of interview methodologies is depth and detailed exploration and understanding rather than breadth and coverage (McDowell, 2010, p. 158).

Recently, with feminist and post-modern work in the humanities and the social sciences, understandings of the interview have been "revolutionized" (McDowell, 2010), emphasizing that the interview process can never replicate the social contexts of the real world. These interactive moments transform the researcher and the researched into co-creators of research data (Rapley, 2006). Thus, the interview process can be viewed as a "discursive repertoire" (Byrne,2004), which means the researcher and the interviewee are constitutive of a

collaborative relationship and make sense of discursive meanings in a mutually interactive way (McDowell, 1992). Both the interviewer and the respondent regularly cross the social boundary, which constitutes the inquirer/respondent division in this account of the interview. This emphasis on mutuality in the interview process is related to the hope that the intensive, reciprocal exchange of feelings, attitudes, and experiences may help build up shared views and ideas between the interviewer and the interviewee.

Therefore, in this research, in-depth interviews collect subjective and discursive materials, and most of the questions thus focus on the interpretations, experiences, and spatialities of rural-urban migrants' religious life and their formation of subjectivity under the current religious policy background imposed upon the everyday religious experience. As a marginalized social group, it is necessary to allow sufficient room for rural-urban migrants to give statements and counterstatements in the joint construction of knowledge and viewpoints. It means that only some broad research concerns and questions aiming at collecting background information about the research settings would be listed in the topic guides. The interview proceeds normally begin with a few broad and general questions about their background information concerning the research setting. Then I tried to access the interviewee's more detailed descriptions of the situation, which I was trying to examine and asked them to express their own ideas, viewpoints, and judgments. The interviews were mainly conducted with the following groups of people: (i) rural-urban migrants who are engaged in the official churches/house churches; (ii) the staff of faith-based NGO and the pastors of official churches, especially those in Shenzhen Christian Council and Shenzhen Christian Three-Self Patriotic Committee, the official religious institutions which specialize in official church management; (iii) the church leaders, the pastors and other staffs of house churches. I conceive that the interviews with these people help me to construct and develop an in-deep understanding of the ways in which rural-urban migrants experienced and interpreted religious beliefs in an everyday context.

There were two factors I was particularly careful about during the interview. The first consideration was establishing a mutual and conversational partnership between the interviewees and myself, which was crucial during the process of the interview. As a culturally "mainstream" postgraduate student, I was aware of the limitations of my comprehension of the interview data would adequately reflect the broad social, cultural and political time-spaces which influence rural-urban migrants' viewpoints and experiences. To mitigate the potential bias that may arise from my interpretation of the data, I adopted a collaborative approach with the interviewees in the construction of knowledge and viewpoints. This involved the provision of statements and counterstatements, as well as the sharing of my views, understandings, and tentative conclusions with the interviewees. By doing so, I was able to facilitate more in-depth exchanges of ideas during the interviews. In essence, my approach to conducting interviews aligns with McDowell's (2010, p.162) argument that 'the interview exchange is more of a collaboration than an interrogation'. This approach was necessary to ensure that the interview data accurately reflected the diverse perspectives and experiences of rural-urban migrants.

Secondly, in some cases, I also employed the method of narrative biographical, in which stories of rural-urban migrants are collected, analyzed, and unpacked in order to understand how meaning is discursively constructed through storytelling and to explore the story as a meaning-making device (Rosenthal, 1993; Kartch, 2017). Insights into the migrants' experience, subjectivity, and meanings are gleaned through their narratives. Thus, I conducted open interviews while encouraging interviewees to share their life stories. Notwithstanding the interviews were unstructured, I prepared some open-ended questions on their conversion history, migratory experience, working life, and living strategies in the cities. The outcomes depended on the participant's readiness to describe what transpired and which aspects of the story were more significant than others. Within these processes, I paid specific attention to the life stage at which they converted to Christianity and participated in urban churches and how Christianity impacted upon their experiences as migrants.

Research path 2: Critical discourse analysis

Derived from a multidisciplinary background, critical discourse analysis (CDA) emphasizes contexts of language use beyond sentence grammar (Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Critical discourse analysis differs from discourse analysis in being problem-oriented and therefore is described as an approach interested in 'understanding and explaining social phenomena that are necessarily complex' (Van Dijk, 2013). Van Dijk (1993) points out that CDA 'focus on the role of discourse in the (re)production and the challenge of dominance which as the exercise of social power by elites or institutions resulting in social inequality.' More specifically, the CDA approach intends to explore what structures, strategies or other properties of textual discourses or verbal interaction play a role in the modes of discourse-power reproduction (Van Dijk, 1993). CDA analyses dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as the 'internal relations' of discourse (Fairclough, 2013). Therefore, in the method of CDA, languages and discourses are viewed as social products invested with rich meanings, ideologies, and social power instead of passive signifiers of unmediated, absolute realities.

In this research, I consider the relationship between the church and the government in the context of religious freedom in China, which embodies the freedom of religious belief, the state supervision of religious activities, as well as having clergy work within the legislation and official consultative bodies (Qu, 2011). The party–state dominates in its religious policy and law-making, as well as in the practical dealings of religious affairs. In this sense, policy and rules about religion act as legal representations used for regulating religious activities in the "red market," which comprises all legal (officially permitted) religious organizations and religious activities (Yang, 2006) and shape the image of Christianity in public for the party's interest. Therefore, being aware of the hegemonic function of official discourse and its diffusion helps us to understand and clarify the changing policy landscape of religion in the urban governance and structure of hegemonic power in the relationship of church-government interaction.

The analyses of official documents and statements, thus, were conducted through critical discourse analysis. The sources of discourses were multi-scalar, involving national policy, local regulation, and media coverages that played critical roles in producing and circulating the urban religious policies and Christian propaganda in the media. Additionally, the research also carefully examined the narratives and discourses related to the religious practices employed in/beyond the church itself and the identities constructed through the interplays of discourses and state power. The official religious policies, such as "Shenzhen Special Economic Zone Regulations on Religious Affairs" and "Financial Management Measures for Places of Religious Activities", were obtained from the Shenzhen Government's website. During my fieldwork in the official church, I also paid attention to management notices published by the church and documented them by taking photographs.

Research path 3: Participant observation

Participant observation is the core means in ethnographic research in order to understand the world-views and ways of life of actual people in the contexts of their everyday lived experiences (Crang & Cook, 2007), with the researchers' body becoming an instrument for inquiry (Parr, 1998). As a "deep hanging out" (Wogan, 2004), the observation method supposes that normal behaviors are meaningful and purposeful, reflecting deeper values and belief (Mckechnie, 2008). By personally entering the social setting, which is central to a particular research project, the researcher is closely caught up in the webs of social relations, social interactions and cultural effects which he/she attempts to examine (Hughes, 2002). In this process, the researchers come to terms with social actors' own perspectives and report social realities on those actors' own terms. To be an observer, however, researchers also need to maintain some form of objectivity in recording field notes (Tedlock, 1991). Using participant observation means balancing its *subjective* and *objective* components to try to develop intersubjective understandings between the researcher and the researched (Crang & Cook, 2007).

To understand migrants' social relations and interactions with churches and other church members through the lens of embodiment and emotion, this research applies participant observation to explore migrant Christians' everyday religious practices in Shenzhen. This research used the observational method to generate new knowledge and evidence that cannot be extracted simply from interviews and documents. Through experiential practice, for example, participating in worship and prayer, the researcher bears witness to their religious practices' embodied, emotional and spiritual aspects. Moreover, the participant observation method helps us to articulate broader patterns and social contexts and also produces extra insights and conclusions in the process of analysis, which includes observing the routine operation of urban faith-based organizations, the interaction of churches with governments or other religious institutions, and members' casual chatting about their daily life experiences.

Taking photographs also records and represents our research experiences, such as documenting changing environments or particular events(Watson & Till, 2010, p.126).In this research, apart from taking notes for on-site information, I also took photographs for 'writing up' visible information like decorations inside the church, the rituals of worship, and even some special events of churches. It should be mentioned that the issue of confidentiality and anonymity must be considered due to the possibility of photos gathered during the research involving church members and the internal church. The ethical considerations for this aspect will be detailed in the later section on confidentiality and anonymity.

As noted above, this study was conducted from October 2019 to June 2021, with two interruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The participatory observation method has been consistently employed throughout the research process. The primary form of observation was daily religious practices within the church, which ranged from evangelical worship services to various fellowships with migrant Christians as well as Bible study classes for members. By participating in the observation of these activities, I developed a nuanced understanding of migrant Christians' daily religious practices and place-making within churches' spaces and became familiar with various activity arrangements designed by churches for serving rural-urban migrant groups. In addition to church services and prayer meetings, I also volunteered for church services, such as Sunday school or preparing food for Sunday worship, and spent time with fellow church workers, particularly those who focused on serving migrant Christians by providing services for their children or assistance during difficult times. These observations facilitated a deeper understanding of the daily operations of faith-based organizations and provided insights into the development of possible theo-ethics. Going beyond this straightforward information presented in the field sites, I also observed latent and covert forms of religiosity within churches and beyond via embodied religious practices and interaction with rural-urban migrants.

The analysis was based on the grounded theory approach. Each time after collecting data from the field, a preliminary analysis was conducted. In doing so, I gradually narrowed down the observation focus and identified more in-depth research questions. As Adler and Adler (1994) have argued, at the initial stage of observation, research data collected are necessarily descriptive and unfocused. As the research process goes on, data should be progressively more focused and articulated with potential theoretical frameworks until observation data reach a state of theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

4.5 Multiple positionalities and reflexivity in this research

When engaging in qualitative data collection and analysis, social reality is constructed and presented from the interpretive standpoint of the researcher. Such constructions are "more or less affected not only by subjective understandings (previous experiences, values, assumptions, hopes, fears and expectations), but also by the social position from which the social reality is perceived" (Barker, 2003, p. 23). That means, in social

research, not only the researcher's subject is important but also the context where this is arranged (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008).

Accepting that what is perceived in the workplace or social community as reality is socially constructed, positionality will significantly influence the decisions made during each cycle of the research process. Drawing upon the scholarship of feminist researchers like Gillian Rose (1997) and Donna Haraway (1988), many geographers, especially feminist geographers, have pointed to the importance of positionality and/or situated knowledge (McDowell, 1992; Moss, 1995; Massey,2004; Simandan, 2019). Donna Haraway (1988) developed the concept of "situated knowledges," highlighting that no position is permanent and that all knowledge is partial. As Haraway (1988) notes, the illusion of a "Godtrick" arises from the assumption that scholars can see "everything from nowhere"(p.581); in fact, all human knowledge is partial and embodied, and power is always involved in its production(Haraway, 1988; Rose, 1997). This concept is particularly relevant to this study since we are dealing with research participants who presumably think there is a "god reality" of omniscience. The concept of situated knowledge endeavors to cultivate a form of knowledge that is locally "objective" (Sultana, 2017) and is acutely aware of its own partiality and contextual dependence. It rejects the notion of any absolute truth and thus opposes detachment and modernistic notions of objectivity and thus challenges the ideals of "modernistic notions of objectivity" (Sultana, 2017, p.1). Acknowledging situated knowledge requires a critical awareness that power relations can produce "others" in the research process and that researchers *per se* are involved in the process that produces such differences (Sultana, 2017).

Drawing on this idea, reflexivity about the research process becomes a necessary part of the research, which to situate the researcher themselves in this very process, to acknowledge the embodiments and scales involved, and to locate the researcher along a range of social, political, or cultural issues. During the research, reflexivity is the process of digging deep into who/what we are, "a process that brings the researcher's self to the central stage and makes her/him visible" (Miled, 2019, p.5). This reflective practice must be incorporated throughout the entire research endeavour, including planning, conducting, and writing about the study. By promoting an ongoing and recursive relationship between the researcher's subjective responses and the intersubjective dynamics of the research process, reflexivity ensures that researchers continually reassess their own influence on the research and its participants (Probst, 2015). In sum, reflexivity is essential for researchers to navigate the complexities of the research context effectively.

Based on a constructivist epistemology, I see the data collected as mutually constituted between the researcher and the researched, and thus I agree with Rose (1997) that "researcher, researched and research make each other" (p. 316). According to Rose (1997), this implies that "the identity to be situated does not exist in isolation but only through mutually constitutive social relations, and it is the implications of this relational understanding of position that make the vision of transparently knowable self and world

impossible" (p. 314). Even the knowledge we have about ourselves is partial. However, the research will be more beneficial if the researcher can provide a more nuanced and reflective account of the research process, contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. In this section, thus, I describe and explain the multiple positionalities and reflexivity during my fieldwork and even in my writing stage, revealing the attitudes towards religion and our relation to interviewees as a geographer working on Chinese Christianity.

1.Insider and outsider

Several decades ago, Patricia Hill Collins (1986; 1999) offered an interesting elaboration of the concept of "the outsider-within," suggesting that one's location within the organization creates different lenses of reality. Likewise, Gillian Rose (1997) articulated a feminist critique of positionality, highlighting both its fluidity and politics. For Rose (1997), "reflexivity looks both 'inward' to the identity of the researcher, and 'outward' to her relation to her research and what is described as 'the wider world'" (p.309). While Herod (1999) went further and disrupted the neat dualism of insider-outsider by discussing the shifting contexts and complexities of research encounters and the need for researchers to adjust their positionality frequently over time through different phases of the inquiry process. In this section, therefore, I present and explain the context and intention of my shift of *insider/outsider* during my fieldwork.

As an outsider, a non-Christian researcher, I was conscious about my position from the beginning. In practical terms, I utilised the term "cultural Christian"— Cao (2010) employed to describe his positionality whilst conducting an ethnography of Christianity in Wenzhou, to identify myself during the fieldwork. As "someone who appreciates the doctrine and the faith but has no personal commitment to the church" (Cao, 2010, p.18), I participated in a variety of church services and fellowships, listening to sermons, sharing everyday experiences with Christian fellows, studying the Bible, saying prayers, as an ordinary migrant Christian would. In order to participate in this church as an insider, I decided to identify myself as a "catechumen" (*Mudaozhe* 慕道者) and only at a later stage openly identified myself as a PhD researcher after I had established mutual trust with other church members. In many cases, my religious positionality was assumed. I would be referred to as "Sister" (*Jiemei* 姐妹) and sometimes be asked to pray with, or for, a church or person. For those congregants who were curious about my faith, my non-Christian positionality provided an opportunity for them to proselytize.

However, there was still wavering trust between me and some key church members after two months of fieldwork. For them, I was an outsider, coming from a position of relative privilege, and didn't belong to their church, albeit my regular and consistent attendance at church activities and Sunday worship. At this stage, volunteering regularly at the church was significant in developing genuine relationships and gaining some trust. I attempted to be a regular volunteer in the "Love Feast," which means I was deeply involved in the

preparation of the feast after every Sunday prayer, needing to buy food, cook, and distribute meals and even clean up after the feast with other co-workers. The preparation of the feast offered many chances for me to establish friendships and share similarities with co-workers and the church community through informal talk and other cooperation. The relationship only truly became more positive after several months of my involvement. This relationship not only helped me to interpret and recognize members' real thoughts and their narratives when they referred to faith as resulting in meaning that was more than what was represented but was also crucial in clarifying the daily operation of a house church. Meanwhile, keeping in an agnostic position when it comes to transcendent experience (such as of the holy spirit, healing, and miracles in this study) in my fieldwork in order to balance the postsecular critique and transcendent feelings. That means I would not simplify the holy and spiritual landscape among the migrants to merely "social phenomena"; rather, it is unknowable and full of migrants' theological knowledge and experiences, and I do not claim to possess any privileged approach to their explanation. Also, during my conversation with Christian members, I made a conscious effort to utilize the language and terminology that they commonly use in their everyday life.

Nonetheless, maintaining a consistent position as either an insider or outsider is challenging and even impossible. Specifically, it is apparent that the positionality of the researcher can shift depending upon a number of considerations, in the process, the boundary of the supposedly stable dualism of "insider/outsider" is blurred and fluid (Herod, 1999; Mullings, 1999). Moreover, being entrenched in the role of an insider carries drawbacks, such as reduced participant explanations and potential blurring of professional boundaries during interactions (Bukamal, 2022, p. 19). Therefore, the dichotomy between insider and outsider is not fixed, and researchers should approach their roles with a critical and reflexive stance, acknowledging the fluidity of their positionality and seeking to mitigate any potential drawbacks. Brace *et al*.'s (2011) discussion of faith as "a belief-ful relationship with an object that cannot be accessed through doctrinal statement and ritual alone" (p.3) highlights the importance of understanding the real-life experiences behind religious emotions, affect, or embodied expressions in the church. After several months of fieldwork in urban churches, I increasingly began to consider religion as something "researchable" and of analytical interest on the one hand and something that should be researched, especially researching rural-urban migrants. Going back to my transcripts after the fieldwork, I was able to distinguish better the ambiguities inherent to the personal biographies of the Christian interviewees. For example, becoming more sensitive to the role of religion in interviewees' workplaces and daily life helped me to grasp experiences of integration in Shenzhen.

Also, interviewers sometimes found that stepping out of the role of "insiderness" helped them be more objective and open up the conversation during the interview (e.g., Mullings, 1999). An example of this occurred during my interview with a house church leader, who requested my opinion on Christianity in China prior to our discussion. Similar to this instance, several young Christian workers consulted me on my views of Christianity when they discovered that I was a PhD researcher from a British university and that my research

area concerned geographies of religion. Their attention to my outsider positionality allowed me to explain what it is I am interested in learning about in ways in which I feel I can play a greater role in controlling the discursive terrain over which the conversation will flow, in which I could find the detail I am interested or maybe missed in those interviews before. Particularly for the religious policies discussion, I found it more advantageous to position myself as an outsider rather than emphasizing that I was "one of them." As a religious insider, I would be expected to align with their beliefs and perspectives, whereas as an outsider, I could approach the discussion from a more neutral standpoint and avoid any biases or assumptions.

Overall, sensitivity towards researcher positionalities is in keeping with the poststructuralist, anti-essentialist agenda of critical ethnography. The act of crossing cultural boundaries challenges the traditional dichotomies of insider/outsider and sameness/difference—a more dynamic "betweenness" emerges, which relies less on the researcher's positionality itself and more on how this position is communicated and negotiated during the research process (Nast, 1994). Such betweenness highlights the fact that, during the fieldwork, the researcher is constantly engaged in (re)negotiation with research subjects rather than being either connected or disconnected from them, thus implying that researchers are "never 'outsiders' or 'insiders' in any absolute sense" (Nast, 1994, p.57).

2. Gender

In addition to considering the positionality of insiders and outsiders in relation to research subjects, another important aspect of my work involves gender. Feminist geographers have been emphasizing the significance of lived experiences of individuals and communities in their localities, while also bringing to the forefront the challenges female researchers face during fieldwork (see McDowell, 1992; Nast, 1994; Nagar & Geiger, 2007; Chattopadhyay, 2012). Gender not only shapes the researcher's work but also significantly impacts day-to-day research activities (Kusek & Smiley,2014). Bearing in mind this, in this section, I discuss and explain how my gender worked as a part of my identity as a researcher and influenced the process of data collecting throughout my fieldwork.

It has been noted that Christianity in impoverished rural areas is an overwhelmingly female institution that mostly attracts the illiterate elderly (Cao, 2011), and the saliency of female-dominated is also in urban Christian churches. During my fieldwork, most of the churches I visited had more female members than male ones. In spite of most of my male research participants being approachable, friendly, and eager to share their stories, the male-dominated nature of religious leadership inside the church is common and generally accepted, whether in rural or urban. This male-dominated leadership is not only reflected in the pastoral care of the church but also in the invisible power relationships within the church— female believers are expected to exhibit submissive and gentle behaviour, and consequently, their personal opinions are discouraged in church affairs, but rather an obedience to the guidance of pastors or elders. And their understanding of doctrine should also be led by pastors. Additionally, single female believers' intimate relationships and

marriage choices are often guided and suggested by the church. During interviews with single female believers, it was clear that their responses regarding partner standards and marriage were heavily influenced by the church. They often conformed to the official statements of the church, even when they disagreed with some aspects. Especially in terms of their attitudes toward the church, they are clearly under much pressure from external factors compared to male migrant Christians and, therefore, may be unable to express their thoughts openly. Gender also influences how researchers and participants interact during interviews. For example, during my interviews with migrant Christians, female Christians exhibited relatively lower levels of trust and requested a higher degree of anonymity. Some specifically requested not to have their names included in publications and would not provide their last names when introducing themselves to the researcher.

As a female researcher, I realize my gender allows me to be an insider in the broader group of young migrants in Shenzhen through their personal and lived experiences. The everyday experiences of female members— especially their practice in building up relationships— were definitely impacted by their gender and varied greatly from male lives that revolved around work rather than home. Although interviews constituted a crucial component of my research methodology, participant observation had proven to be an invaluable supplement, providing essential context, grounding, and connections. In addition to interviews, my involvement in church activities such as Sisters Fellowship and Youth Fellowship facilitated the establishment of trusting relationships with female members. Subsequently, I gradually integrated into their daily lives, engaging in activities such as visiting their home and shopping with them outside of church gatherings. These experiences have provided me with first-hand, authentic information about female Christians' everyday experiences in Shenzhen that I cannot gain solely from interviews.

Meanwhile, the discourse surrounding the power dynamics of gender within the church was another aspect I needed to consider and investigate in my fieldwork. Church sermons inherently contain gendered messages that often stress the importance of women conforming to Biblical teachings and following male leadership. Women are frequently encouraged to aspire to the role of a "good wife" or "helper" within the church community. Additionally, there are other implicit gendered discourses within the church. For example, some reformed house churches hosted theological training for their congregants. All the guest speakers invited to lecture at the training are male Christian celebrities holding advanced degrees (e.g., professors, entrepreneurs, overseas pastors). They are literally expected to "teach" (教课 *jiangke*), an act of passing on knowledge, rather than to "preach" (教导 *jiangdao*), an act that is supposed to be moved by the Holy Spirit. In contrast, female members are typically limited to sharing their personal stories of conversion, thoughts on daily service to the church and family, or their experiences with the Holy Spirit during the personal sharing session of Sunday worship. And their speeches are characterized by a significant amount of emotion and

affect, which aligns with the church's expectations of them. This dichotomy between rational masculinity and emotional femininity in the church reflects a broader gender power structure present in urban churches.

In summary, gender issues are an important aspect of human geography research, and positionality plays a critical role in shaping the way these issues are studied and represented. By acknowledging their own positionality and engaging with feminist perspectives, researchers can better understand and address gender issues in their research and contribute to more nuanced and inclusive understandings.

3. Political context

It is worth noting that political context is one of the most important structural forces that may influence the positionalities of both the researcher and the researched in China. Thøgersen and Heimer (2006) note that "doing fieldwork inside the People's Republic of China is an eye-opening but sometimes also deeply frustrating experience" (p.1). Indeed, studying Christianity in China is a problematic and risky undertaking: it often involves considerable difficulties in terms of access, official mistrust, and even the fear of repercussions for our collaborators. Notwithstanding the more tolerable atmosphere toward social studies in the post-Mao era, religious topics with other topics like ethnicity are someway still sensitive in China (Thøgersen & Heimer,2006). Specifically, the CCP views Christianity as being closely linked to "religious infiltration," which encompasses any actions or propaganda that may include the risk of overthrowing the regime and socialist system, undermining national unity, controlling religious organizations and affairs, and illegally developing religious organizations and strongholds of activity (F.G. Yang, 2011, p.30). Given its political context, China would appear to present various restrictions on researchers who are intent on eliciting genuine views and experiences of local people. In this research, unregistered house churches and other legally ambiguous fellowships aimed at rural-urban migrants were included. Also, my fieldwork covered some faith-based activities that were not allowed by the religious administration (such as preaching publicly to migrant workers and congregational meetings of some house churches). Thus, negotiating the presence of state power during my fieldwork was critical to me in gaining authentic and detailed information for research.

During my fieldwork, the political context had a significant impact on my research in two ways. First, political concerns from informants had posed influenced my access to some fields. For example, in some TSPM churches, pastors or co-workers refused to participate in my project unless there was a letter of introduction from the government or the official agency, which a PhD student from a UK university cannot obtain. Moreover, within the process of standardizing the management of TSPM churches, which aimed to turn Christianity into a fully domesticated religion that would do the bidding of the party, CCTVs were installed in almost every official church and gathering place, which made some Christians feel uneasy and insecure. Although the official statement claimed that these high-definition cameras were intended to ensure safety because they were connected to the Public Security Bureau, during my fieldwork, many believers and pastors

indicated that they believed these high-definition cameras were used to monitor the interior of the church in real time. Consequently, some Christians were unwilling to participate in my research, albeit some were interested in the topics. In terms of these circumstances, I had to be more flexible in my research conducting. In praxis, the rejections were case-contingent: although many TSPM church leaders refused to participate in my research, I was still allowed to conduct interviews with other Christians within their churches if I ensured that my questions did not include any anti-party or critical information about religious policies. Moreover, being a Shenzhen native not only helped me avoid the bureaucratic red tape and official restrictions that often hinder foreign researchers but was conducive to my searching possible relationships with official church staff through *guanxi* (关系 personal relationship). In Chinese culture, *guanxi* could be seen as a series of social interactions that form intimate and reciprocal relations (Chen & Chen,2004) in which favours and information are exchanged over time, enmeshing individuals within networks of reciprocal obligation. I found a co-worker at Baoan TSPM Church through my family's *guanxi* and developed a friendship with her. Through this connection, I was introduced to Pastor Jie at the church, whose status and introduction provided me with a smooth acceptance and prolonged presence in the church. To identify additional interviewees in the TSPM church, I developed the mutual *guanxi* with staff and Christians in Baoan TSPM Church, employed the snowballing method, and sometimes conducted covert research to reduce their concerns, which I will explain in more detail in the remaining parts of this chapter.

Second, the "self-censorship" caused by the current political context made both the researcher and the researched keep in mind which topics are "untouchable," leading respondents to avoid or perfunctorily answer some questions they consider sensitive. Moreover, as China is known for its "high power distance," where there is a strong emphasis on hierarchy and strict management structures, and managers with significant power (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p.43), individuals from highly hierarchical organizations may be hesitant to participate in research for fear of damaging their professional reputation (Zhou & Baptista, 2013).To address this, the interview questions were carefully designed to depoliticalize, and unavoidable politically sensitive questions were only asked according to the interviewee's responses. However, no matter how politically "innocent" the topics are, as long as we depend on official institutions, publications, and media, there is still a risk of getting stuck in official interpretations of Chinese social reality, as formulated in the general political discourse (Thøgersen & Heimer, 2006, p.13). In this sense, it's also important to collect information concerning the subjective realities of the informants. During interviews with rural-urban migrants, conversations frequently turned to their grievances about the current *hukou* system, low incomes, heavy workloads, and the challenges presented by stricter religious policies. These conversations provided insight into the migrants' daily living conditions but were rarely linked to the party-state, which was crucial for the researcher to collect such information as it vividly presents the landscape of rural-urban migrants' everyday life in urban China.

Overall, my research primarily concentrates on the religious life and lived experiences of rural-urban migrants rather than political issues that could influence participants to articulate their true thoughts and feelings (as discussed above). I considered the impact of political context on this research and implemented a series of measures to minimize its effects as much as possible. For example, to ensure the reliability and validity of my research, I employed several tactics, such as being open and honest with participants, collecting as much data as possible and cross-verifying it, and integrating the analysis with the existing literature. However, it should be noted that strategies were put in place only to reduce or try to shield the impact of political issues rather than completely eliminate them. And the politics might become more subtle and covert, but it was still very much present in my working contexts.

4.6 Ethical dilemmas

4.6.1Informed consent and the ethics of covert research and social media

It is essential to initially state that obtaining informed consent from migrants, staff and pastors of the church, and relevant government officials should be ongoing and need to be continuously renegotiated between the researcher and the researched throughout the research process (Miller & Bell, 2002). For the researcher, it is unavoidable that not everything is equally available for observation, and people may be reluctant to talk at all. So, it needs subtle negotiations with gatekeepers and careful manoeuvring of the researcher into a position to get data throughout the fieldwork (Seale, 2012). In this research, the pastors of churches (official or unofficial) will be the gatekeepers who can facilitate access to members of the churches and act as the point of contact for me during the fieldwork. As in Reeves's (2010) research in a Probation Approved Premises, the gatekeeper may have the power over the research project. In this sense, maintaining "rapport" with the gatekeepers may be a strategy to manage research relationships within the field, in which the researchers intend to keep an independent role in the project (Reeves, 2010).

During the fieldwork, the establishment of rapport is needed. Even owning the gatekeepers' agreement, informed consent from the individuals is still needed for conducting interviews and using the data they offered. During my fieldwork, I gave my contact details to all potential participants so that they could raise any questions or concerns about my work. Additionally, I commenced gaining the gatekeepers' consent before entering the field and tried not to disturb normal church activities as much as possible within the churches. After being granted access to do the fieldwork, I explained my presence to everyone I spoke to and ensured that I had clear information sheets to support this.

In this research, I did not use a paper-based consent form to obtain the interviewees' consent; rather, I relied on oral consent for conducting interviews and using the data they provided. In China, paper-based and formally styled consent forms may be associated with legal documents and signing on means producing a

legal effect. Because of the sensitivity around Christianity in China, most interviewees sought to conceal their real names and were, therefore, hesitant to give a formal signature on the forms. Specifically for house church members, signing a formal consent was inappropriate and carried legal concerns, which might create unwarranted and unwelcome feelings of caution and anxiety. So, I employed oral consent in my research and obtained oral consent from interviewees before each interview.

To avoid the researcher's presence impacting the authenticity of the environment being studied and gather naturally occurring data under different research conditions (Calvey, 2008), I conducted covert observation in certain instances without invoking the concept of informed consent. Against negative connotations and moral strings attached to the "covert" label, Calvey (2017) presents and compellingly substantiates a nuanced argument that covert methods have always been part of social science research and present a crucial, even if submerged and stigmatized, tradition of inquiry.

As Calvey (2008) notes, "research is a situated business and not open to rationalistic planning"(p.908), and ethical codes offer a limited nuanced understanding of the emotional, biographical and shifting character of fieldwork where ethical decisions are occasioned practices. In my research setting, some TSPM megachurches had membership sizes of one or two thousand. The viability of obtaining full and informed consent from everyone in such large organizations was extremely low. Moreover, seeking informed consent from pastors or church staff could influence the interviewee's response, as their introduction by a pastor in an official church could be mistaken as an official investigation.

Thus, I conducted semi-covert research for my observation in the megachurches. I received the informed consent of every single interviewee individually but did not inform the pastors of my research intentions. In this circumstance, I would confine my investigation to interviews alone. If interviewees feel unsafe or any potential harm to them, the interviews could be changed to a place outside this church and ensured all information could be kept confidential. I also want to clarify that although the covert research was observational and "naturalistic"—meaning it did not require participants to do anything they were not already going to do—ethical concerns may still arise as the thing I revealed may have the potential risk to individuals who did not provide explicit consent. However, these risks could be averted by the fact that all megachurches involved in this study are TSPM churches (legally registered), meaning participation in their activities and talking with their members or staff does not pose the same policy risks as engagement in house churches. Furthermore, I have anonymized all interviewees' information to ensure their identities remain untraceable.

4.6.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

During the interview, the interviewee may share information that could jeopardise his or her position in a system. Thus, their information must remain anonymous and protected from those whose interests conflict with those of the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

Because of the sensitivity of field sites (most house churches have not been registered with the government), all the names and relative location information of house churches have been anonymized. For the same reason, all participants were anonymized, and I used code names in this research. Furthermore, I excluded any identifying material or information that I consider may cause problems for the individuals involved, and it needs to be judged according to the tangible situation during the fieldwork. I took a notebook and a recording pen to record the observational findings and interview data. This did mean that staff were potentially be able to see what I write. So, all the members of the churches were anonymised in my field notes.

As noted above, the visual material in this research raised ethical concerns around anonymity and security as well, as this study collected several visual materials, such as photographs of church events, along with information about churches and interviews with participants. All the photos taken tried to avoid showing people's faces as much as possible. In addition, most of my informants tend to be absent from the photos, whether these photos would be published or not. To eliminate informants' tension about the visual materials collected during the research, I handed them over to informants so they could view them, making sure that I could use these materials in my presentations, thesis, articles and other outcomes of this research. Also, I collected many visual materials like photographs of the worship or events in the church, which inevitably involved the interiors of churches. Given the issue of anonymity and security, these photos were carefully selected to avoid any risk of containing identifiable information (such as church names, residential addresses, church promotional decorations, etc.). Moreover, these photos had been approved by the pastors of the churches. Additionally, I used screenshots of the church's WeChat group in the digital chapter (**Chapter 8**), and the WeChat group name and members' WeChat names or nicknames were pixelated to keep all group members' information confidential. It is imperative to ensure participants' privacy in the digital age, as digital identities like the names in WeChat may be identified across different online contexts, and safeguarding anonymity is critical to ensure the ethical use of such materials in academic research.

Chapter 5. Faith, neoliberalism, and postsecularity :

the rise of Calvinist Christianity among young migrant Christians in Shenzhen

5.1 Introduction

On the first day of a public holiday, while much of Shenzhen was at rest, the interior of a modest building in one of the city's industrial districts was abuzz with activity. Nearly one hundred young Christians—drawn from churches across the city—had gathered for a three-day seminar on Calvinist theology, led by Pastor W, a prominent Calvinist preacher from Nanjing. The event, hosted by Church A, had originally been planned for an audience of fifty. Yet, after the announcement was circulated via social media and reposted in WeChat groups across multiple congregations, attendance swelled far beyond expectations. Each session during my three days of participant observation was filled to capacity, and even those unable to attend in person requested audio recordings of the lectures. This enthusiasm reflects a broader trend: among Shenzhen's most active house churches, Calvinist congregations have expanded significantly in recent years, with membership predominantly composed of young rural-urban migrants.

Why would these believers forgo the rare leisure of a public holiday to engage in intensive theological study? What is it about Calvinist theology that resonates so strongly within Shenzhen's migrant Christian communities, and how does its growing presence reshape the city's religious landscape? To address these questions, this chapter approaches the phenomenon through the lens of postsecularity. By examining the reason for young migrant Christians' enthusiasm for Calvinist theology and the forms of religiosity they embody, it reconsiders the relationship between secularity and postsecularity —secular conditions necessarily precede postsecular impulses, but as an ongoing process in which the two intersect, co-exist, and mutually reshape one another (Cloke *et al*., 2019). In doing so, the chapter also examines how Calvinist ethics engage with the intertwined pressures of neoliberal urbanism and authoritarian governance in contemporary China. Drawing on Max Weber's theorisation of the Protestant ethic as a comparative lens, the discussion considers how Calvinist ethics are reinterpreted and localised within postsecular urban contexts, giving rise to what might be described as a "Protestant ethic with Chinese characteristics." This emergent ethic offers theological grounding for disciplined work and moral conduct, while simultaneously negotiating—and at times accommodating—the constraints of China's authoritarian–neoliberal order.

The chapter situates these inquiries within the intertwined contexts of postsecularity, neoliberal, and rural–urban migration. In the context of post-reform China, the intersection between faith, neoliberalism, and urban

migration presents a complex and paradoxical landscape (Cao, 2010; Huang, 2015; Qian & Guo, 2019; Yoo, 2021). On the one hand, in light of China's unprecedented scale and pace of economic development, neoliberal logic continues to be the most influential discourse in social media and influences individuals' economic practice and choice of self-development in the cities (Laikwan,2022). Neoliberalism in China is deeply incorporated into China's state developmentalism and secular ideologies, where hegemonic discourses of reason, efficiency, and progress produce docile, governable subjects (Qian & Florence, 2021; Qian & Guo, 2019). Young migrant labourers have been frequently viewed as the "object-targets" through which neoliberal subjectivities and ethics are materialised, maintained, and reproduced (Buckley, 2013; Pun & Lu, 2010). For the rural-urban migrant, the apartheid-like *hukou* system, together with the disciplinary factory system, has created a highly exploitative migrant labour regime that aims to produce durable, governable and self-reliant migrant bodies and minimise their labour costs and consumption of welfare (Alexander & Chan, 2004; Ong,2007; Pun,2007;2010). Also, *suzhi* discourse has played a critical role in legitimising structural inequality by embodying neoliberal logics of class differentiation (Anagnost, 2004; Jacka, 2009; Kipnis, 2007). As a "blame-the-victim" technique, it attributes migrants' marginality to individual deficiencies while obscuring the role of the state–capital alliance in producing institutional inequality (Anagnost, 2004; Jacka, 2009; Qian & Guo, 2019).

This neoliberal hegemony is sustained not only through structural mechanisms but also circulates and reproduces via the shaping of subjectivities—manipulating belief, desire, and affect (Anderson,2016; Cloke *et al*., 2019; Qian & Guo, 2019). In recent years, neoliberalism has been commonly understood through an analytic of governmentality, a framework which has helped focus analysis of the mundane practices through which neoliberal spaces and subjectivities are produced at a range of different scales (Larner, 2003). This perspective has opened up renewed attention to the performative and affective workings of neoliberal capitalism which has penetrated emotional and affective life (Anderson, 2016). Berlant (2011), for example, argues that affective competencies of late capitalism are accompanied by "cruel optimism" that the endurance of pain and exhaustion in the pursuit of a better life, despite the desired future, remaining unattainable and its pursuit often entailing self-destruction. This affective politics often entails self-destruction and immaterial labour exploitation, which is "increasingly automated by technologies of self-regulation, targets, and a normalized gig economy in which get the job done mentalities have come to legitimatise sequential servitude to the "next task" and downgrading of working conditions" (Cloke *et al*., 2019, p. 57). Schumaker (2016) and Monbiot (2017) also claim that exhausting levels of intimacy, communal trust, and deep friendship in neoliberal society lead to a "psycho-spiritual crisis" in which victims feel "disoriented and unable to locate meaning, purpose and sources of need fulfilment" (Schumaker, 2016, p.5). This anxiety over the pursuit of self-improvement is particularly acute among the younger generation of rural–urban migrants. Unlike their parents, they are more deeply embedded in secular values that emphasise the relentless demands of self-cultivation and the pursuit of personal success, shaped by the rapid expansion of neoliberalism over the past three decades in China.

On the other hand, in recent years, religion has increasingly interacted with—rather than simply opposed—the forces of development and capitalism in shaping migrant experiences in Chinese cities. Christian values, particularly the concept of Caritas, align with the state's "harmonious society" agenda by promoting state-endorsed moral standards and filling gaps in welfare provision for migrant workers (as discussed in the next chapter). For rural–urban migrants, religion also offers theological vocabularies and ethical frameworks to navigate inequality and alienation, enabling them to settle materially, symbolically, and emotionally in unfamiliar socio-economic environments (Gao, Qian, & Yuan, 2018; Zhu & Guo, 2009). These religious ethical frameworks are not merely an individual response to external economic and political change, but are embedded in migrants' active interpretation of secular conditions. For example, Yoo (2021) shows how Calvinist theology allows young believers to reinterpret capitalist logics of work, success, and wealth—seeing material achievement not as opposed to spiritual growth, but as a means of serving God and supporting church work. Such reinterpretation produces hybrid religious–secular subjectivities, in which theological commitments coexist with, and reframe, capitalist aspirations. As Gao and Qian (2020) note in the case of Foxconn migrant workers, Christianity can also reinforce existing systems of domination. Theologically mediated understandings of alienation and inequality may re-legitimise the state–capital alliance, embedding religious belief within the very structures it seeks to navigate. Overall, these perspectives imply that religion 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 Shenzhen, the collaboration of authoritarian governance and neoliberal economic policies creates a distinctive context in which the intersection between faith, neoliberalism, and rural–urban migration becomes especially visible. This is particularly the case among young rural–urban migrants, whose aspirations differ markedly from those of their parents' generation: whereas the latter largely migrated in pursuit of basic survival, the former are motivated by ambitions for socio-economic mobility and middle-class lifestyles in the city. These young migrant population includes college students and high school graduates, and most of them belong to the post-1980 and post-1990 generations and were primarily white-collar workers in their twenties and thirties. Yet, despite their qualifications, few hold—or are likely to secure—Shenzhen *hukou* under the city's highly selective points systems[23]. Like their predecessors, they face institutional discrimination rooted in China's urban–rural dual structure and hukou regime, as well as uncertainty and uprootedness caused by disembeddedness from social networks and heated competition in urban labour markets. However, they are less willing to acquiesce to the discourse of "low quality" (*di suzhi*),

[23] Since the early 2010s, all Chinese megacities have implemented points systems that allow non-local residents to apply for an urban *hukou* in the city where they live, based on their accumulated points. Under these schemes, applicants are ranked according to a total score derived from various criteria, such as age, educational qualifications, professional skills, and length of residence. Although intended for applicants other than "talents," points systems are highly selective in practice. In Shenzhen, for example, approximately 70% of the total population consists of migrants without a local *hukou*, making they excluded from full urban citizenship and therefore lack access to many welfare benefits and public services.

yet they still struggle to meet the ever-escalating benchmarks imposed by neoliberal ideals of self-cultivation. Within this context, faith becomes a critical source of moral guidance and existential orientation. Calvinist theology, in particular, appeals to these young migrant Christians for its comprehensive doctrinal framework, extensive literature on integrating faith into everyday practice, systematic theological reasoning, and Presbyterian-like modes of church governance. Under these circumstances, examining the popularity of Calvinist Christianity among young migrant Christians provides a framework for understanding how Calvinist ethics reinterpret work, identity, and personal value within the constraints of China's authoritarian–neoliberal order, and for exploring how postsecular religiosities are (re)shaped and (re)constructed within exploitative labour regimes.

Building on the analysis above, this chapter investigates the emergence of Calvinist Christianity among young rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen, arguing that their religiosity is being reshaped at the nexus of market rationalities and theological commitments. It explores how Calvinist ethics provide a framework for navigating exploitative labour regimes and for reinterpreting work, identity, and personal value within the constraints of China's authoritarian-neoliberal order. To develop these arguments, the chapter first offers a concise review of debates on the relationship between the religious and the secular from a postsecular perspective, establishing the theoretical foundations for the analysis. It then engages with Max Weber's account of Calvinism's role in the development of capitalism, re-theorizing this relationship in light of the contemporary entanglement between Calvinist theology and Shenzhen's prevailing neoliberal governance. The empirical sections analyze the motivations behind young migrant Christians' pursuit of "rational theology" in Calvinist churches and examine how their Christian practices—particularly their work ethics—are interwoven with neoliberal rationalities that influence and reshape their religiosity within the postsecular and "labour regime" realities of Shenzhen.

5.2 Postsecularity, migration, and the reconfiguration of Calvinist ethics

5.2.1 Rethinking the religious and the secular through a postsecular perspective

Over recent years, the "postsecular" turn has emerged in the geographical literature as a normative description of the re-emergence of religion in the public sphere and a self-reflective reformulation of the traditional secularization thesis (Beaumont & Baker, 2011; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2015). Drawing on constructive ideas from Jürgen Habermas and Klaus Eder, Cloke *et al*. (2019) argue that the concept of postsecularity reflects both instances of a vigorous continuation of religion in a continually secularising environment, and a more general rise in the public consciousness of religious discourse and social action. This line of inquiry casts light on how neoliberalism has created opportunities for faith-based organizations as providers of welfare in the wake of the restructuring of the welfare state in the West (Beaumont & Cloke, 2012; Holloway, 2013; Williams *et al*., 2012; Williams, 2015). In this sense, flourishing faith-based organizations (FBOs) in the West suggest that religion not only negotiates neoliberal economy

and governance but also co-constitutes the latter. Another group of scholars see the postsecular as the individual religious involvement that people are becoming more conscious about the religious and spiritual dimensions of everyday life (Kong & Qian, 2018; Olson *et al*., 2013). In this way, there is an increasing focus on theological discourses and interpretations as well as spiritual experiences that compose the everyday practices and embodied subjectivities. The meaning of transcendence has not disappeared in modern society. Rather, it provides ordinary people with a system of religious vocabularies to make sense of and negotiate secular processes, such as changing political-economic conditions, gender, mobility and migration, and multicultural encounters (Olson *et al*., 2013; Oosterbaan, 2014a; 2014b; Gökarıksel & Secor, 2015; 2017). In this sense, both two spheres of study above might come to realise that there is a mutual learning relationship between the secular and the religious: secular citizens are expected to be more self-reflexive; at the same time, religious actors are more sensitive to secular worldviews and concerns.

Indeed, many researchers have problematised and criticised widely accepted narratives of the distinct boundary between the secular and the religious and come to rethink what religion and religiosity mean in modernity. Asad (2003, p.9), for example, suggests that to "make a rigid division between the sacred and the secular is surely to impoverish both." He further argues that, when either religious or secular actors navigate social milieus, there is no single and consistent motive for a complex action; instead, "there were several part-agents", "because of the diverse desires, sensibilities, and self-images involved" (Asad, 2003, p.12). Therefore, religious actors can only be analysed by examining "overlapping, fragmented cultures, hybrid selves, continuously dissolving and emerging social states" (Asad,2003, p.15). French religious theorist Danièle Hervieu-Léger (1986; 2002) has developed this argument eloquently by attending closely to the "ongoing reorganisation of the nature and forms of religion into configurations which are compatible with modern living" (Davie, 2007,p. 61). Instead of ascertaining the extent to religion jibes with, or deviates from, the normativised religious-secular differentiation, a more refined approach delves into "the kinds of religiosity that are nurtured by and flourish in modern societies" (Davie, 1996,p.101), shaped by intertwined processes of secularisation and sacralisation. In other words, new forms of religious organisation and expression are more productively analysed as products of, rather than backlash against, modernity (Qian & Kong,2018). In this sense, religion is by no means "sequestrated" by the secular; rather, it is continuously reinvented through its engagement with secular processes (Davie, 2013; Hervieu-Léger, 1986). As Hervieu-Léger (1986) and Davie (1999) both contend, forms of religiosity that flourish in modern societies are precisely those shaped by these intertwined processes of secularisation and postsecularisation. Ultimately, religious institutions that "think and speak from the inside of modernity" are more likely to navigate societal upheavals effectively and respond to the shifting needs of their constituencies (Davie, 1996, p. 106).

Accordingly, this study conceptualises the boundary between the religious and the secular as fluid, continually reconstituted through processes that both disrupt and are embedded within secular modernity. In the context of postsecular China, this entails examining how young migrant Christians' religiosities are

reconfigured at the intersection of neoliberal discipline, socio-economic restructuring, and the theological framework of Calvinism. This approach positions Calvinist Christianity not as a static doctrinal body of doctrine, but as a dynamic moral and theological resource for young believers, not merely challenging external secular values but also cultivating "humble Christian ethics" that facilitate adaptation to the demands of current socio-economic orders.

5.2.2 Postsecular reinterpretation of Calvinist ethics in urban China

When discussing Calvinist theology, it is almost inevitable to invoke Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2001). In this seminal work, Weber famously argued that Calvinist doctrine—particularly its emphasis on predestination and the "calling"—cultivated a disciplined and rationalised approach to work that facilitated the development of capitalism in early modern Europe. The moral imperative to demonstrate one's election through diligent labour and frugal living, Weber contended, unintentionally legitimised and energised the ethos of capitalist accumulation. Although Weber's thesis has been subject to extensive debate, revision, and critique, it remains a foundational framework for examining the ethical dimensions of religious practice within economic life.

From a postsecular perspective, however, Weber's theory can be reinterpreted in ways that move beyond its historical and Eurocentric parameters. Specifically, the study of religiosity and theological interpretation in the everyday lives of thses Christian believers—particularly with regard to their work ethic and economic decision-making—extends Weber's (2001) analysis of the elective affinity between the Protestant ethic and capitalism. Postsecularity challenges linear narratives of secularisation, instead emphasising the mutual constitution of the religious and the secular. This relationship is not one of unidirectional influence but rather a dynamic process of reciprocal construction and transformation. As will be explored further below, Calvinism provides young migrant Christians with a moral framework that informs their perspectives on life and work. In doing so, Calvinist ethics can generate alternative systems of value that subtly resist capitalist measures of worth that can, in part, resist neoliberal utilitarianism by grounding dignity in divine calling rather than market productivity, and cultivate forms of self-understanding that transcend neoliberal utilitarianism.

Yet this process of ethical formation is not insulated from broader socio-economic forces. Calvinism does not function solely as a theological instrument through which migrants shape their daily practices; it is also influenced by the secular logic of neoliberalism. The city's authoritarian–neoliberal order, combined with hukou-based discrimination, has heightened its appeal among young rural–urban migrant Christians, who often view it as a "rational" and "practical" theology. This pragmatic orientation has, in turn, prompted urban churches to adapt Calvinist teaching in ways that address more directly the labour-related concerns of young migrant congregants.

At the same time, the relationship between Calvinism and neoliberal discipline is deeply ambivalent. Although Calvinist theology provides migrants with a powerful resource for alleviating the existential pressures of precarious labour, it can also operate to rationalise—or even internalise—the very logics of exploitation it seeks to counter. For Shenzhen's young rural–urban migrant Christians, Calvinism offers both a moral rationale for enduring exploitative working conditions and a framework for assessing the moral worth of economic success. Unlike Weber's historical context—where the Protestant ethic contributed to the emergence of capitalism—Calvinist ethics in contemporary Shenzhen operate within an already entrenched capitalist order. They function as interpretive resources through which believers navigate neoliberal pressures, institutionalised exclusion under the hukou system, and the uncertainties of urban life. By framing vocational excellence, frugality, and perseverance as forms of spiritual obedience, Calvinism enables migrants to reconcile aspirations for middle-class lifestyles with a theological commitment to service and humility.

In this light, Calvinist ethics in the postsecular China should not be understood as a simple historical residue or foreign import but as a living moral discourse actively negotiated within the secular beings in Shenzhen--socio-economic and political configurations of authoritarian–neoliberal urbanism. The ethic of disciplined labour and self-regulation resonates strongly with the demands of China's high-intensity urban labour regimes, yet it is re-signified through theological narratives that invest precarious work and migrant striving with transcendent meaning. In this chapter, the postsecular analysis reveals how Calvinist theology becomes a site where capitalist secularity and religious orientation intersect, producing hybrid moral subjectivities that are simultaneously complicit with, and critical of, the prevailing socio-economic order.

5.3 The rise of the urban intelligent gospel and relocating Calvinism in Shenzhen

In the past, Christianity in China has often been characterised as growing primarily amongst the poor, uneducated, and underprivileged of society. In the early-1980s, Chinese Christianity was conceivably dominated by the marginalized of rural China. Following the thaw after the Mao era, house church movements which were Charismatic in nature made huge revivals in deeply rural Chinese provinces like Henan and Anhui, but following the massive urbanisation shift that followed China's economic boom, rural churches today are losing their young members and overwhelmingly comprised of the elderly, women and children. Many rural churches have even been led astray by "heretical movements" which diverged significantly from the original Gospel.

Over the last decade, a growing body of literature offers insight into the rural-urban migrant Christians. Chen Xinhua and Song Qinnian's (2012) study of Christianity and urbanization suggests that most congregants in official and house churches in Beijing and Nanning are from rural areas. Huang Jianbo's (2014) research on Christian migrants and their adaptation to urban areas also provides further insight. Especially in recent years, "new generation migrants" (Wang, 2001) have become the majority of the rural-urban migration. As I mentioned before, compared with the old generation, the new generation is typically described as a cohort

with relatively higher educational attainment, higher occupational expectations and higher demands for material and spiritual enjoyment and more eager to become a part of the urban society (Fan & Chen, 2013; He & Wang, 2016; Liu, Li & Breitung, 2012). Past research has shown that Christians who attend religious activities in urban house churches are generally younger in age, higher in education level, and more likely to be working in independent, private, or foreign-invested enterprises (Han, Meng & Qin, 2018; Ng, 2020). Scholars characterized this kind of house church as "the new mode of urban house church" (Duan, 2014), namely, the kind of house church that appeared in China since the 1990s, following the traditions of house churches in China, mainly constituted by the younger generation of rural-urban migrants (Homer, 2010; Hong, 2012).

Among this revival of the urban gospel, there has been a growing phenomenon among Chinese Christians that an increasing number of urban churches converted to Reformed Christianity, broadly based on the theology of Calvinism (Brown, 2009; Chow, 2014a, 2014b; Fällman, 2009; 2012). From a historical perspective, Calvinism is not new to China. In the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Reformed missionaries from Europe and North America established several Calvinist churches in China (Chow, 2014a; Kang, 2019). However, with the process of unified worship services in 1958 and later the Cultural Revolution, the majority of religions in China, including Calvinist Christianity itself, have experienced extremely restricted development. After churches were allowed to reopen in the 1980s, John Calvin's teachings once again became a subject of growing interest among Chinese intellectuals when younger and more educated urbanites caught the Christianity fever. The increasing popularity of Calvinist Christianity in China was significantly influenced by "foreign" voices, such as Jonathan Chao (赵天恩) and Stephen Tong (唐崇荣), who played a critical role in introducing Calvinism to Chinese audiences (Chow, 2014a). Tong, in particular, coined the phrase "归正宗" as the Chinese translation for "Reformed Faith" and introduced a broad range of Calvinist writings to Chinese Christians. Therefore, the Calvinist church in China was also named the "Reformed Church." Although these foreign pastors never preached in China directly, their sermons have spread through the internet, pirated cassettes, pirated DVDs and audiotapes, which incredibly influenced many young Chinese Christians. Meanwhile, Korean missionaries also contributed to the dissemination of Calvinist theology by establishing theological seminaries, primarily in northern Chinese cities (Kang, 2019). These have resulted in more and more Chinese church leaders becoming advocates of Calvinism and converting their churches to Reformed status. In contrast with feeling-based Christianity, that were strong in faith but lacked organisational structure and consistent theology in rural China, the Calvinist Christian elite emphasized individualism, scientific, and reflective theology (Chow, 2014a; Fällman, 2012; Kang, 2019). In recent years, several high-profile urban megachurches such as Early Rain Reformed Church and its church leader, well-known Calvinist Christian intellectual Wang Yi, have actively participated in and sought to address the public concerns of Chinese society today that have redefined Christianity and pushed it back into the public sphere (Chow, 2014a; Starr, 2016).

From around 2011, some congregations in Shenzhen led by urban intellectuals tried to learn the theologies of John Calvin and follow the Reformed tradition in their churches, such as scientific and reflective urban theology, Presbyterian organization and male-oriented leadership (Kang, 2019). Unlike most published work on Chinese Calvinism, which highlights public intellectuals and politically high-profile elites (Chow, 2018; Fällman, 2012; Huang, 2020), some leaders of Reformed churches in Shenzhen, like Zhendao Church, claimed that the best way to spread Christianity is not by challenging the government on religious freedom in the broader political sense, but by keeping a low profile and staying underground. They view that being low-profile and rejecting visibly higher status can purify congregants and filter out those who do not truly believe. They also emphasized that the Calvinists should insist on engaging with worldly matters and avoid confronting the government. Pastor Yang of Zhendao Church has mentioned his thoughts about the government:

"The Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s leadership is God-given, and therefore it is legitimate. Nevertheless, Why there are so many restrictions on Christianity in China? It is because there is no Christian in power. What we can do is to spread the true gospel as much as possible and to pray in our hearts for the government to change its attitude."

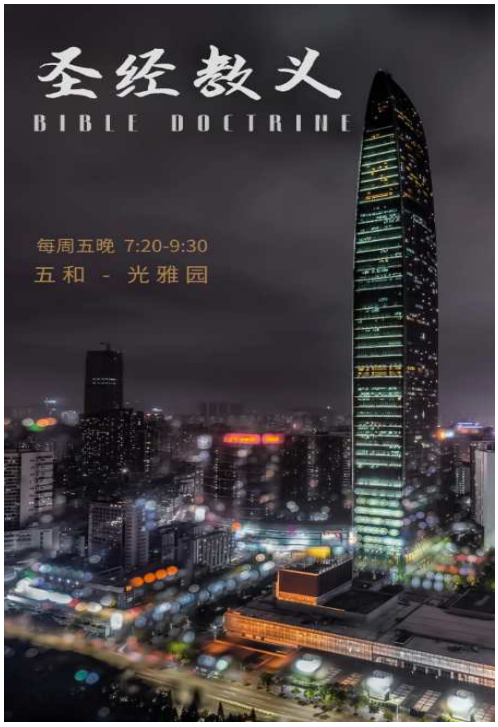

Figure 5-1 The poster of Bible doctrine learning of Zhendao Church

Different from other house churches in Shenzhen, the Calvinist pastor of Zhendao Church emphasizes the "correct" church development as the central focus of the church's daily activities. As he comments about many house churches in Shenzhen, these churches "did not begin with *Zhendao* (真道 Truth), and their members' belief isn't based on a concept of biblical truth or knowledge of theology." The church development of Zhendao Church includes doctrinal studies arrangement, the establishment of church regulations, and the election and training of group leaders and presbyters responsible for various church roles. Among these practices, theological learning is the most important. For most congregants, the Zhendao Church offers courses according to their level of belief and church commitment. For example, "bible training" is open to every member, but "disciple training" is for those who have shown commitment to the church for more than three years and are regarded as potential group leaders, missionaries, or preachers. Under Pastor Yang's leadership, the Zhendao Church experienced rapid growth, gaining significant popularity among house churches in Shenzhen and attracting a large number of Christians from other congregations: by 2019, the Zhendao Church had about two hundred followers in four gathering places (*juhui dian* 聚会点) in Shenzhen, while in 2017, it had only fifty members and one gathering place.

These Reformed churches are particularly welcomed among younger Christians. For them, the vague and perceptual understandings of the Bible that were normal in previous churches interpreting God's will based on feelings would largely hinder them from developing the ideal Christian life in the city. In this sense, the relatively low theological level of the officially-sanctioned church and the "primitivist Christianity" tradition of many house churches, that emphasizes conversion and supernatural acts of healing or prophecy, are no longer adapted to their needs (Bays, 2003; Kang, 2019). Compared with the booming Reformed Churches in Shenzhen, Three-Self official churches' ability to serve believers is limited because of lacking clergypersons. In most official churches, the superficial and tedious sermons cannot fulfil the young Christians' requirements, particularly those coming from rural areas longing for entirely theological education. Regarding house churches, the lack of clergy with theological training also hindered their ability to attract young migrant Christians. Meanwhile, some house churches still focus on the Holy Spirit, and remain rural church Pentecostalism traditions like speaking in tongues, working through spiritual dreams, and healing or emotional expression, especially weeping; those behaviours now have been prohibited in Reformed churches.

Reformed Churches, in contrast, package themselves into a young and energetic, and most importantly, a more scientific church "full of truth." Generally, Calvinist churches are relatively small and can offer their believers plenty of opportunities to speak to a pastor. Even in that relatively large church, it can also basically satisfy the needs of believers to sufficiently disagree by having believers elect respected members to serve the duty of a pastor. Also, Calvinist theology teaching is based on a concept of biblical truth or knowledge of theology and closely follows Christian catechisms or creeds such as the Westminster Catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Westminster Confession of Faith (Kang, 2019). By holding open Bible seminars with famous Calvinist pastors, Zhendao Church has attracted many young Christians who are not satisfied

with the current mainstream Three-Self system of theological study and actively seek other gospel study resources. It is normal to find that some parts of the members of Calvinist Churches are from the Three-Self system. In Zhendao Church, this ratio has reached three-fourths. Moreover, some Calvinist Churches extend the "scientific" rhetoric further, for example, Zhendao Church underling that young people should not only improve themselves in doctrinal but in skills and knowledge learning as well to search career development opportunities in Shenzhen. So, the church especially holds job search seminars and study groups for young groups led by the pastor and elders to share job-hunting skills and select books good for self-promotion. For example, Elder Zhang often shares books related to how to work better and achieve self-improvement within the church's official WeChat group and invites members to study and engage with him. The following is the information he posted on Oct 27, 2020:

"Many Christians lack the wisdom found in the general revelation of this world, such as the ability to work efficiently. This book is a classic and highly regarded resource, an essential guide for mastering the art of getting things done. I have studied it once before and it is very useful. This is not as simple as a book that teaches you how to improve your work efficiency. What is effectiveness? How can enhancing it transform one's life? Starting next week, let's read and learn together!"

In sum, by employing a non-confrontational strategy and prioritizing doctrinal education, urban Calvinist churches in Shenzhen aim to offer more than just a community-like surrogate family for migrants, as is typical of other migrant churches; they seek to deliver a comprehensive framework of systematic beliefs that encompasses theological instruction, professional development, and self-development, which attracts young migrant Christians. The growth of Calvinist Christianity in Shenzhen is not merely a matter of numerical expansion but also of the reconfiguration of vocational ethics and religious mission in an urban setting.

5.4 Migrant workers' religiosity in post-secularity Shenzhen

5.4.1 The pursuit of "rational" Christianity

In addition to the emphasis on church development and theological study previously mentioned, the quest for rational theology among young migrant Christians is intricately linked to their subjective experiences within the highly neoliberal secular condition of being. In my fieldwork in Shenzhen, the young migrant Christian group on whom I focus basically belongs to the post-1980 and post-1990 generations and were mostly high school or college graduates in their twenties and thirties. Most of them move to Shenzhen to seek better occupational opportunities and strive for upward mobility. As the young migrant groups undergoing a wrenching transformation to adapting to urban life in the post-Mao period, dominant neoliberal discourse in cities emphasizing the requirements for self-responsibility at the level of individual subjects profoundly impacted the lives of young Chinese (Ong, 2006; 2007). This neoliberal rationality, "while foregrounding the market, is not only or even primarily focused on the economy; it involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action" (Brown, 2005, p.40) and has been embedded in everyday

social organization and imagination (Couldry, 2010, p.5), which naturally affects the new-generation Christian groups' view toward their belief and life. And it is not surprising that China's urban youth are strongly motivated to seek socioeconomic success and pursue middle-class lives. Against this background, young migrant Christians attempt to seek a more "rational" theory to explain their beliefs and life to outsiders, and Calvinist theology provides them with a possible path to "the truth" and becoming the ideal Christian. A member of Zhendao Church describes the difference between the traditional house church and the Reformed church:

"In the Reformed Church, you can clarify what the truth is, what the Bible really means, and how we should practice it in daily life…Finally, become a true Christian, and let more people know the gospel."

Likewise, the explanation from Pastor Zhang from Zhendao Church might reflect the logic why Calvinism attracts young migrants:

"*Calvinism is based on the Bible and has been formed into a total belief system that includes reason, consequences, and action. It is a systematic and complete worldview. First of all, the life of belief is about the inner self, affecting one's behaviour or actions. Such belief involves changing one's views of life, the world, and values. This is what the Bible says one must do. Reformed theology comprises the three views conveyed by the Bible and delivers a rational belief system that is very appealing to Chinese young people. This young generation does not want to believe in a religion that they do not understand. They want to know what it (Christian belief) is and why they should believe in it*."

This emphasis on a coherent, systematic worldview resonates strongly with Max Weber's observation that Calvinist theology, through its intellectual rigour and ethical demands, generates a distinctive "rationalisation of conduct" (Weber, 2001). In Weber's account, the Calvinist pursuit of doctrinal clarity was not merely an intellectual preference but part of a disciplined life-orientation — a structuring of thought and action in line with divine calling. In the Shenzhen context, young migrants' attraction to such theological systematisation parallels this dynamic: the Reformed tradition offers them a framework to organise their faith and daily behaviour in an otherwise fragmented, fast-paced neoliberal urban environment.

During my fieldwork, it was not difficult to find the shadow of neoliberal logic hiding in my interviewees' positive attitudes toward the Reformed Church: their desire to achieve self-exploration and self-improvement guided by doctrine, which is driven by neoliberalism calls on the active agency and "entrepreneurialization of the self " (Brenner *et al*, 2010, p.199)that conceives of the individual as an enterprise, a collection of assets to be invested in, nurtured, and improved (Gershon, 2011). For many Calvinist church members, the systematic faith is expected to replace their old style of belief in Christianity and further reshape their worldview by reassessing their lives and values with "true" guidance from God rather than "chaotic" teachings from

traditional, rural-based churches. An active young member, Brother Xu, who just engaged in the Zhendao Church for around half a year expresses his feelings about Calvinist theology: "*Calvinism is based on the Bible and has been formed into a total belief system that includes reason, consequences, and action. It is a systematic and complete worldview, which lets me know what I believe in, and how I could do*." Similarly, other young members are expressing their joy in learning the Calvinist theology, like they "*make great progress*" compared to other non-Calvinist church members or obtaining more knowledge to "*improve myself*." The church, to some extent, caters to this desire for "self-improvement" by encouraging theological study through mechanisms such as daily check-ins in church WeChat groups. Additionally, the church motivates members by promoting diligent individuals to leadership roles within study groups, thereby sustaining enthusiasm for theological learning.

Figure 5-2 The Calvinist theology class in Zhendao Church
Source: pictured by the author

This pursuit of Calvinist theology, in return, reconstructs young migrant Christians' subjective experiences and serves as spiritual "empowerment" to counter the neoliberal discourses legitimating exploitation and inequality in labour markets. Through theological study, some migrants construct a "more divine" Christian identity as a counter-narrative to the state-promoted *suzhi* discourse, which stigmatizes migrant labourers as a lower social stratum deserving less income, entitlements, and status. For example, Brother Liu, who works as a factory security staff, expresses that his interior faith has worked as empowerment for him against the *suzhi* discourse in daily life:

"*I don't feel that I am any different from those outsiders (Non-Christians) because, through studying theology, I have gained true faith. In the future, when I enter the Kingdom of God, I might even hold a higher position than those who do not believe."*

Like Liu, in interviews, many young migrant Christians claimed to have high personal *suzhi* or at least not be low *suzhi,* given their closeness to "truth" and advanced theology teachings. As Yang (2005) notes, Christianity is often regarded as modern and cosmopolitan, and therefore compatible with market-driven urban modernity, young migrants actively reconstruct themselves as high-*suzhi* (quality) citizens through the enactment of purportedly Christian values. In this context, young migrants' religiosity is not just a response to neoliberal labour conditions but also establishes an ethical space that challenges and reconfigures dominant social, cultural, and political narratives in China.

Meanwhile, through Calvinist theology, migrants gain spiritual "empowerment" to confront risks and uncertainties, particularly the heated competition of urban labour markets in the era of neoliberalism. During my fieldwork, many people in Zhendao Church expressed that theology learning helps them "*search for a firm relationship with God*," as it provides them with certainty within the unstable urban experience. Along with economic restructuring and de-collectivization, young migrant Christians faced the deregulated labour market in their process of striving for upward mobility and ideal middle-class lives in Shenzhen, pursuit of high-standard doctrine training, to some extent, resist increasing uncertainty and risk during the socioeconomic as ordinary people living in the reform era are encouraged to be self-reliant individuals. Even some members of Calvinist churches express their wish to gain the "common" principles and wisdom for dealing with secular problems and challenges from the catechism because of her "*lacking the wisdom of the universal revelation in this world "* (interviewee SGL) and "*catechism in some ways did help her to handle some difficulties in daily life "*(interviewee ZY).

Although many Evangelical churches in Shenzhen have criticised Calvinist churches for their strict adherence to theological doctrine, something that can easily develop into Legalism, extremely led by doctrine and religious morals, Calvinist Christianity does appeal to those young migrants flowing into the cities. On the one hand, this pursuit suggests that the popularized discourse of the self-improvement ethos, prevalent in neoliberal society, unconsciously influences the religiosities of young migrants. Indeed, as Hervieu-Léger (2002) notes, modern religiosity rarely relies on settled, programmatic religious identities; instead, configurations compatible with modern living—individuals live out and negotiate sacred selves to achieve self-construction and self-governance. On the other hand, theological interpretations empower their subaltern subjectivities to counter the neoliberal discourses of inequality and risks. In this way, their religiosities can create a moral and ethical space to reconfigure or deconstruct the mainstream, prevailing neoliberal narratives in China.

In this respect, the Shenzhen case differs from Weber's description of the Protestant ethic, which facilitated the rationalisation of economic activity and ultimately evolved into the spirit of capitalism. Here, the popularity of Calvinist theology is itself shaped by the pervasive neoliberal ethos of the secular sphere. Such practices demonstrate that the relationship between religious ethics and secularity is less a matter of one-

way, Weberian influence than of dynamic interaction and mutual entanglement, as Calvinist theology in Shenzhen can simultaneously reinforce and subtly resist dominant socio-economic rationalities.

5.4.2 Calvinist ethics under a regime of labour

Outside of the religious communities, however, young migrant Christian have qualitatively different experiences in a highly secularized and rationalized world. In this part, I 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. I suggest that Calvinist migrant Christians use theological teachings and religious ethics to reconcile with their daily life and find consolation, while faith also engages in the construction of selfhood, self-value and moral superiority of their daily praxis. 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, virtuous and trustworthy Christians. In the interview, "working for God" was frequently mentioned.

The notion of "working for God" consists of two parts. First of all, the inner motivation of hard work is to glorify God, not to meet own desires for worldly success. In the workshop titled "the Christian view of work" (*jidutu de gongzuoguan* 教徒的工作观) in Zhendao Church, the pastor defined the notion of "work" from a God-centred perspective that human beings were created in the image of God who is the founder of work, and thus work is the purpose for which human beings were created, and also emphasized that every Calvinist Christian has a responsibility to manage the world according to God's will. Based on this view, work is not just a source of livelihood, but more importantly, it provides an opportunity to serve God and the society at large. Zhou, a salesman, working in a foreign trade company in Shenzhen, described his transformation on the job:

"After graduation, I never thought of the meaning of work. I used to think that we only work for ourselves as other non-Christians did. You know, there is a limited chance for low-educated non-local people like me, especially in Shenzhen, such a fiercely competitive place. As my job and income are not ideal, when I was busy with my work, I always got bored and tired……but now, I change my thought toward my job. I know what I am doing is for God. If you believe in the Lord, even though this negativity could still be present to some degree, I feel I am uplifted."

This notion of work as a divine calling directly recalls Weber's concept of "Beruf" (calling), in which worldly occupations are invested with spiritual significance. For Weber, the sanctification of everyday labour fostered an ethic of conscientious, disciplined work that was historically conducive to capitalist development. In the Shenzhen Calvinist context, this ethic is similarly "inner-worldly" — it sacralises participation in the labour market while reframing it as service to God rather than to purely economic ends. Many respondents revealed how they, prior to embracing Christianity, usually viewed work as numbing, while often having to navigate

poisonous workplace relations that sapped their morale and energy. Converting to God-centred work ethics has profoundly transformed their experience of work and the workplace. They shared about having acquired a more positive attitude towards their work and their colleagues as they embraced a new outlook in life and made changes to their behavior and the sense of rootlessness in the city can be diluted by the impulse to work for God.

Second, God-centred work ethics also stress the importance of developing the talents given by God and bringing their talents to professional fields. Such an idea of Christian professionalism concerning talent-improving practices resonated with the post-Maoist discourse about human capital development (Hoffman, 2010, pp.84–90). As labour-power becomes a source of personal development, young Chinese choose to improve their abilities and talents for personal happiness and wellbeing. Personal talents could be interpreted as a "gift" or "grace" from Chris. Pursuing good performance in work in Calvinist doctrines provides a Christian with a chance to show God's kindness. This observation echoes Max Weber's (2001) analysis of the elective affinity between the Protestant ethic and capitalism, in which Weber argued that Protestant concepts of calling and predestination unintentionally contributed to the emergence of capitalism in early modern Europe. For early Protestants uncertain about their personal salvation, dedication to worldly occupations as a response to God's calling was seen as a sign of divine election. These non-economic motivations laid the groundwork for wealth accumulation and ultimately contributed to the development of capitalism. Here again, Weber's analysis is instructive: the disciplined cultivation of God-given talents, combined with a refusal to indulge in idleness or waste, reflects the Protestant valorisation of methodical, purposeful activity. The Shenzhen case reveals how this ethic has been reinterpreted in a post-socialist, neoliberal labour regime, where human capital development is both a state priority and a personal survival strategy. Calvinist teaching thus dovetails with — yet morally reframes — the market's demand for self-optimising workers.

Apart from that, "sin" is another keyword of their religious teachings. Scholarship has examined the differences between the Chinese Calvinism from the early European version claiming that the followers in China are clear about their salvation (Kang, 2019). Calvinist churches in Shenzhen criticized self-centred, workaholic, and success-seeking lifestyles as sinful acts in opposition to their God-centred perspectives. Despite God's command to work, pure dedication to work would raise criticism from the church. Unlike the "boss Christian" group in Wenzhou, who view worldly wealth as a direct result of God's blessing (Cao, 2012), in Calvinist theology, pursuing the secular world should not be an ultimate life goal, and the notion of original sin came into play here. In this way, "sin" works as a resistance to secular value. Under the increasing pressure from workaholic lifestyles prevalent in urban China, in the Sunday group, members are told to rethink their balance between work and religious life and keep alert of the "sin" coming from being too addicted to the secular world, as Christians should not consider work as the source of their identities, but

rather as a channel for their religious devotion. They also are encouraged to take time off to attend Sunday, refuse high-paying jobs that might require them to miss Sunday services, and instead choose less-promising jobs that could assure spare time for religious activities. Weber noted that ascetic Protestantism constrained the pursuit of wealth by condemning luxury and excessive consumption, even as it demanded industriousness. Similarly, in the Shenzhen Calvinist discourse, "sin" functions as a moral boundary against over-attachment to secular success, tempering the work ethic with an ethic of detachment. This tension — between diligence in the world and resistance to the world — is precisely the paradox Weber identified in the Protestant ethic.

Sometimes, they theologically mediated interpretations of alienation, labour exploitation and social inequality. As rural-urban migrants, nevertheless, the motivation of their religious morals cannot break through structural constraints on their own agency, considering *hukou*-based institutionalized marginality in China remains the main obstacle on their path to self-development and self-realization. While the Chinese state has promised to reform the *hukou* system and promote service provision to migrant workers, the policy priority is still how to maximize the utility of labour and human capital of rural-urban migrants (Chan, 2009; 2012; Chan & Buckingham, 2008). When they realize they might largely face failure in the competition of urban labour markets in the era of neoliberalism, the theological understanding of "sin" could also be interpreted as the root of the world's imperfection that partly dissolves their disappointment toward the secular world. "Sin" can, to some degree, transfer into the inner reconciliation with the difficulty from the outside world, in which the young Christians confront and deconstruct the neoliberal challenges, like the pressure from wealth accumulation and requirements of eternal progress, into a form of theological understanding of "sin." A typical example is Zheng, an office worker in her early twenties, who reformulated her discourse of difficulties and disappointment in urban life by relying on religious notions:

"I am still a sinner by nature, so I will naturally make mistakes and fail. Sometimes, the failure is because the Lord wants us to see our self-righteousness and let us know that we are actually very limited in facing the real world. This is very normal. Although there are many successful people in society, they have not realized their sins.....It's not that I pray today, then my work would go smoothly. As if I believe in God, there would be no difficulties or temptations. God actually witnesses our faith through various trials and makes us more obedient to him and rely on him."

Young Calvinist Christians' adherence to the discourses of "working for God" and "sin" is reminiscent of Gao and Qian's (2020) description of "*benfen"* (本分 obligation) among migrant worker believers, whose religiosity often appears non-radical and uncritical of material inequalities. This religiosity is framed with a moral emphasis on self-discipline and obedience to the logic of industrial capitalism. Both migrant workers and young migrant Christians strive to position themselves discursively as modern and civilized subjects,

appearing to align with neoliberal expectations. The notion of *benfen* seems to highlight the vulnerability of migrant workers more negatively, as their limited social capital, compared to the younger, more educated generation, constrains their opportunities for self-development. This does not suggest that the work ethic of Calvinist Christians fundamentally challenges dominant socio-cultural framings of differentiation and inequality faced by rural-urban migrants. Instead, their religiosity often aligns with neoliberal logics of self-discipline and self-development, internalizing through religious explanation of the structural dilemmas they face within the current "migrant labour regime" (Fan, 2004, p. 283). In this context, faith operates in a manner akin to what Foucault (1982) theorizes as the logic of governmentality. It enables young migrant Christians to adopt "humble Christian ethics," construct specific selfhoods and meaningful lives, and present themselves as conscientious moral subjects. However, these selfhoods and subjectivities often align with rationalities that facilitate adjustment to urban work and life. In this process, young migrant Christians embody a pious, hardworking, and obedient ethos, which corresponds to what Wonji Yoo (2021, p.447) describes as "neither laziness nor workaholism."

In general, the case of Shenzhen suggests that these young migrant Christians are engaged in a complex negotiation between Weberian "inner-worldly asceticism" and the rationalities of China's authoritarian–neoliberal order. Their religiosity enables them to internalise certain market-compatible virtues—discipline, reliability, and self-governance—while re-signifying these qualities within a theological framework that offers a critique of unrestrained materialism. In postsecular Shenzhen, Calvinist theology functions as a site where capitalist secularity and religious orientation intersect, producing hybrid moral subjectivities that are at once complicit with and critical of the prevailing socio-economic order. And these subjectivities are ultimately incorporated into neoliberal Foucauldian modalities of governmentality, shaping migrant Christians into diligent yet not workaholic, self-driven yet compliant individuals, thereby enabling their smoother integration into the narrative of the contemporary neoliberal labour regime. This "Protestant ethic with Chinese characteristics" extends Weber's insights, offering a postsecular reinterpretation of the complex and dynamic relationship between Protestant ethics and the operations of secular economic structures.

5.5 Conclusion

Drawing from ethnographic research in Shenzhen, this chapter has examined the current burgeoning Calvinist theology among the young migrant Christians and how their religiosities (re)configured and (re) constructed in the post-secularity and neoliberalism present. With the revival of the urban gospel as well as neoliberal values and politics engendered by post-Mao economic reforms, the young migrant Christians in Shenzhen turned to Calvinist Christianity, wishing to achieve self-construction and self-governance through the "rational" theological guide. Their Christian ethical norms and religious practices articulate the influence of post-Maoist discourses about work and self-success. In their daily life, religion did not simply serve as a compensatory tool for offsetting frustrations and difficulties in the neoliberal world. Through following the

Calvinist theology, the young Chinese Christians identified themselves as "God's agents." This religiously valorized self-understanding enabled distinctive types of agentive action. That is, they acknowledged the ultimate divine authority in the economic world and reorganized their daily lives following God's will; by underscoring the "sin" at the same time to mediate their loss of failure and disappointment in the neoliberal reality.

In the first part of this chapter, I put emerging Calvinist theology in urban China into the background of the ongoing rural-urban population movement. With the emergence of college-educated young generation migrants and followed by the revival of urban churches, the original Christian gospel system, in which the countryside was stronger than the cities, has changed and, at the same time, affected by the foreign pastors' mission, theology-leading the Reformed Church became more and more accepted by urban Christian elites and migrant Christians.

Second, focusing on the "rational" theology learning in Reformed churches, I argue that the young migrant Christians' pursuit of the rational theology from the Calvinist system is highly relative to their wish for self-improving and accomplishment, which reflects that neoliberal principles have become deeply embedded, even down to the level of the individual's evaluations of what developing the self involves(Boltanksi & Chiapello,2005), and it has inevitably influenced their attitude toward Christianity. In this point, their 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 migrant labour regime.

Then, I look into the young migrant Christians' faith in their daily praxis, especially their work ethics. The work ethic of young Calvinist Christians has reconfigured the secular logic of work, success, and prosperity from the vantage point of the Christian faith. At the same time, young migrant Christians an extent internalized imbalance discourses in the fierce social competition by religious interpretation. In all, their faith allowed them to practise Christian vocabularies and discourses tactically to constitute their religiosity, and Calvinist theology enables young migrants 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.

In sum, this chapter offers two theoretical looking into the studies of postsecularity. First, as rural-to-urban migration has re-mapped the urban religious landscape through the trans-local mobility of religiosity and situated religious conversion, more attention needs to pay on exploring how Christianity rebuild rural-urban migrants' meaning system, highlights their religious identity and helps them to respond to structural imbalances and institutional obstacles they might face in the cities. Recently, there have been growing numbers of studies of migrant workers groups (Cao, 2010; 2013; Gao *et al*., 2018; Gao & Qian, 2020) that have

recalled this trend, which helped us to reconsider the postsecularity of China linking to specific social contexts like rural-urban mobility and neoliberalism. Second, as Hervieu-Léger argued modernity itself nourishes new forms of religiosity. While the secular may undermine certain forms of religious life, it also contributes to their reconfiguration and renewal in other contexts (Davie, 2007; Hervieu-Léger,1986). In this study, migrants' migrant Christians' religiosity is highly culturally variable and needs to be contextualised within specific political, economic and social entanglements. In this sense, religiosity is integral to, and indeed constitutive of, the ways in which secular modernity is lived and perpetuated. A postsecular present does not necessarily go beyond secularity or be inherently anti-secular but contests with and relies on secular conditions (e.g. neoliberal reason in this study) to frame religious interpretations, ethos and identities. Future research on postsecularity needs to move from the Christian-secular co-option/resistance duality model to specific contexts in which new religiosities are engendered and evolved.

In sum, this chapter makes two contributions to the geographies of neoliberalism, migration and religion. First, this chapter provides a new understanding of how neoliberal governance is circulated and reproduced through migrants' embodied experiences and subjectivities. I argue that neoliberalism operates not only through institutional mechanisms of differentiation but also through the internalization of rational-optimization logics by presenting a vision of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) that glorifies endurance of pain and exhaustion in pursuit of an ostensibly better yet perpetually unattainable future, which finally aims to reshape young migrants' subjectivities to render them governable and enduring labouring subjects. By situating the study of young migrant workers within broader debates on the affective dimensions of neoliberalism (Anderson, 2016; Berlant, 2011), this research highlights how psychological and psychotherapeutic technologies are mobilized to amplify migrants' affective capacities, thereby facilitating their exploitation. Furthermore, within the context of China's distinctive neoliberal-authoritarian regime, migrants' affective lives emerge as a key site of state intervention through which the state negotiates its dual commitment to neoliberal economic policies and authoritarian governance. Consequently, future scholarship needs to pay closer attention to the affective terrains of lived migrant experiences, where various powers might intersectingly operate and contend.

Second, this chapter provides a grounded and nuanced account of how rural–urban migration reshapes the religious landscapes of Chinese cities. It demonstrates that the sacred geographies of urban China are continually reconfigured through the translocal mobility of religious populations and their situated engagements with local socio-cultural environments, revealing how rural Christians are both shaped by, and in turn shape, specific dimensions of urban Christianity. Migrants' religiosity emerges not only as a resource for navigating structural inequalities and institutional constraints—such as the hukou system, labour market precarity, and socio-economic exclusion—but also as an active force that interacts with and transforms the local cultural milieu. This analysis highlights the need for religious geography to attend more closely to the mutually constitutive relationship between migrants' religious practices and the evolving spatial, social, and

symbolic configurations of urban sacred space, particularly under conditions of intensified mobility and neoliberal–authoritarian governance.

Chapter 6. Mapping the lived theo-ethics within emergent social infrastructure in Shenzhen

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I examined how the rise of Calvinist theology has shaped the religiosity of young migrant Christians in postsecular urban contexts, and how their faith practices interact with Shenzhen's prevailing neoliberal values in both work and everyday life. In this chapter, the focus shifts to the large number of urban churches in Shenzhen. With the influx of rural-urban migrants reinvigorating these churches, they have become crucial sites for the development of theo-ethics, enabling migrant workers to settle materially, symbolically, and emotionally within a new socio-economic environment (Gao, *et al*., 2018; Zhu & Guo, 2009).

Christianity in Shenzhen traces its origins to the Western missionary presence, particularly the Basel Mission in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While some local believers have inherited their faith across generations, the vitality of these congregations declined markedly during the rapid economic reforms, as local residents often prioritised material prosperity over religious pursuits. Following the repression of all churches between 1957 and 1976 and their subsequent reopening in the post-Mao period, many TSPM churches witnessed shrinking attendance from local communities (Zhu & Guo, 2009). By contrast, the inflow of rural migrants in the reform era significantly revitalised these urban churches. For example, migrant workers now account for approximately 80 per cent of registered churchgoers at Baoan Church and nearly 90 per cent at Xixiang Church. House churches reveal a similar dynamic. Alongside professional fellowships, such as those oriented toward businessmen or white-collar professionals, the majority of house churches in Shenzhen are either established by migrants themselves or consist predominantly of migrant members. In both official and unofficial congregations, therefore, the migrant presence has not only reshaped the demographic composition of Shenzhen's Christian landscape but has also transformed churches into key infrastructures of belonging and support. As the following sections show, these migrant-driven urban churches are simultaneously sacred and social spaces where theo-ethics is enacted, and where migrants' lived religious practices become entangled with the broader challenges of precarity, urban governance, and neoliberal restructuring.

Although plenty of literature has focused on the revival of urban Christianity in China, scholars have yet to make breakthroughs in the traditional political and grand narrative that views the Christianity revival in urban China in the past three decades as a response of religious groups to state power and thus embraces a

dual model of state dominance-church resistance (Potter,2003; Yang, 2006; Anagnost, 1994; Kindopp, 2004) that concerns "moral clarity and an old political logic" (Cao, 2010, p. 6) lacking the foci on religious individuals' daily practices and without the view from urban caring. Thus, this chapter aims to re-examine urban churches engaging in urban care for rural-urban migrants from the intersection perspective of theo-ethics and social infrastructure.

Against this backdrop, this chapter proposes a new conceptual approach that combines insights from social infrastructure and theo-ethics to analyze the Christian church's involvement in migrant support in Shenzhen. By conceptualising urban churches as social infrastructures, the aim is to highlight the religious actors who are indispensable for cities to function as social spaces of care (Latham & Layton, 2019), even though their everyday practices—such as offering care, fostering support networks, and providing financial assistance—are frequently rendered invisible or overlooked within China's religious environment. At the same time, drawing on Paul Cloke's (2010) original theorisation of "theo-ethics" and recent theoretical advances in the geography of religion, this study emphasizes the shift among migrant Christians "from propositional modes of belief and ecclesial practice, toward more performative theologies that incorporate tradition and immanence in the form of virtue ethics" (Williams, 2015, p. 195). By examining the lived theo-ethics that emerge from migrants' daily religious practices, the chapter shows how urban churches negotiate their dual roles as sacred and social infrastructures, thereby creating spaces of hope through which rural-urban migrants navigate the precarity of urban life.

In demonstrating the argument of social infrastructure and theo-ethics in China, this chapter presents three main areas of analysis. To begin, by conceptualising the urban church as a form of social infrastructure, it analyzes migrants' everyday routines and activities within their faith-based communities, especially focusing on their affective and embodied religious practices in the church, as well as social caregiving from churches or members. By concentrating on migrant Christians' lived religious practices, the aim is not to provide a comprehensive account of the diverse motivations for migrant workers' conversions to Christianity at the individual level, but rather to highlight their authentic and mundane religious experiences in the new city, as well as how urban churches respond to their needs, both emotional and material. It then offers a more nuanced understanding of the crossover transformation between sacred space and social space through the perspective of theo-ethics, exploring how theo-ethics is enacted within these urban churches to provide care and justice for marginalized migrant workers in their everyday praxis. Finally, it examines the inherent shortcomings and external constraints faced by urban churches in their caregiving role as social infrastructures under the current religious policy environment.

6.2 Urban churches, social infrastructure and the possibility of theo-ethics

6.2.1 Rethinking the urban church as infrastructure

The main contribution of this chapter is to build on what Amin (2014) terms the "infrastructural turn" to theorize the urban church as a social infrastructure, for it plays a critical role in dynamically structuring the possibility of caregiving and receiving from the interpersonal network among the church members and social scale. Social infrastructures are sociotechnical tools and systems that organize and pattern the possibilities of urban social life (Latham & Layton, 2019; Klinenberg, 2018). In sociologist Eric Klinenberg's (2018) discussion of social infrastructure, he suggests that social infrastructure is able to address and prevent some of the most pressing concerns of contemporary urban life: countering social isolation, negotiating difference, and creating places for all—regardless of age, race, gender, sexuality, or income. Actually, they can help the city to develop, enable critical resources to reach households, and often support particular household members to have economic resilience and life opportunities in cities (Truelove & Ruszczyk, 2020). Christian Churches have a long history in caregiving, such as Evangelicals in the U.S. South, providing immigration welcoming and caring (Ehrkamp & Nagel, 2012).In recent years, the renaissance faith-based organizations engaging in social welfare in Western societies—addressing the lethargy of the neoliberal state in the provision of public services and filling the gulfs in social justice, has also drawn attention from the body of religious geography inquiry (Cloke, 2010; Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Cloke *et al*., 2019; Williams *et al*., 2012). Nevertheless, the infrastructural approach toward urban churches has been rather lightly interrogated in the growing infrastructure literature thus far(McFarlane & Robinson, 2012; McFarlane *et al*., 2017; Truelove & Ruszczyk, 2022).

In this chapter, I draw particular attention to urban churches in Shenzhen city, arguing these Christian churches as social infrastructures in terms of the care provided for rural-urban migrants from two points. I argue that, firstly,urban churches provide the material sites where church members enact caring among the members and even for strangers in the cities. Latham and Layton (2019) argue that infrastructures like libraries, parks, sports facilities, and other community centres play a significant role in making a good city and recognising the critical contribution they make to the social life of cities for they are sites in which strangers can meet and mix with others with whom they share their neighbourhoods and cities, and rather than just fulfilling an instrumental need, they are sites where cities can be experienced as inclusive and welcoming (Klinenberg, 2018). From their argument, it is evident that the primary function of social infrastructure is to promote sociality and facilitation of activity, which is the background structures and systems that allow social, economic, cultural, and political life to happen. In this sense, urban churches own the "affordances and capacities for particular individuals from different social backgrounds" (Latham & Layton, 2019, p. 4), and these everyday encounters in the city (Wilson, 2017) are the beginning of possible social care toward migrants. This is precisely important in the Chinese context because the lower affordances and higher accessibility of Protestantism than other religions in China render individuals from different social

backgrounds more easily gather for day-to-day activities freely and without barriers in church. Urban churches serve not only as places for worship. However, they could double as venues for other activities like community meetings, local theatre, fitness classes, and music concerts, like other social infrastructural spaces like schools and libraries(Latham & Layton, 2019).

Secondly, more than merely a material entity, urban churches are embedded in interpersonal networks and relationships among the church members, and within these connections, care as a relational process becomes possible(Power & Mee, 2020). As a fundamentally relational concept, social infrastructure is practised and relational, transforming into actual infrastructure when organised practises are involved (Bateson, 1972; Star, 1999). Given this, social infrastructures may exist to amplify connections within groups, and they can also orientate people towards interacting across differences (Blommaert, 2014; Klinenberg, 2018). This weaving of diverse people with multiple backgrounds as social infrastructure is helpful as an analogy to the urban church. In daily life, the urban church could facilitate community and social connections that can have social significance for rural-urban migrants; within these connections, communities are built, trust developed, cooperation achieved, and friendships made (Amin, 2002; 2008). In this sense, social infrastructure becomes a space of care "through the practices of care that take place between individuals" (Conradson, 2003, p.508). As we can see, in the praxis, Christian churches do not only provide social care to undocumented migrants (Ehrkamp & Nagel, 2014), but even function as a route to civic participation (Levitt, 2008), for their offering the networks of spaces, facilities, institutions, and groups that create affordances for social connection.

In light of the above, I re-examine the Christian church in Shenzhen via the lens of social infrastructure as a site of interpersonal care and sustaining social relationships amongst church members. This chapter aims to analyse the urban church as a social infrastructure from the following perspectives. I begin by examining where care is located in cities, specifically how social infrastructures for rural-urban migrants are developed and managed in this chapter. By illustrating the process of establishing urban churches in Shenzhen, it elucidates the sociocultural context and material condition of social infrastructure construction in Shenzhen. Then, I excavate the "infrastructures of everyday life" and possible material and social support that enables daily caring on an individual and church level within the social infrastructure to be accomplished. Focusing on the lived experience of migrant workers in urban churches, this study interrogates the affective and embodied activities of everyday religious life within social infrastructure, ranging from lived worship experiences to forming spiritual and social networks among church members to enacting caring; it also attempts to reveal how rural-urban migrants are experienced differently on a physical and emotional level. Finally, I examine the politics of care within the social infrastructure, including how faith-based ethics evolve and impact migrant members' lived religion. Attending to the practises and politics of care in care spaces tries to bring new insights into the complexity and opportunities of context-based care (Darling, 2011).

In sum, it is essential to approach the urban church from a new research perspective, from the material, affect, everyday encounters and social relations that engender in the urban churches. Currently, urban churches are actively engaging in urban care infrastructures that protect rural migrants from neoliberal failure. As Klinenberg (2002) argues, it is critical to articulate why these types of spaces matter. There is a role for us to play in exploring and explaining how urban churches matter in terms of infrastructure. This study aims to bring attention to Christian churches in urban China and make two primary contributions. In keeping with recent work on infrastructures, this study contributes to religious geography by articulating a deeper connection between urban church and social infrastructure, which remains fundamentally inadequately conceived. Additionally, it sheds light on the politics of "infra-making" (Lancione & McFarlane, 2016) within the social infrastructure, more specifically on how migrant members reconcile secular values and religious ethics in everyday religious praxis.

6.2.2 Theo-ethics and different expressions in China

The preceding sections emphasise the significance of studying rural-urban migrants' everyday religious practices from lived religion and social infrastructure perspectives, but the politics and religious ethics embedded in social infrastructures require more examination. In this research, the concept of theo-ethics, as developed by Cloke (2010; 2011), might be helpful for us to figure out a more socially engaged faith and look at the formation of ethical subjectivity beyond secularism and neoliberal metrics and the role that theological notions play in shaping the behaviour of faith-motivated actors (Williams, 2015). Building on arguments made by Cloke (2010) and Williams (2015), theo-ethics is not equivalent to conventional theologies or religious values; instead, "it follows an emerging post-phenomenological approach to religion which focuses on conceptualising the lived embodiment of religion" and highlights the way lived religiosity or spirituality is experienced and performed through faith-motivated praxis (Williams, 2015, p. 195). Firstly, theo-ethics emphasises the change from the orthodox faith and ecclesial practice to the performative and embodied interpretation of theologies in order to reconcile the ethics of transcendence with this-worldly care and public engagement (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013; Williams, 2015); in the meantime, theo-ethics moves beyond both religious and secular fundamentalism towards the more hybrid formation of faith-related identity and practice based on the pursuit of the common good (e.g. the Christian value of agape). Secondly, theo-ethics may serve as active resistance to neoliberal subjectification, which relies on self-to-self ethical relations and is therefore indifferent to the "*Other*". The theo-ethics is a call to love people without the neoliberal concern for otherness constrained by material logic and rationale (Cloke, 2010, p. 229). Finally, theo-ethics may create an alternative affective politics of hope that transcends neoliberalism's insecure and cruel optimism. It provides new imaginations and hopes in life contained in the name of God but not confined to that name (Cloke *et al*., 2019) as theo-ethics emphasises religious or spiritual states like love and suffering over the truth and story of God.

In China, the discussion of theo-ethics has also been rooted in a neoliberal context, as neoliberalism's flourishing in this country is not a singular process that results in standardised subjectivity; rather, it is entangled with the authoritarian regime, creating a new condition of being for hybrid and contested subject formation (see Qian & Guo,2019; Pang, 2021; Qian & Florence, 2021). Unlike in Western society, where theo-ethics appears to work as an active resistance to neoliberal governance (Cloke, 2019; Williams, 2015), theo-ethics in China appears to provide a different picture. For instance, Gao Quan's (2021) research on Foxconn migrant churches argues that theo-ethics not only negotiates but also co-constitutes the neoliberal economy and government, contributing to a more humanist and hopeful neoliberal system. Christian theo-ethics and Foxconn churches, he argues, create spaces of agency for social service mobilisation in the same way that the majority of Western faith-based communities do, at the same time refashioning migrant workers' work ethics by reconciling religious and humanistic ethics, thereby transforming them into governable and durable labour subjects, and finally provide a new management philosophy for factory managers as an alternative to neoliberal logics (Gao, 2021). In this sense, we need to give nuanced considerations to theo-ethics in the Chinese context, given that ethical values are increasingly constructed through amalgamations of secular, spiritual, and religious frameworks (Taylor, 2007), the relationship between religion and secularity is not uni-linear, but somewhat more entwined and inextricably intertwined, and theo-ethics of urban migrant churches and other faith-based NGOs in China is not merely the presence of religion in social service, it also needs to focus on Christians' everyday praxis in the secular world and discover how faith works on their lived, and embodied subjectivities. Additionally, because the distinctions between transcendence and immanence, other-worldly pursuits and this-worldly engagements have historically been blurred in Aisa (Kong & Qian, 2018), the mundane praxis of Christianity in alleviating suffering, caring for, and social welfare among the migrant community has long been overlooked and viewed as a given religious morality, whereby the examination of theo-ethics among the Christian church in China is now fully manifest. Therefore, a more critical account of emerging theo-ethics in China has required that need to contextualise the lived enactment of theo-ethics within broader political, economic and social entanglements (Williams, 2015). By drawing on the lived experiences of rural Christian migrants and everyday encounters in migrant churches, this chapter tries to present the lived enactment of theo-ethics in the everyday praxis of urban churches, particularly the care and justice for marginalised migrant workers, and to discuss further how they make sense of and negotiate with the secular world and faith-based communities themselves.

6.3 The social infrastructure as a space of duality: sacredness and social care

As the preceding sections have conceptualised the urban church as a form of social infrastructure, the following analysis turns to how this dual function is materially and affectively lived out by migrant Christians in Shenzhen. In this context, faith-based social infrastructures—such as Protestant churches and other religious organisations—have become increasingly significant in providing both spiritual care (*otherworldly care*) and social support (*this-worldly care*) for migrant workers (Gao *et al*., 2018; Gao & Qian, 2020; Gao,

2021). Importantly, this duality is not mutually exclusive; rather, in the lived experiences of migrant workers within church communities, the spiritual and the social are deeply intertwined and mutually reinforcing. The sections that follow examine in detail how urban churches provide these two dimensions of care, thereby elucidating their role as vital social infrastructures in the lives of rural–urban migrants.

6.3.1 Sacred space and otherworldly care

Migrant worker Christians themselves inhabit a profound ontological tension: on the one hand, they embrace a religious identity as Christians; on the other, they must pursue self-development through precarious labour in the city. As rural-urban migrants, they first encounter institutional marginality (Anagnost, 2004; Jacka, 2009; Sun, 2009); meanwhile, they, as labours, are also subjected to a highly precarious and exploitative production regime that includes disciplinary techniques such as collective dormitories, intensive pre-work training, mandatory overtime, strict surveillance, and monetary penalties, all of which contribute to the development of submissive migrant labourer (Chan & Zhu, 2003; Pun,2005; Gao & Qian,2020).In this sense, migrant workers are enduring the "double exploitation" of state regulatory power and labour relations in their daily life (Pun,2005). In this sense, migrant workers are enduring the "double exploitation" of state regulatory power and labour relations in their daily life(Pun,2005). What is more, for those migrant Christians, their faith may not be respected and understood in their daily life. In the interview, many migrant Christians express their upset and anger when their families and other workers despise their beliefs. A young male Christian mentions his unpleasant experience that his roommate laughs at him because of his regular morning prayers in the dormitory. It is, therefore, common for migrant Christians to feel incarcerated and alienated within this hyper-exploitative labour regime.

It is precisely against this backdrop of socio-economic precarity and symbolic marginalisation that urban churches emerge as sacred spaces, providing migrant workers with emotional care and spiritual refuge built on the Christian theo-ethics of love and equality, which contrasts the excessive workloads and coercive and hierarchical management at the workplace. For many migrants, the urban church functions provide a relatively secure and liberating environment where they can both seek reassurance and temporarily escape the constraints of the "factory regime." As one interviewee explained: "*I can talk to brothers and sisters about all the unhappy experiences I have met in the factory*"; another remarked: "*Everywhere you go, you have to go to the church first.*" Such reflections reveal that religious belief serves as a means of resisting or neutralizing the negative aspects of daily existence, even if only temporarily. While it remains uncertain whether faith can bring their lives into a state of enduring "ontological security," entering the church allows migrant workers to reclaim a stable sense of belonging and security otherwise denied to them in the workplace.

Fellowship activities are a vital part of this caring. Through prayer, hymn-singing, and discussion, migrants can articulate personal emotions that cannot easily be expressed elsewhere. Brother Huang, the leader of Qiaoxiang house church, who came to Shenzhen to work hard in the early days and is now doing his business,

claimed: "*In this church, we do not care about who the locals are or who the migrants are……The thing we care about is the Christians themselves. We care about their spiritual needs and the growth of their spiritual lives. If they have difficulties, they can come here with confidence. Although they may not be able to help them completely, the Lord's house is always open for them*." For many urban house churches of Shenzhen, when migrant workers come to the church for the first time, they will be assigned to different groups. Following each prayer activity, group members have a sharing time to discuss any challenges or confusion encountered during their work. On this occasion, they could get emotional comfort or guidance from other members and pray for one another. This emotional support from churches is also evident in many official churches in light of the increasing number of rural-urban migrants joining. Baoan Church, for example, offers a variety of services to Christians, the most popular of which is an intercession service for those who lack confidence and require the praying power of others, which reinforces their Christian closeness, regardless of whether they usually meet each other outside the church. Likewise, Merlin Church has set up a receiving desk for believers who wish to lodge their requests for intercession. It has been especially the case since several factories shut down due to supply chain difficulties caused by the pandemic. Many Protestant house churches specifically target those unemployed migrant workers for evangelisation and spiritual care, praying for them and helping them overcome obstacles.

In addition to mutual emotional support and communication among members, embodied practices of prayer constitute a crucial means through which migrant Christians can channel and release their emotions. A prayer meeting in Qiaoxiang house church provides nuanced insight into how worship rituals become vehicles of emotional expression and spiritual empowerment within these urban churches:

Before praying, members knelt in a circle, and Bibles and hymnals were placed in front of everyone. Brother Wang, the worship leader, began leading the prayers after learning to sing the proper psalms for worship that night. Brother Yang, who could play the guitar as the accompaniment, began plugging the guitar's strings with his fingers. Each time it was an E chord. Each note was delayed by a half-second, creating a tiny resonance with the room's atmosphere. "Lord, we ask you and use our hearts to feel your existence truly." When Brother Wang repeats this sentence, the guitar accompaniment gradually strengthens the harmony. When the prayer reached its climax, some believers began to yell "Yes, Lord" to show their affirmation; at this time, some believers began to take the initiative to speak out their prayers loudly. Most prayers are about the problems and perplexities encountered in daily life. The members responded with "Yes, Lord. Amen" at the end of a single prayer. It is easy to feel the excitement and empathy of the believers through the music and prayers on the scene. When the prayer was over, some people were still kneeling, thinking about what they said to God and praying to God. Some migrant workers are too excited to whisper sob. At that time, Bother Yang began to play the prelude to the hymn. As the chords became louder, everyone stood up and began to sing the hymn "Love the Lord Deeper" tonight. The members began to beat the music with the music. Some believers were excited to tears, and some gradually

raised their hands to greet God. In the end, the worship ended in a loud chorus of the congregation raising their hands.

——Fieldwork note of Qiaoxiang House Church(14/11/2019)

Figure 6-1,6-2 Migrant Christians in the prayer meeting
Source: photographed by the author

Prayer meetings in Qiaoxiang Church exemplify how the urban church becomes a site of otherworldly care through collective prayer and worship rituals, creating opportunities for migrant Christians to express emotions, share burdens, and experience God's presence in ways that reframe the hardships of urban life. Such worship is marked by embodied ritual and intense emotional expression, reflecting the affective religiosity common among rural Christians. As Huang (2014) observes, many migrants adopt an inward, affective orientation rather than a text-centred or intellectual approach typical of urban Christian elites. With limited theological training, they make sense of faith through bodily practices, emotionally charged narratives, and lived experiences—forms of expression that orthodox theological vocabularies often find difficult to capture (Gao *et al*., 2018). 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 (Kao, 2009). Alongside migrant workers coming into the urban church, this tradition from rural churches also appeared in urban migrant churches. During the fieldwork, these characteristics of rural Christians are still common in Shenzhen migrant churches, like sharing experiences of miraculous healing or overcoming life's difficulties through God's empowerment.

Crucially, through these embodied practices of worship and prayer, migrant Christians can further cultivate and deepen their Christian theo-ethics. As Robbins (2009) observes, Pentecostalism itself places a strong emphasis on ritual and social productivity. Randall Collins (2004) similarly argues that significant collective rituals generate a form of effervescence that energises participants and enables them to feel empowered—to experience themselves as more significant than their individual existence. He further generalises this familiar

point to suggest that all successful interactions—when sufficiently ritualised—produce some degree of this effervescence, which he terms "emotional energy." This effect was clearly evident during my fieldwork. For instance, Gaoyu, a young Anhui migrant at Meilin Church, recounted that he often felt an "indescribable touch" from within during worship, which he interpreted as the Holy Spirit filling his body. Such embodied sensations reinforced his conviction that God resided within him. Unlike Buddhism, Taoism and folk religions, all of which are characterised by hierarchical relationships between ritual specialists and believers, Christianity offers laypersons a more stable communal life and a stronger sense of egalitarian involvement in ritual practices (Fiedler,2010). Within migrant churches, collective worship rituals therefore become key sites of shared participation, enabling congregants to experience emotional intensity, feel touched by the Holy Spirit, and develop a heightened sense of sacredness and moral accountability. Such experiences often engender repentance, reinforce holiness, and orient believers towards sacrificial devotion, understood as offering themselves as "living sacrifices" in response to God's unconditional love. For migrants, being genuinely Christian is foremost equivalent to being passionately faithful. Interestingly, as Kang (2016) observes, this passion from worship rituals among rural migrant members frequently transfers to embodied practices such as enduring hardships, undertaking evangelistic missions, or serving the church—practices that translate ritual affect into concrete ethical commitments (as will be discussed in detail in Section 6.4).

Through these Christian modes of interaction and various activities, migrant Christians gradually overcome their initial fear and anxiety in the new and strange place and gain recognition within their faith communities, thereby transforming the urban church into what Huang (2012) terms a "space of recognition." For migrants, who are often subject to marginalisation and a lack of respect in broader social life, the church provides an alternative arena of empowerment. Participation in church activities enables them to assume meaningful roles in communal life, ranging from leading intercessions and hymns to undertaking missionary work—a dynamic visible not only in house churches but also in many official congregations. In Baoan Church, for example, the lack of young local believers has opened space for many more educated migrants to take responsibility for organising religious activities and evangelisation. A 28-year-old female migrant worker Sister Chen who regularly leads prayers at Bible studies and Sunday worship described her experience of empowerment and belonging as follows:

"To be honest, it's the Lord's grace to be able to take on these tasks in the church. Of course, I'm also very grateful to the pastor for trusting me and giving me this opportunity... Outside the church, I am just a dagongmei (women migrant worker), a nobody. No one cares about my faith or my life. However, in this place, I feel that the Lord needs me, and the brothers and sisters also trust me, so I will do my best to do these things well— to guide each member in prayer toward a closer relationship with the Lord. (For me), outside the church, it's very difficult to own such pleasure and delight."

Chen's experience illustrates how participation in religious life not only provides migrants with emotional relief but also grants them symbolic recognition and dignity denied elsewhere in society. Although the church is inherently hierarchical, marked by the division between shepherds and sheep, it does not reproduce the social and political hierarchies that govern secular life. Rather, within the church, it is widely acknowledged that all faithful people, regardless of social status, share equally in the grace of Christ.

Overall, through prayer, worship, and fellowship, the urban church carves out as an ethical and emotional space that provides rural–urban migrants with otherworldly care: spaces for emotional release, religious community belonging, and the experience of divine accompaniment amid daily struggles. Pentecostal-style worship rituals, in particular, play a vital role in strengthening and deepening the cultivation of theo-ethics. The following section will show how these theo-ethical practices enable urban churches to act as social infrastructures, offering not only spiritual but also material support and social bonds for migrant communities.

6.3.2 Social supporting space and this-worldly care

"For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in"

Matthew 25:35

In recent years, churches in Shenzhen—particularly house churches—have become increasingly involved in providing social assistance to migrant populations, thereby offering them forms of this-worldly care. Among these efforts, the role of "boss Christians," or entrepreneur Christians, is particularly noteworthy in the building and maintenance of faith-based social infrastructures, as they actively provide vital financial capital for church-building projects, evangelical organisations and church initiatives. Chen and Huang (2004) find that this new type of Christian, "boss Christians," has emerged since the end of the 1980s. In contrast to the uneducated farmers and elderly city dwellers who have traditionally made up the majority of the Chinese Christian population, these boss Christians are private business owners or employees who are young, rich, open-minded, and active in local church communities(Cao,2007). The most famous Boss Christian group in China is entrepreneur Christians from Wenzhou who donate their fortunes to the church and promote the gospel throughout China. Hundreds of sumptuous "unofficial" house churches operate openly in suburban Wenzhou, decorated with conspicuous red crosses (Cao, 2007; 2008; 2010). As both successful private entrepreneurs and influential Christian leaders, they explicitly promote the production and management of church development in consumerist and entrepreneurial terms. Within Shenzhen's house churches, boss Christians also take an active role in establishing the church and applying their strategic vision and managerial experience to the organisation of evangelizing activity. Qiaoxiang House Church, established by some "boss Christians" in 2012, first targets migrant employees in factories and their families and friends.

They find a place for church activities and hire a pastor for theological training. After two years of rapid growth, Qiaoxiang Church has developed from a small congregation with about 20 members into a church with more than 120 churchgoers, most of whom are migrant workers. Likewise, Pingan house Church was organised in a neighbourhood by a "boss Christian" who rents the space for church activities, supports most of the church's daily expenses, and introduces the church to his factory workers. Even during the early stages of the re-opening of TSPM churches, boss Christians were essential in providing funds and land for the church's re-establishment in the 1990s. In general, the boss Christian group is a vital component that cannot be ignored in the faith-based infrastructure building in Shenzhen.

With financial support from Christian entrepreneurs, many ambitious house churches seeking to expand their influence provide direct economic assistance to members in need. For example, in Church B, when the child of a migrant member was unable to secure admission to a local primary school due to the family's non-local *hukou*, Brother Zhang, the church leader, used his personal connections to arrange a place for the child at a school and generously covered the tuition and miscellaneous fees for the first year. In another case, a Christian entrepreneur personally funded the printing of evangelistic leaflets and hired people to distribute them in crowded public spaces such as subway entrances. The leaflet read: "*Dear friend, thank God for allowing me to meet you! If you encounter any difficulties or burdens in Shenzhen, you are welcome to visit our church. We will do our best to help you, and we hope you will also hear the word of God*."

While such forms of support are the most direct, it is important to note that in recent years, with the tightening of religious policies, many unregistered and publicly visible evangelistic activities have come under strict government scrutiny. Moreover, not all churches—particularly house churches—are able to rely on wealthy members to provide financial backing for social assistance. In this context, for the majority of urban churches in Shenzhen, it is the networks of mutual aid and reciprocal care among congregants themselves that constitute the primary form of social infrastructure.

First, urban churches create opportunities for everyday encounters with other Christians of varying backgrounds, which offer chances and occasions for migrants to 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. In many urban churches, there are fellowships for single Christian workers called *qing nian tuan qi* (Youth Fellowship 青年团契), regularly organizing outdoor activities to help Christian workers familiarise themselves with each other. Then, it is prevalent for young Christians to find Christian friends or even find a spouse and establish a family with the church's assistance. Other irregular activities, such as Husband and Wife Camps and Sunday school for members' children, are also frequent in many churches. Love Feast is another activity for daily encounters and social connections in

the church. After the Sunday services, Love Feast is intended by the churches for all members to have a meal together and casual chatting, trying to create an atmosphere of love among the congregation. During the Love Feast, newcomers are introduced to other members by the sermon or other church staff.

Figure 6-3,6-4 Love Feast in migrant church
Source: photographed by the author

Beyond these everyday encounters, urban churches also provide spaces of hometown solidarity, enabling migrants to reconnect with fellow believers from the same rural regions who share similar religious backgrounds and memories. This is exemplified in Baoan Church, where the Senior Fellowship members are predominantly female rural-urban migrants from Henan Province who volunteer to clean the church every week. Each Saturday afternoon, they congregate in the church to clean the church and socialize with their Henan *laoxiang* (fellow-townsman). As one member expressed: "*I am very happy that here in the fellowship I can once again find gospel companions from my hometown, relieve the loneliness of living in a strange city, and even speak in the dialect of my native place*." This case illustrates once again how urban churches operate as social infrastructures, offering faith-based networks that bridge diverse groups and relationships. Through fellowships and a wide variety of functional gatherings, urban churches effectively intertwine believers' church life with their personal life, providing not only religious nurture but also a sense of everyday belonging and social integration.

Second, urban churches also function as platforms of mutual support among rural-urban migrants, where information about employment, housing, and social resources is regularly exchanged, enabling them to support one another in times of need and vulnerable individuals within the church. This kind of social support manifests itself not through external assistance, but through the internal group creation of disadvantaged groups. Ley discovers that Vancouver's immigrant church serves as a service hub, providing a variety of services to migrants (Ley,2008). Similarly, information about job opportunities, housing, and donations for seriously ill workers occurs frequently in Shenzhen's urban churches. For instance, in Qiaoxiang Church, when a migrant worker lost his job due to a factory closure, members offered advice, practical

assistance, and even temporary employment through Christian entrepreneurs, while also providing him with temporary accommodation. Such networks transform the church into an internal hub of solidarity where vulnerable individuals can seek practical help.

Unlike Cao Nanlai's (2010) study of Wenzhou Christian churches, which found that migrant Christians in Wenzhou secured access to modern schools and upward mobility through their social interactions with wealthy "boss Christians," thereby reproducing new hierarchies within the church (e.g., local–outsider, urban–rural, boss–worker, Christian–non-Christian, saved–unsaved, spiritual–secular, civilized–backward, male–female), such divisions are far less prevalent in Shenzhen's urban churches. Instead, Shenzhen churches place stronger emphasis on the notions of brotherhood and equality. This emphasis is particularly visible in everyday forms of mutual aid, where support is more likely to take the form of reciprocal contributions among members rather than relying on the patronage of a few wealthy donors. Especially in congregations that stress the "purity of faith," such as Calvinist churches, the critique of materialism and insistence that "everyone can contribute" reinforces a communal ethic of shared responsibility. This emphasis on egalitarian mutual support resonates with Gao and Qian's (2020) study of the Sanzhuli migrant church, which highlights how Shenzhen's urban churches foster inclusive and durable support networks grounded in the theo-ethics of brotherhood and sisterhood. Through these practices, the church becomes not only a space of worship but also a vital infrastructure of solidarity that allows migrants to navigate precarious socio-economic realities without reproducing entrenched hierarchies.

Beyond these forms of this-worldly care, the role of urban churches as faith-based infrastructures points to a broader and more practical significance: they create crucial pathways for migrant Christians to achieve urban integration. In comparison to the earlier stages of migrant Christianity, when churches were often organised along ethnic or hometown lines and functioned as extensions of kinship-based solidarities, the migrant churches in Shenzhen are notably more open and inclusive. This openness creates expanded possibilities for meaningful encounters among migrant Christians of diverse backgrounds, enabling them to cultivate new forms of social belonging beyond the narrow confines of kinship and regional ties. In this respect, religious networks provide an important alternative to the traditional reliance on kin- and ethnic-based bonds that historically structured the ways in which rural migrants settled in cities (Yue *et al*., 2013; Wang, 2004). Whereas the latter often reinforced exclusionary boundaries between different hometown groups, the religious community offers a broader and more egalitarian framework for solidarity, recognition, and participation.

In this sense, by functioning as a form of social infrastructure, urban churches reconfigure the very modalities of migrant adaptation. Rather than depending solely on hometown associations for security and support,

migrant Christians can access faith-based networks that not only offer spiritual care but also foster practical forms of assistance, ranging from emotional companionship and mutual aid to job opportunities and childcare. This shift underscores the transformative role of religion as a cultural and social resource in urban China, enabling migrant workers to negotiate urban precarity through shared faith and theo-ethical commitments. In this process, migrant Christians are empowered to move from what Li Zhang (2001) characterises as "strangers in the city" to loyal, participatory members of social collectives composed of Christians across varied socioeconomic positions. Religion, in this regard, constitutes not merely an inward source of spiritual resilience but also an outwardly oriented infrastructure of belonging that unsettles traditional kinship-based logics of settlement and opens new pathways for urban incorporation.

6.4 Negotiating sacred space and social care space with theo-ethics

While these two modalities of care—other-worldly and this-worldly—may appear distinct, within urban churches they manifest in a harmonious and intertwined form. This integration is not incidental but the direct outcome of an emergent theo-ethics, which provides the moral and ethical framework underpinning migrant Christians' religious practices. In this sense, theo-ethics functions as a mediating logic that reconciles spiritual devotion with social responsibility, enabling the urban church to operate simultaneously as a sanctuary of transcendence and as a practical infrastructure of everyday care.

First, theo-ethics should not be understood as abstract theology or a set of doctrinal propositions, but as a performative practice embedded in the everyday lives of migrant Christians. It emphasizes a "theology-through-praxis," where faith is enacted through ordinary acts of service, hospitality, and care rather than confined to propositional belief (Cloke *et al*.,2019; Tse, 2014). Within Shenzhen's migrant churches, this lived and affective enactment generates an affective politics of hope and belonging, enabling marginalized believers to translate the Christian ethos of brotherhood and sisterhood into tangible forms of community life. The experience of Sister Song, a 30-year-old staff member at Qiaoxiang Church, illustrates this performative dimension of theo-ethics. When she first came to Qiaoxiang Church six years ago, it was a small house church with about 30 members. Song utilizes her connections as a bible group leader in the previous church to disseminate Qiaoxiang Church among the group members and invite her friends and colleagues to join the church fellowship. Additionally, she recognises the value of the church service as a home for newly arrived Christians; hence, on her initiative, the Love Feast and welcoming group for newly arrived migrants have been formed to assist them in integrating into the church. Each Sunday afternoon, following Sunday service, around 20–30 migrant workers, both Christians and non-Christians, participate in welcoming activities such as hymn singing, sharing, and group outings. With several years of development, this house church has attracted around 140 Christians, and 90% of them are rural-urban migrants. In 2019, she was elected as the deacon of Qiaoxiang Church, responsible for church management. For her, the church is more than a place for

obtaining recognition. She spends most of her time after work organising the church's daily operations and even established her family in 2020 with another male church coworker. In the interview, she admits that her initial motivation for coming here was solely for the Bible training courses, but after engaging in church activity, she was quickly drawn in by the joyful and relaxed emotional atmosphere, and with the theo-ethics of agape, she later comes to realize that serving is not only a way to demonstrate her loyalty to God, but also a way to help more people like her who have come to the city from a small village through the God's love. With this in mind, she now wishes to build Qiaoxiang Church, "a more comfortable place for all migrant Christians." Her example demonstrates how theo-ethics becomes materially and affectively present in migrant Christians' lived religion, shaping both their communal belonging and individual religiosity.

This habitual performance clearly inspired other members of the church. During a group meeting, one male member shared his experience of becoming more attentive to the needs of fellow congregants and of overcoming his addiction to social media platforms such as *Kuaishou*(快手) and *Douyin*(抖音) in the spare time. Instead, he explained, he now "*spends more time on church activities and is more concerned about the brothers or sisters in need*," following Song's example. He has since taken an active role in the church's welcoming group, greeting newcomers at the subway station, maintaining contact with them afterwards to understand their needs, and providing ongoing support. In addition, he actively evangelises in his workplace by inviting interested colleagues to church. As he put it, "*although those who come for the first time may not necessarily become Christians, I still need to do this—this is also a way of spreading the gospel, letting them feel the love*."

The examples of Sister Song and this brother illustrate how individual performances of generosity, hope, and loyalty informed by theo-ethics can spill over into the practices of others, generating a shared affective texture that reinforces members' sense of belonging within otherwise highly mobile migrant churches. These practices demonstrate how theo-ethics functions not merely as doctrine but as a lived, performative ethic that actively reshapes social relations within migrant congregations. Moreover, this brother's case highlights how theo-ethics in Shenzhen's churches exceeds the boundaries of evangelistic purpose. It increasingly embodies a universal religious ethos of love—a "genuine openness to, and outpouring of, unconditional love towards and acceptance of the other" (May & Cloke, 2013, p. 15)—which sustains both spiritual devotion and social care. In this sense, theo-ethics provides migrant Christians with a moral vocabulary through which to reconfigure ethical relations in the neoliberal city: shifting from self-referential economic and ethical logics toward an ethic of responsibility to the other, grounded in transcendent commitments. Importantly, such practices suggest that migrant churches may even create spaces of openness that extend beyond the religious community itself, offering forms of care and recognition that resonate with non-Christians.

Second, theo-ethics can be translated into a virtue ethics for the marginalized, prioritizing love, care, and responsibility over wealth, education, or status. It creates an affect of inclusion, reconciling and playing down

the imbalances caused by members' diverse social-economic backgrounds as migrant worker Christians are embedded in a complex relationship of "both inclusion and exclusion" with churches (Huang, 2015). As mentioned above, for many migrant Christians, urban churches may welcome and accommodate them in a much more equal style than the larger society does, but conversion or baptism itself does not ensure their full membership, especially in the larger Christian community (Cao, 2010). Here, theo-ethics becomes essential in balancing sincerity, service, and contribution to church life. Although the division of labour in church operations varies, those with greater economic clout would assume more significant responsibilities. Theo-ethics interprets these distinctions as "ordered by God," implying that those who demonstrate exceptional ability and excellence in church matters naturally possess self-evident interior spirituality. For instance, the piano is always used to accompany hymn singing, which is an indispensable part of most official churches' worship sessions[24]. Brother Liu, who is in charge of accompanying the choir at Meilin Church, comes from a middle-class family and was educated in Hong Kong. When migrant members discuss Brother Liu's talent in playing the piano, "*God increased his abilities to urge him to serve more in the church*" or "*he is an amazing gift to the church.*" Although migrant Christians are unable to provide economic and practical support like boss Christians or to be as talented and educated as Brother Liu, they are also urged to participate in other church activities such as volunteer cleaning, volunteer caring and preaching to non-believers around them. In this way, theo-ethics equalizes differentiated roles, ensuring that both boss Christians who donate funds and migrant workers who volunteer labour are affirmed as part of the same moral community.

Theo-ethics thus conveys a relation to otherness beyond material logic and rationale, grounded in universally invoked values of love, grace, and hope, but not reducible to any specific theological form (Cloke, 2010; May & Cloke, 2013). It embodies a universal religious ethos of unconditional love and acceptance of the other, while also cultivating virtues of care and mutuality that empower marginalized migrants to live with dignity. At the same time, however, whether such reconciliation can extend beyond the internal space of the church into the broader urban context remains uncertain. Migrant workers' daily practices outside the church continue to be shaped by economic precarity, limited citizenship rights, and entrenched social hierarchies—conditions that theo-ethics can only partially mitigate.

6.5 The limits of caregiving as the social infrastructure

The section above demonstrates that, despite the increasing visibility of Christianity in Shenzhen, the institutional and material capacity of churches to provide sustained social care for rural–urban migrants

[24] While owning a piano is not a barrier for many house churches, hymn singing with the piano has readily attracted the alarm or objections of neighbours, making it impossible for them to remain underground; thus, many house churches avoid using the piano as an accompaniment.

remains limited. This limitation manifests differently in state-sanctioned Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) churches and in unregistered house churches.

For TSPM churches in Shenzhen, official status grants greater access to government funding and resources, and many official congregations in Shenzhen have historically organised charitable initiatives—such as elder care, health provision, or poverty alleviation projects in other provinces (such as Guangxi province). Yet these efforts often take the form of what Vala *et al*. (2015) term "chequebook activism": believers do not participate directly but contribute financially, and only a small number of religious individuals (sometimes just leaders or experts) participate in this effort. As a result, programmes tend to be large-scale, bureaucratic, and oriented toward state priorities, while the everyday needs of migrant workers in Shenzhen remain marginalised. Moreover, state restrictions prohibit evangelism and religious education in the context of social service provision, further curtailing the possibility of integrating spiritual care into welfare projects. As one pastor in Baoan TSPM Church noted, "*If you do social service work, you cannot evangelise concurrently; if you evangelise, the project will always be prohibited*." Such constraints are designed to produce a form of "non-religious" charity within the state-regulated framework, which not only fails to inspire religious devotion among believers but also lacks responsiveness to the lived realities of migrant workers. Apart from limitations from the government, TSPM churches also struggle with insufficient human resources and oversized congregational structures, resulting in inadequate emotional and spiritual support. Many members of house churches have pointed out that pastoral care in larger TSPM churches tends to be superficial: the limited number of pastors is overwhelmed with administrative duties, leaving little time or patience for meaningful engagement with migrant Christians. Moreover, due to the large congregation size, most church activities are decentralized into various small groups. However, the lack of consistent pastoral engagement combined with high member mobility results in many participants attending only sporadically, making it difficult to cultivate a tightly knit, mutually supportive faith-based community.

House churches, by contrast, occupy a more precarious position. Although they serve as the primary providers of emotional and social care for migrants, their lack of official recognition prohibits them from advertising, displaying religious symbols, or producing printed materials, forcing them to remain small and discreet. This obscurity provides limited flexibility for grassroots initiatives such as work consulting or Sunday schools, but also restricts their reach. Financial resources are especially constrained, as house churches rely primarily on member contributions rather than institutional funding. Many pastors must take on additional employment to support themselves, and even relatively stable congregations conserve staff expenditures to remain viable. For example, Pastor Yang, the sole leader of his church, must rotate daily between four separate congregations scattered across Shenzhen, leaving little time to develop sustained social projects. These structural limits mean that most house churches struggle to extend their caregiving beyond the congregation itself. Although "Boss Christians" have provided vital support for local congregations such as Qiaoxiang Church and Pingan Church—particularly through renting venues, financing

pastors' salaries, and even securing employment for some migrants—their impact remains constrained. Unlike their Wenzhou counterparts, Shenzhen's Boss Christians typically operate modest businesses and maintain a low profile, which limits their capacity to substantially expand these social infrastructures.

Although the church emphasizes equality among its members, caregiving within urban churches inevitably exhibits certain selective tendencies in practice. Support from churches is often directed toward those whose roles align closely with the developmental objectives of the church itself. For instance, Church A, an Evangelical congregation that operates a church academy, tends to channel much of its material support toward members who are involved in teaching at the academy. Sister Wu, for example, was recruited as a part-time teacher at the academy and, as a result, not only entered the church's daily management group but also gained greater opportunities to lead worship and prayers. Similarly, a Reformed house church with a strong emphasis on evangelism privileges members who participate in missionary activities. Those engaged in evangelising in other regions are financially supported through collective Sunday offerings raised by the entire congregation, and the church allocates a portion of its income to subsidise their missionary work.

In sum, the caregiving practices of both TSPM and house churches highlight the inherent limits of religious social infrastructures in Shenzhen. While they offer meaningful spaces of belonging and support for migrant workers, their reach is fragmented and uneven, constrained by state regulation in the case of TSPM churches, and by resource scarcity and precarity in the case of house churches. Moreover, selective patterns of care within some churches reveal that caregiving can become a form of subtle control and even reproduce hierarchies within faith communities. These limitations underscore that, at this stage, urban churches in China constitute a situated and contingent form of social infrastructure. They can be viewed as a possible force that fills the gaps left by the neoliberal restructuring of welfare provision in Chinese cities and provides new avenues for rural–urban migrants to pursue social integration, but they have not yet developed to the scale or institutional capacity of faith-based organizations in many Western societies. Nevertheless, as a form of social infrastructure, these churches are increasingly presenting how theo-ethics in China moves from faith-by-dogma to faith-by-praxis in addressing this-worldly concerns (Cloke & Beaumont, 2013).

6.6 Conclusions

Cities are full of sophisticated and often surprising social networks; in this chapter, I argue that urban churches function as social infrastructures, densely woven with relational ties that help bind people together and provide critical support during times of stress (Latham & Layton, 2019). In Shenzhen, these churches offer both this-worldly and otherworldly forms of care, addressing the material needs and spiritual aspirations of migrant Christians. By attending to the nexus of social infrastructure, sacred space, and theo-

ethics, this chapter advances a more nuanced understanding of how religion operates simultaneously as a spiritual and material infrastructure in contemporary urban China.

On the one hand, urban churches in Shenzhen constitute sacred spaces of transcendence, which provide migrant workers with emotional care and spiritual refuge through prayer, worship, and embodied theo-ethical practices. These spaces sustain believers' sense of ultimate belonging, reinforce moral subjectivities, and generate affective attachments that transcend the uncertainties of migrant life. On the other hand, these churches also operate as social spaces. Through fellowships, welcoming groups, and communal "Love Feast" meals, newcomers encounter robust interpersonal connections, build social ties with others from similar backgrounds, and access networks that offer potential mutual support. These tangible, human-enacted acts of care directly address the material hardships of their lives, functioning as the vital social glue that holds the community together. Within these social infrastructures, Boss Christians play a pivotal role, especially in sustaining Shenzhen's numerous house churches by providing financial resources, securing venues, and enabling pastoral work.

The integration of these two functions is not incidental but is actively shaped by an emergent theo-ethics within the neoliberal Chinese city. Far from an abstract theology, theo-ethics is enacted as a lived and affective practice that mediates between sacred devotion and everyday responsibility. It fosters an affective politics of hope and belonging among migrant Christians in order to create a space filled with hope, dignity, and moral agency for every member (Cloke *et al*., 2019; Williams, 2015). In this study, theo-ethics provides a sustaining ethical framework for migrant Christians that enables urban churches to maintain their caregiving practices and negotiate the tensions between spiritual devotion and social responsibility.

In general, this chapter has presented a grounded picture of urban churches in Shenzhen as infrastructures of both care and devotion. Two broader contributions to geographical debates emerge from this discussion. First, this chapter advances the study of lived religion by foregrounding the broad spectrum of migrant Christians' everyday religious practices within urban churches—ranging from prayer and fellowship to acts of care and interpersonal interactions. Through these embodied and affective experiences, migrant Christians cultivate and enact theo-ethics, producing a form of religiosity that is simultaneously affectively charged and socially consequential. Such practices reveal how religion is spatially and materially woven into daily church life, providing migrants with crucial resources to navigate precarity and marginality. In this study, I argue that Christianity for most migrant believers is "a combination of lived practices, performed relationships, beliefs, theologies, and organizational structures" (Ezzy, 2020, p. 450), and thus must be understood not only in terms of propositional belief but also through "the material, embodied aspects of religion as they occur in everyday life, in addition to listening for how people explain themselves—which includes both the experiences of the body and the mind" (Ammerman, 2014, p. 190). Future research on migrants' religious experience, therefore, needs to situate their intimate and embodied practices within broader socio-economic

contexts, unveiling the implications behind their lived religion. In this sense, the lived religion approach is particularly valuable for attending to vernacular religious practices as they are embedded in specific social milieus.

Second, this chapter contributes to geographical understandings of sacred space by conceptualising urban churches as dual infrastructures of transcendence and care. While the primary emphasis of this study lies in their social infrastructural role, the sacred dimension of churches is equally significant, as they do not merely function as spaces of worship set apart from the secular city but simultaneously operate as infrastructures of social reproduction that provide shelter, networks, and belonging. This duality highlights how sacred spaces in the Chinese urban context are actively negotiated and reconstituted through theo-ethical practices, thereby blurring the boundaries between spiritual devotion and social life. Through these arguments, this study underscores that sacred space is not fixed or self-contained but relationally produced at the intersection of religious devotion, social care, and urban governance. Future research should therefore move beyond conceiving churches as bounded religious sites, and instead examine how social connections and interactions are continually reproduced within churches and other religious spaces, and how religiosity and secularity are negotiated and reconciled within these contexts—particularly within the postsecular condition of urban China.

Overall, these insights underscore that urban churches in Shenzhen constitute a situated and contingent form of social infrastructure. In post-reform China, the historical transition from a "rural China" held together by kinship and geography to a modern, urban China (Fei, 1992) has been accompanied by the disintegration of traditional beliefs and local knowledge, the reorganisation of social interactions, and the reconstruction of new social connections. In this context, religion has gradually provided a possibility for new social connections for rural-urban migrants. As social infrastructure, the urban church provides emotional and supportive space for migrant believers and transforms into a "welcome hub" where belief, social capital, and possible interpersonal networks entangle, leading to the emergence of a new social support network for migrant workers that transcends traditional migrant connections and becomes an organic part of resisting the risks of modernity in urban China. This vital space of belonging for rural–urban migrants has reconfigured the geographies of care, faith, and sociality in the neoliberal city, albeit frequently remaining invisible in Chinese society. However, this chapter also demonstrates that while Shenzhen's urban churches offer spaces for emotional and physical encounters with the "Other" (Cloke et al., 2019, p. 55), their sustainability remains precarious, constrained by state regulation, financial limitations, and the selective nature of caregiving within the church.

Chapter 7.

Re-examining femininity within church and family:

an intersectional approach to the agency of female migrant Christians

7.1 Introduction

In the **Chapter5**, we delved into the intricate dynamics of religious subjectivity among young migrant Christians, with a particular focus on their deep engagement with Calvinist theologies. This examination highlighted how these rural-urban migrants embrace and integrate Calvinist theological doctrines and religious values into their lives, intertwining them with the prevailing neoliberal norms in urban China to shape their existence in Shenzhen. Building on this exploration, a critical question arises: How can we understand the prevalent pious agency among the female migrant Christian in Shenzhen, especially they likely face more pressure than their male counterparts within such highly secular city?

Drawing on emerging discussions and debates in postsecular feminism, specifically concerning religious agency and intersectionality, I argue that within the current postsecular framework, it is crucial to scrutinize the agency of religious women within the genuine context and circumstances they face——the intersectional social context. This chapter further investigates the agency of female migrant Christians and their negotiation of subjectivities within multiple social norms, particularly in adopting and practising relatively "conservative" or "pious" religious values in a highly secular city. By focusing on their church life, marriage choices, and family dynamics, we explore the non-confrontational agency of religious women amidst the intersections of secular values, traditional culture, and church teachings in Shenzhen. The agency of these female migrant Christians is achieved through the strategic reconstitution of their subjectivities, drawing on existing cultural resources, rather than outrightly opposing hegemonic norms socially, ethically, or politically—a departure from some assumptions within traditional feminist thought.

7.2 postsecular feminism, agency, and intersectionality

The agency has been a central topic in social theory, particularly in debates over religious women's agency (Bilge,2010; Braidotti, 2008; Mahmood, 2005; Singh, 2015). In traditional feminist frameworks, religious women are often portrayed as situated in relation to external entities such as systems, structures, or society.

Within this paradigm, they are either depicted as being determined by these external forces, as seen in the structural model exemplified by Durkheim, or as actively engaging with and influencing these forces, as illustrated by the action model associated with scholars like Simmel and Weber (Bilge, 2010, p.12).

In recent years, however, burgeon studies of agency of religious women, so-called the "postsecular" turn, have emerged with the intention of delving into the deep diversity of women's practices within various contexts, which purses new understandings of the constitution of the feminine self and feminist consciousness through the lens of a particular critical angle: through the critique of secularism as cultural and political ethos (Mahmood, 2005; Bracke, 2008; Braidotti, 2008; Vasilaki, 2016). Particularly, this body of scholarship delves into a phenomenon that has been regarded as a "paradox" by many mainstream feminists, namely the active and voluntary compliance, embracement, and propagation of religious practices and traditions that are perceived as "conservative "(Avishai, 2008), "gender-traditional"(Burke, 2012), or "fundamentalist"(Bracke, 2003) by numerous women, which seems contradictory to feminist ideologies as these religious practices and traditions are often associated with the perpetuation of women's subordination, the reinforcement of ontological differences between men and women, and the imposition of strict social roles and duties on women(Singh,2015).In this way, scholars seek to problematize traditional normative conceptions of secularism and the way these define what constitutes religion and religious subjectivity in the modern world and document and affirm religious women "as agents, as subjects of their own lives, thus radically refusing these subjects to be constituted by oppression alone"(Bracke, 2003, p.337).

Within this "postsecular turn", scholars have further focused on the complexities and ambiguities of gender relations within religions (Woodhead, 2001, pp. 68–70) and explored how women forge feminine connections to the divine even within historically male-dominated religious traditions, whether by rewriting religious narrative or cultivating women-centred practices (Braidotti, 2008; 2013; Mahmood, 2005; Vasilaki, 2016). In this body of literature, Rosi Braidotti, and Saba Mahmood in particular, whose stance is emblematic of the postsecular time and whose combined contributions give the conceptual space for re-examining the meaning of religious subjectivities in a postsecular society (Vasilaki, 2016).

Saba Mahmood's landmark study titled *the Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* "represents perhaps the most challenging and theoretically sophisticated argument to liberal and to postmodern feminism," as it delves deeper into the discussion on agency and political subjectivity and inspires plenty of related research after. (Vasilaki, 2016, p.113). Different from the liberal-secular framework, she focuses more on questions of piety, morality, modesty, virtue and divinity, namely the agency of those women "who may be socially, ethically, or politically indifferent to the goal of opposing hegemonic norms" that have been long ignored by mainstream feminists(Mahmood, 2005, p.9). On the liberal assumption that agency must transgress structural norms, she argues that "transgressing gender norms may not be a matter of transforming consciousness or effecting change in the significatory system of gender, but might well

require a retraining of sensibilities, affect, desire, and sentiments – those registers that escape the logic of representation in their significatory political cultural systems"(p.188). Inspired by Foucault's analysis of ethical formation, she questions the binary of subverting-confirming the norms as the site where subjectivity is produced, and proposes to detach the notion of self-realization from that of autonomous will. Meanwhile, she insists on keeping the concept of agency open and allowing it to emerge from "within semantic and institutional networks that define and make possible particular ways of relating to people, things, and oneself "(T. Asad, 2003, p.78).

In this way, in Mahmood's framework, on the one hand, the notion of agency seeks to be disassociated from the objectives of progressive politics, as the tethering of the two has frequently resulted in the confinement of agency within the discourse of resistance to oppressive and hegemonic exercises of power and, on the other hand, it could be productively explored through the nexus of ethics and politics in the real world (Mahmood, 2005, p.34). More specifically, in her analysis of the mosque movement, rather than denying or ignoring the political influence within this process, she turns the view to explore how the political effectiveness of these movements perform within the ethical domain—"those strategies of cultivation through which embodied attachments to historically specific forms of truth come to be forged" (Mahmood, 2005, p.35).

Compared to Mahmood's work, Braidotti (2008) concentrates more on the political subject of religious women. Braidotti (2008, pp.3-15) argues that the current postsecular turn in feminist studies challenges European feminism because it makes manifest the notion that agency, or political subjectivity, can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality. In this sense, she posits that political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of counter-subjectivities and asks to untie the feminine subject from its "oppositional" other to envision "an interiority that is not only formed within the limits of human otherness, but also . . . (through) interrelations with non-human, post-human, and inhuman forces" (Braidotti, 2008, p.16). In this way, Braidotti recognizes the "multiple others" that exist beyond the dominant systems of signification to produce the subject. Agency, then, constitutes all those relations, attachments, and desires that make possible the subject, including those that do and do not subvert systemic norms and those in partnership with the divine. Braidotti (2008, p.15) also points out, it is noteworthy that the material and discursive conditions that create negative experiences such as oppression, marginality, injury, or trauma "are also the conditions of their overturning". The conditions for political and ethical agency are not oppositional and thus not tied to the present by negation; instead, they are affirmative and geared to creating possible futures. Ethical relations create possible worlds."

There is also other work of postsecular feminism has reimaged notions of feminine agency and subjectivity outside of the narrative of subversion. Burke (2012), for example, particularly focuses on those "compliant" agencies within religious women, referring to religious women who practice their faith without challenging

religious institutions or seeking religious advantages. Different from the traditional type of agencies in secular narrative, this kind of agency "neither defined by its opposition or resistance to religious norms, nor by its nonreligious aims, but by its immanent affirmation of, and attempt to live up to, religious norms themselves" (Singh, 2015, p.5).

Overall, from the above discussion, we can summarize two key characteristics of the agency of religious women in postsecular feminism studies:(1) it endeavours to detach the feminist project from its secular and liberal norms, while associating political subjectivity with spirituality instead, which broadens the understanding of agency, especially non-confrontational one;(2)it also sheds light on the need of engaging in multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions within the world religious subjects inhabit. In other words, informed by the poststructuralist deconstruction of the humanist subject, the interrogation of the agency in the postsecular feminism abandons the ontological priority of agency to context, and turns to explore specific contexts and articulated social formations from which different forms of agency and subject positions arise (Bilge, 2010). Overall, postsecular feminist studies emphasize an ethical-political formation framework beyond the binary of subverting-confirming norms.

However, notwithstanding new insights from postsecular feminism opening up possibilities for further understanding of religious women's agency, feminisms exhibit significant difficulty in articulating the role of religion and religious inequalities within feminist equality discourse, particularly concerning female migrant Christians who encompass multiple marginalized identity backgrounds. They need a critical lens to analyze the truly social and contextual conception of agency through "a thorough consideration of situated and historicized structures and operators of power that constitute, not determine, subjects" (Bilge, 2010, p.23). Recently, intersectionality emerged as a valuable framework for exploring power dynamics and subjectivity across various economic, political, social, and cultural contexts (Sihgh, 2015; Hopkins, 2018). Therefore, in this chapter, I advocate for an intersectional approach to agency to overcome this distance.

First coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw and rooted more broadly in the writings of black feminists in the United States, the concept of intersectionality moves feminist theory and practice beyond an exclusive focus on gender rather on the wide variety of axes of power and oppression that "intersect" within women's everyday life and aims to shed light on the marginalization of minority women's voices, both in the broader society and the feminist movements(Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989;1991). In the intersectional analysis, identities and oppressions are not additive; instead, they are "miscible and blend together" and form a type of "matrix" (Collins, 2000), and therefore can only be analyzed and understood in conjunction with each other and in dynamic, rather than in isolation (Giorgi, 2020; Singh, 2015). Meanwhile, as Collins (2019) notes, the tension between intersectionality as the reality of oppression and intersectionality as a process of becoming that might open spaces of possibility and freedoms that resist and challenge social inequalities; in this way, to look into religious women's intersectionality cannot merely be reduced to the exploration of the multi-faceted

nature of identities and how they reflect in migrants' lived experiences, rather, we also need to carefully examine the intersectionality they experience as a process of becoming that may engender new subjectivities and agency.

As mentioned above, literature on postsecular feminism reminds us that religious women's agency transcends the oppression/liberation dyad and should be understood through ethical-political concerns and commitments. Ethical-political differences actually modulate the nature and character of oppression and the appropriate responses/resistances to it; they shape what will be regarded as oppressive or rather as empowered, in what specific ways it is experienced as oppressive, and how oppressive social structures or relations should be resisted. The intersectional perspective looks at the different identities, experiences, oppressions, and goals of women, as well as how these things interact, overlap, and ultimately shape their ethical and political subjects. It gives us a way to think about a wider range of moral and political issues. Given that, an intersectional approach offers promising directions for postsecular feminist studies.

Within the study of the religious agency of female migrant Christians, what is largely unexplored is the relational processes and multiple experiences of social inequalities, especially how different forms of social oppression form and constitute one another to produce a matrix of social structures that condition the experiences and functioning of them. In postsecular feminist studies, there is a growing focus on the non-confrontational agency and its ethical-contextual formation process. We suggest using intersectionality to address this concern, as it has the potential to enhance the field. In this case, we argue that we must analyze religious subjects and agencies in light of their intersectional experiences. This chapter examines the formation of Christian migrant women's subjectivity and religious agency under the intersectional power relations produced by the patriarchy within the family, the workplace, and religious institutions. This approach provides a non-Western insight into the postsecular feminism of Christianity within native cultural and power structures.

7.3 Positioning female migrant Christians' Subjectivity in Modern China

In fact, Chinese rural-urban Christian women's subjectivities under the context of urban China cannot be separated from the intersectional "matrix of domination," which includes the legacies of traditional familial and patriarchal culture and Mao's ideologies, the popular mechanisms of market forces in the post-Mao era, and gendered power structures within the church. In the rest of this section, I would like to elaborate on how these triple stresses impact female migrant Christians in this case.

The Confucian notion of order has exerted a significant influence on Chinese society for millennia.

Consequently, the cultural legitimacy of the state and its political system has been predicated upon ideal Confucian moral codes, which underscored the proper order and hierarchy within the family, emphasizing the moral cultivation of obedient and filial subjects. Women's submission to men was normalized as part of the "three cardinal guides" (*sangang* 三纲), which encompassed the principles of "ruler guides subject," "father guides son," and "husband guides wife" (Johnson, 2009, p.2). Consequently, a culture of gender inequality became entrenched, with women's roles being diminished under male dominance.

During the Republican period in China (1912-1949), both liberal democrats and communist reformers recognized the necessity of changing or even overturning the traditional family structure to facilitate China's transformation into a modern nation-state. Two major waves of transformative forces emerged to improve women's social status and roles: the influence of Western missionaries, who sought to evangelize China through women in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Chung, 2005; Kwok, 1992; Lutz, 2010), and the May Fourth Movement's advocacy for women's emancipation in the early twentieth century (Chen, 1971; Witke, 1970).

Upon assuming power in 1949, the Chinese Communist Party declared that the socialist revolution had liberated rural women from "feudal" tyranny inherent in the Confucian household hierarchy and broader societal structures. During the Mao era, peasant women were celebrated as "holding up half the sky" (*neng ding ban bian tian* 能顶半边天), symbolizing a Marxist interpretation of feminism and efforts to mobilize women for the construction of socialism (Jacka, 2013), which propagated a myth of equality between men and women. However, this Maoist state did little to combat patriarchy, as Hoing (2003) explains, as Maoist gender ideology emphasized the equality of men and women rather than addressing women's social expectations and conditions.

Since the introduction of the reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, China's rural areas have witnessed dramatic social and economic transformations as the state pursued a series of pragmatic measures, such as marketisation and de-collectivization, to liberate the productive agency of individuals. The implementation of the home responsibility system (HRS), which signaled the demise of communal production, was the policy that had the most significant effect on rural societies. First, gender ideology in the post-Mao state appeared to retreat from a symbolic gender-equality agenda to focus instead on economic growth (Jacka, 2013, p.987). Now, peasants, and particularly peasant women, were depicted as "backwards" and low *suzhi* (quality), and were viewed as a barrier to China's project of modernisation (Jacka, 2013). The gender inequality issue, particularly in rural society, has been overshadowed by official demands to raise their *suzhi* in commodity production (Jacka, 2006, p.588). Second, China's socialist change occurred without questioning traditional notions of gender roles in the household. Household divisions of labor between women and men in China have long been shaped by the notion that "men rule outside, women rule inside" (*nan zhu wai, nv zhu nei*,男主

外,女主内) and by the assumption that "women's work" is lighter and less skilled than "men's work." In addition, as elsewhere, "women's work" is commonly seen as less worthy of recognition and reward than "men's work". However, following the implementation of de-collectivization and, in particular, with industrialization taking place, men were the first to leave agriculture for higher-paying jobs off the farm, which entailed employment outside of the community, as well as outside the family. In the meantime, with the exception of harvesting and ploughing, the majority of agricultural work came to be considered as women's inside work, to be undertaken alongside household chores and childcare (Jacka *et al*.,2013, pp.249-250). Consequently, the status of women, especially rural women, in the post-Mao era did not challenge the patriarchal-feudal system in history, even though they were more liberated than earlier generations of women, but rather presented a more complex picture.

When these rural-urban women migrants migrate to cities in search of "*dagong*" (employed work 打工), they may attain a liberating sense of autonomy from familial patriarchy and an urban modern identity (Pun, 2005; Pun & Chan, 2013; Zhang, 2014). However, this does not mean that migration necessarily empowers rural migrant women, as they are actually absorbed into a larger "matrix of domination" woven by the state and global capitalism, in which the state and manufacturing factories adopted a set of governing techniques to produce both endurable and governable labouring subjects, but simultaneously to minimize labour and welfare costs. The governing techniques are examined at two scales: that of "daily" reproduction within the factory dormitory system and that of "generational" reproduction within the migrant household (Schling, 2014). As for daily reproduction, chief among these is the strategy of "just-in-time" production. By controlling workers' daily reproduction with the just-in-time production model, the time of female migrants' lives is regulated and streamlined to meet the timetable of production and particularly in the collective factory (Pun, 2005; Pun & Smith, 2007). The intensive workloads and work schedules constantly shuffled them from day to night shifts, with little daily interaction with friends and workmates possible. Meanwhile, as a spatial mechanism under the labour regime, the dormitory system does not cater to labour power reproduction beyond the immediate, daily needs of an individual worker. They do not provide accommodation for couples and do not accommodate women with immediate care responsibilities: their labour does not meet the temporal requirements of the production regime(Pun & Chan, 2013; Smith & Pun, 2006).In this way, the dormitory system was tightly interwoven with the just-in-time production model; women migrant workers were intentionally largely atomized as isolated subjects and were deprived of emotional support from family and friends.

In terms of "generational" reproduction, it is evident that the *hukou* system plays a central role in maintaining the rural space as the locus for generational labor-power reproduction, thereby lowering labour costs for both capital and the state (Schling, 2014). Since female migrants typically do not possess urban *hukou* (and often face difficulties in obtaining it), returning to rural areas for marriage in their mid-twenties has been the

normative pattern of behavior expected from the lives of "*dagongmei"*(working girls). For instance, Pun (2005) reported that the majority of *dagongmei* in the Shenzhen electronics factory she researched during the mid-1990s left "automatically" in their mid-twenties. This recognition was accompanied by a fear of future economic insecurity and low social status if they remained unmarried in the city. Even if they choose to stay in urban areas, their socio-economic status makes upward mobility challenging.

Firstly, the stigmatization of older migrant women had a disciplinary effect in regulating the temporality of young female factory workers. Considered less productive, the disposability of older women was socially normalized through ostracism for their "abandonment" of reproductive relations (Pun, 2005; Jacka, 2006). Secondly, if these female migrants choose to remain single, they will face further marginalization due to traditional values prevalent in rural areas and the societal expectation of family-making from the social mainstream, resulting in a loss of emotional support from family members. For example, the sexist and popular term originating from the news media, "*shengnu*" (剩女), literally meaning "leftover" or "surplus women," implies social invisibility, discrimination, and anxiety among single women regarding the possibility of being passed over for marriage (Fincher, 2014). Therefore, external pressure and internalised fear of becoming "too old" and undesirable on the rural marriage market intersected with the knowledge of they would simultaneously become "too old" for the urban labour market have disciplined women migrants' self-perceptions and led many of them to engage in temporary employment (Schling, 2014).

Finally, and often overlooked, is the pressure from the church. Although Protestants once represented the progress and liberated value in Western culture by offering women new public roles, such as be missionary, it is also noteworthy that inside the church there is an evident gender-power structure— female believers are lower in status than male members and are in a subordinate relationship. Scholars who study women's religious experiences in Chinese history have traditionally viewed women's religious devotion and choices as a spatial counterpoint to dominant patriarchal discourse, posing a threat to patriarchal interests because their religious piety could disrupt their identification with the familial roles of father, husband, and son (Zhou, 2003, pp.112–117). However, due to the "striking parallel between traditional Chinese patriarchal ideology and the conservative evangelical ideal" (Cao, 2008, p. 100), the emphasis on feminine submission, subordination, purity, piety, and domesticity in the church actually perpetuates a gender power structure. For instance, studies on the religious lives of Taiwanese immigrant women in the US (Chen, 2005) and South Korean women (Chong, 2008) suggest that evangelical church participation serves as a response to Confucian patriarchy, which imposes an ideal of womanhood characterized by obedience within the male-dominated kinship structure. While affirming the autonomy that may be gained by converted women through church participation, Chong's (2008) South Korean women's case provides a contrasting explanation that religious involvement is motivated by the contradictions of South Korean modern patriarchal relationships, and evangelical faith possesses emancipative and oppressive potentials that cause ambiguous consequences in these women's lives. In Cao Nanlai's (2010) study in Wenzhou, he described how in churches dominated by

male entrepreneurial believers, women's religious expression of emotions was marginalized as irrational, thereby keeping female members subordinate to the rational leadership of men in the church. Additionally, rural Christian women often face pressure from Christian institutions, sometimes for the sake of evangelism. Rural Christian churches have a long history of sending female members as missionaries. Many rural underground churches exhibit a strong dedication to dispatching their female members to urban areas for evangelistic endeavors, with some even claiming to "occupy" the city (Huang, 2014, p. 244). In my field work, at least three female migrant Christians were dispatched by the church to "expand the church" in areas outside of Shenzhen.

In summary, female migrant Christians found themselves subjected to intersectional repression stemming from traditional familial and patriarchal cultures, the neoliberal labour regime, and even the Christian church, and became "object-targets" of the state's neoliberal and secular projects of producing productive, docile, and governable subjects. In this context, female migrant Christians are ensnared in what Collins (2002) describes as a "matrix of domination," which forms the foundation for a pervasive structure of inequality.

7.4 Reclaiming femininity within the church and family

Although female migrant Christians were highly constrained by the intersectional matrix of domination mentioned above, it didn't mean they had to accept the dominant arrangements wholly negatively, as they were capable of constituting their Christian femininity and ethical selves, and sometimes strategically redefining the existing power structure by utilizing Christian discourses and ethics. This is particularly manifest in the churches where women workers constructed a "feminized community" in response to the subaltern subjectivity imposed by labour discipline, and in the home relationships in which they negotiated patriarchal power through evangelism. Particularly, I explain how religious agency can be communicated through the performance of submissive, pious, and tolerant Christian femininities, especially through their Christian marriage and family life.

7.3.1 Church as "Women's Community"

It is not surprising to find the gender imbalance in most Chinese churches. The pre-dominance of women in China's churches is a sign that often it is women who look for something to help them deal with the daily pressures and troubles of marriage and family life (Kao, 2013; Cao,2010). In rural areas, an important feature is that female leadership in "Pentecostal" congregations is more common because women are seen to have the ability to build remarkably intimate relationships with God (Kao, 2009; Wang, 2003; Wielander, 2013). Also, in Shenzhen, although urban migrant workers are pre-dominantly male, there are far more female Christians than male believers going to church, participating in choir, serving as Sunday school teachers and organizing and preaching. According to the CGSS 2010 (Chinese General Social Survey 2010) data, nearly

70% of Christians are women and only 30% are men; the gender imbalance is more discernible in Protestantism than other religions, such as Buddhism (Lu & Zhang, 2016). Women's conversion to Christianity can largely be attributed to the insecurities and hardships of rural life and especially women's subordinate status, which compel them to seek refuge in God (Fiedler,2010). For example, during my interviews, many female respondents confessed that childhood family calamities, such as parental domestic abuse or the death of their mother, had a direct effect on their pursuit of Christianity. This kind of "feminization" of Protestantism is often ascribed to the need to express emotion and spiritual support, as I have elucidated in the previous chapter, that churches served as social infrastructures that supplied migrant workers with faith-based communities and the theo-ethics of love. In this case, I intend to follow this line of inquiry further that describe how a "feminized community" characterized by embodied practices and emotional narratives be constituted through female migrant Christians' interaction with the church.

In contrast to oppressive factory life, in which women were atomised as isolated subjects and were deprived of emotional support, the churches offer them a place for spiritual release. Many female Christians conceive of their churches as places in which they can unleash their feelings, talk freely to fellow believers and express private emotions that they are ashamed to share elsewhere. It is evident that those married women who are suffering from an unhappy marriage and an unsatisfactory life. Through particular religious rituals such as prayer and testimony, it offers an opportunity for the liberty and transformation that many female workers claim to have experienced. For instance, Meihui, a 34-year-old rural migrant woman from Meizhou, which is an economically deprived and culturally conservative district in Guangdong province, was overwhelmed by the distress caused by her husband's gambling addiction and irresponsibility toward his family. For Merhui, the church's prayer meeting served as an emotional pathway for her distress:

"Because of my husband's problems, I was often depressed, and sometimes I felt like there was no point in being alive. But I had a thought in my heart, "You go to church! You have to pray to the Lord!" I couldn't help but cry during the prayer meeting as I wondered why life in Shenzhen was so difficult and what time was my husband could realize his sin. After praying for a while in the church, I gradually felt peaceful ……It is pointless to rely only on myself, no matter how tremendous my efforts have been. You can't solve any problem by depending on your own mind. In prayer, I feel that the Lord loves me and is always by my side."

Recovery from domestic wounds made Meihui's religious salvation, leading to an alternative social integrity that overcame personal loss and humiliation inflicted by a patriarchal system.

Moreover, some woman migrant workers also actively construct a feminised space characterised by their embodied practices and emotional narratives. During my fieldwork, in some lingen-based (charismatic faith 灵恩)migrant churches, Christian women often prioritise feelings and emotional experience, such as healing

and the experience of the holy spirit, over religious hierarchy and orthodox theological vocabulary. It is noteworthy that emotionally laden narratives are dominantly shaped by women and, in particular, rural migrant women. During my fieldwork, in some churches, there are elderly women shouting and even dancing during church. They also make sense of their religious activities and commitment to God through embodied practices such as sharing experiences of the miraculous healing of their bodies or God empowering them to survive life's difficulties. A 51-year-old female member from Shajin Church describes her feelings about praying out loud at a prayer meeting:

"I'm full of impulses to shout. Other members' shouting also encourages me to continue to cry out to the Lord to save me. I can feel the Holy Spirit leading ……During the praying, I regained my love for God."

This resonates with Daniel Bays' (1995) observation that the early members of Pentecostal groups in China were Christians who sought a deeper religious experience than what they found in their churches. Meanwhile, woman migrant workers also actively construct a feminized space through day-to-day participation in the church affairs, to a certain extent, achieving their own autonomy and empowerment. Although Chinese Christian intellectual circles are still male-dominated, especially as it stands in contrast to the makeup of congregations I mentioned above, women clearly do play an essential part in daily Christian experience. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent in some house churches, according to my observations, which were more capable of accommodating women workers' requests for lived, affective and embodied religiosity compared with the TSPM churches. The latter normally identified themselves as urban evangelists and therefore followed a highly institutionalised structure that emphasised religious hierarchy, theological knowledge and formal training. The TSPM churches are often based on a gender division of religious participation in which males have greater responsibility for leading worship and preaching while females tend to undertake more responsibilities for evangelisation (Kao, 2009). For example, the majority of the chief pastors of Shenzhen TSPM churches were all male, with only a few women entering the core of power in these churches.

However, the situation is quite different in some house churches, most of which bear the legacy of a Pentecostal-style charismatic Protestantism(Tong & Yang, 2014), since the early stage of the Pentecostal movement, there have been plenty of examples of women leaders and featured as "female ethos" (Brusco, 2011; Robbins, 2004). These Pentecostal-style house churches welcome female members to engage in church serving, such as internal church affairs and the mission. Pingan house church, for example, after Sunday worship, there were prayer meetings, Bible studies, and hymn-singing gatherings, in which female members exchanged interesting pieces of gossip, enjoying each other's company. There are also some visiting groups made up of women co-workers that continuously collect information about everyone's recent situation, which was mentioned during the prayer meetings, and visit people in need. Sister Xu, a 36-year-old Christian from

Pingan Church, has worked as the leader of a visiting group since 2018. Her sympathetic, warmhearted services are highly praised by other church members, and she is committed to her godliness, not only glorifying God but also giving her own satisfaction and empowerment beyond the everyday "tedious and hard" working experiences:

"Of course, I sometimes get exhausted because the sisters' homes are all in remote places, and when I return from their homes to mine is quite late……But when I consider that I am preaching the gospel and that so many sisters trust me to tell me about things they are unhappy about, I realize that everything I do is extremely valuable. Although working hard in the factory is my benfen (duty 本分), I believe that my involvement in the church increases my zest for life. In the church, I have a feeling that I am truly alive."

She also mentions the experience of how she slowly got used to praying in front of people:

"When I was the group leader leading the prayer for the first time, I was so scared (to pray in the group). I have not spoken eloquently since I was young. Unlike some younger sisters (of the church), I was not college-educated. I was scared that the prayers I said would not express my sentiments or make mistakes. You can imagine how anxious I was when I had to pray. Brothers and sisters prayed earnestly for me as they realized I still didn't know how to lead a prayer, and their love and passion really raised me. Thinking of that, I still feel heartwarming."

Xu's experience is consistent with Woodhead's (2001, p.71) observation that the "emphasis on the authority of feeling, intuition, and experience in religious matters empowers women to attain a spiritual and institutional power denied them elsewhere." Developing her gifts in the Christian women's community and attempting to establish herself as a preacher, Xu's spiritual credibility, authority and leadership extended back to her job. She said that her boss was amazed by the change in her behaviour that made her more confident and reliable in the workplace. The personal transformation and empowerment that Xu experienced convey the underlying theme of dealing with the male-dominated church order and daily repressed labour regime. In this way, this "feminised community" in the church has also become a female collaboration to deal with their internal depression and establish a new channel for achieving self-esteem.

In this study, female rural migrants find avenues to exercise their religious agency within various church activities that largely relieve the suffering from the class-based structure facilitated by the neoliberal labour regime. Their agency manifests through a strategic reconfiguration of their subjectivities, drawing upon existing cultural resources rather than directly confronting hegemonic norms on social, ethical, or political fronts. Thus, Christianity emerges not solely as a tool of domination or oppression, but also as a source of potential material, social, and spiritual resources for women (Martin, 1990). Through the emotional practices and embodied engagement of Christian women, they gradually reshape the religious landscape of the church, transitioning from a context characterized by the "presumption of male dominance" to one marked by the "de

facto feminization of Protestantism" (Kao, 2013, p.115). This transformation subverts the established gender hierarchy, historically dominated by males, and creates spaces where women workers can reclaim their suppressed agency.

7.3.2 Constructing a "Christian family"

Christianity used to play an active role in modernizing the Chinese family and was positively involved in the discussions of domesticity by Chinese Christians amid the social gospel movements in the Republican era (1912–1949) (Schneider, 2014; Zhou, 2021). Until now, the family-making of Christians is still one of the cores of Chinese church life. Although Christian women migrants were experiencing a double marginalization inflicted by patriarchy and the exclusion from the dominance of familial or lineage culture in their daily life, as Collins (2019) argues, intersectionality can enable greater appreciation of the agency that may arise from the interaction of different forms of identification and processes of marginalisation. Thus, in this section, I intend to focus on how female migrant Christians' practices of family-making, trying to look into their reframing of religious agency, encapsulate an intersectional encounter of theological thinking, gender hierarchy, and social traditions.

(1) Building a Christian family

Young single migrants, as opposed to family migrants, epitomize Shenzhen's neoliberal urbanism, which relies heavily on the productive and flexible young labourers. This alignment is evidenced by Shenzhen's demographic profile, boasting the youngest mean age (32.5 years) and the highest unmarried rate (68%) among China's cities. However, this statistical trend belies a deeper cultural narrative embedded within Chinese society, as we mentioned earlier, being single carries largely negative connotations, as getting married at a "suitable" age is viewed as a hegemonic cultural norm in Chinese society. Singleness comes with a sense of shame and failure. This is particularly the case for female migrants as single girls after a certain age are labelled as "*Shengnu*" and suffer pity and mockery (Gaetano,2014, pp. 130–135). Within the faith community, an imbalanced gender ratio, with a surplus of single female members compared to males, presents additional challenges for single female Christians in navigating marriage choices.

Given that, in daily activities, Christian churches, particularly house churches, place a premium on the family-building practices of these single migrants, enabling them to establish a church-based family life in Shenzhen in the future. Acting as "marriage agents," the church encourages faith-based marriages among its members. For instance, *dan shen tuan qi* (Singles Fellowship 单身团契) for single Christian workers regularly organizes outdoor activities to facilitate interactions among Christian workers, aiding them in finding a spouse and establishing a family. Additionally, marriage counselling sessions and Christian marriage sermons, where Christian couples share testimonies and emotional experiences, are prevalent in TSPM churches and house churches. These sessions aim to educate Christian couples on building strong marriages in accordance with

their shared faith and biblical values. Once single members have relationships, the church actively intervenes in their social interactions, arranging them towards the "next step", particularly focusing on female believers. Zhang Yang, a 27-year-old female migrant worker, met her husband at Singles Fellowship. As she says, though the brother first indicated interest in her, other church members helped him to elicit a response. Once their relationships are made public in the church, the churches arrange a fellowship on love/marriage, which offers guidance on marriage and family relationships.

If the above description indicates the influence of the church on female single members at a practical level, then the church emphasizes the establishment of Christian families in its daily Christian education based on Christian teachings. For many female workers, Christian values, therefore, play a crucial role in shaping their understanding of the ideal marriage or the role of wives in relation to their husbands. Of particular importance is migrant workers' interpretation of the view of "women as the helper" in Christian doctrines. The doctrines such as "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" and "For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior" (Ephesians, 5, p.22–23) often been mentioned during daily teachings. Some feminist scholars interpret the notion of male headship as a form of patriarchy that maintains a symbolic structure of male dominance and justifies female subordination as the "order of creation" mandated by God (Ruether, 2001).

However, in this case, things appear different. When pastors conduct Christian marriage sermons for female members on a daily basis, they intend to create "moral" male Christian images distinct from the outsiders(non-Christians). As Gao's (2019) study of Christian rural migrants in China shows, the male Christian workers, in their daily life, will consciously distinguish themselves from secular masculinity and men's domination through a soft patriarchy that emphasises responsibility, self-reflection, mutual submission, love and emotional intimacy with their wives. This kind of "moral manhood" they perform has presented a more attractive and reliable image for female believers as their men's headship did not act as or reinforce hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity but behaved as hard-working and partner-caring in the secular sense. In my fieldwork, I also observed similar situations. In daily church activities, male members exhibited qualities of helpfulness, compassion, and diligence, especially when the church is visited for inquiries; they take on the task of communication proactively. In the church's marriage education, contents such as "brothers should cherish sisters and consider the difficulties of sisters" have always been mentioned. In general, through Christian family education, the church aims to present a moral image of brothers in Christ to female members and imply the happiness of godly marriage.

Against this backdrop, the marital pressures from the family interweaving with comprehensive theology training on the family from the church significantly influenced single female migrant Christians' views on marriage, as they claim Christian marriages tend to provide them a sense of stability against their

uncontained future urban life. When I asked Hu Ting, a 26-year-old woman, about what kind of ideal marital relationship she aspired to, she emphasised that an ideal marital relationship should be "joined together" by God so that the couple could achieve "a spirit of unity" (tongxin hey 同心合一,) and therefore less likely to separate in comparison with non-Christian couples. In Hu's example, what I want to emphasize is that Christian women's imagination of ideal spouses morally justified their struggle for autonomy in marriage from their parents. Hu's parents had match-made a potential spouse for her but she refused to return to the village to attend the *xiangqin* (blind date 相亲). Compared with her own choice, her parents care more about the benefits her marriage can bring to the family, such as how much betrothal gifts(caili, 彩礼). Choosing a Christian marriage for her is not only to act in accordance with God's will, but also to attain a certain sense of agency to establish a type of marriage they aspired to.

Sister Chen also gives her view on marriage and talks about her current singleness:

In fact, I have always felt that getting married is very risky. Some testimonies of many people say that getting the other half to believe in the Lord after marriage is too difficult. And now the news makes me really worry about worldly marriages, too. Leaving aside the most extreme case of divorce, infidelity within marriage is not uncommon. I feel that compared with those "waibangren"(outsider 外邦人), the brothers in the Lord still give me more peace of mind, and at least the church will have a little restraint on them. Of course, a gifted brother does not need the supervision of the church members. He can love the sisters and the Lord, and can lead the sisters to live a life full of the gospel…… Although I am currently single, I believe that my marriage is entirely in the hands of the Lord. Singleness is simply a test of faith by God, urging me to become a better Christian. (After this test), I trust that the Lord will surely prepare a perfect marriage for me in the future.

What Chen refers to as "test" resonates with Mahmood's (2001) study of single Islamic women who utilise the discourse of "blessed marriage" to justify their self-directed, autonomously chosen goals. For single female Christians in this study, Christian moralities on family building appear to offer them the agency to choose "blessed marriage" beyond the traditional and uncertain secular marriage, a practice of Christian ethical values, but also enhance their capacity to endure and persist in the face of marginal singleness.

(2) The Christianization of family relations

For those married Christian women, Christianisation or sanctification of family relations is a major way for them to perform their godliness in marriage.The vast majority of Chinese Christians today, including those who attend TSPM churches, are evangelical and subscribe to a very conservative worldview. In the Christian context, the female is supposed to be a spiritual role of supportive lover, submitting to her husband and being a good mother, which could result in a happier marriage where relations are improved. In a sister fellowship, the co-worker speaks of three qualities necessary to be a "helper"(the role of a woman in the relationship) as

understood in the Bible. She thinks a woman has to be humble, compassionate and transformative; only through a change in oneself can one expect a change in others. Similarly, a male preacher in the Zhendao church also claims in Sunday worship: "*Women tend to be emotional and first committed to sin. Brothers are rational because men were the first created by God. Women are the hands and legs of men, while men are the head*". This emphasis on Christian wives as "helpers" in marriage echoes what Linda Woodhead refers to as "the sanctification of the home realm" (2004, p.232).

By presenting themselves as good wives, Christian women believe that they can not only honour the Lord but also lead or influence their husbands to Christ.In my interview, Christian women often mention that their husbands consider them to be "better wives" since their conversion to Christianity. For example, the 42-year-old cleaning lady Lijun told me that her husband could not understand her Christian faith at the beginning: "*When he heard me saying prayers, 'Jesus, you're the love of my life', he was jealous of Jesus and thought I was crazy*". But Lijun gradually resolved her husband's misunderstandings and eventually converted him by enacting an image of a good Christian wife. As Lijun said, her husband felt that she became softer and more passionate and tolerant after converting to Christianity and therefore he believed that having Christian faith was a good thing. Lijun sincerely admitted that their intimate relations had substantially improved, as she explained: "*When you submit yourself to God, He will re-lighten your life, let your life shine again*".

Secondly, for Christian migrant women, evangelizing among their non-Christian family members is another way to present their godliness and strategy that might improve their status in the family. Although single Christian women also have the duty to preach their family members, this is particularly the case for married female Christians that evangelizing is not only the duty of a Christian themselves that brings glory to God but also a way to make cozy domesticity in a practical sense. During this process, the most common trajectory of evangelization often started from husbands and mothers-in-law, then targeting other female relatives and then male relatives, although Christian women would read just their strategies in accordance with relatives' susceptibility to the "gospel." My interviews show that it was usually women who first converted to Christianity before converting their husbands and other family members. In Chinese family life, the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law relationship, which scholars often depict as inherently conflictual (Stacey, 1983; Gallin, 1994), is crucial in determining the harmony of family life. This can be illustrated by the story of Junwen, a 45-year-old female member talks about evangelization and changes in her family:

"I am the only Christian in my family. My son and husband used to be very opposed to this. And they said it is wasting of time. But I kept praying to God, and at the same time strive to be "a good mother and a good wife" at home that God wanted, and slowly they did not oppose me coming to church. My mother-in-law used to be very picky about me, but after I kept inviting her, she gradually came to church with me and joined the Fellowship (Women Fellowship). I can see her transformation, and we have more topics to talk about because of

Christ.....Last year,she was baptized in our church and I was so moved that this was the Lord's will.Now,My family thinks that believing in Christ is not a bad thing, and overall I am very satisfied now."

From Juwen's experience, we can read of the mother-daughter relationships that became a satisfying spiritual companionship or even something akin to Christian collegiality and sisterhood.

However, this Christianization is sometimes constrained by the family environment. For example, Sister Li was actively involved in church activities before marriage, serving as a co-worker in the church and showing great enthusiasm for church affairs. After marrying a nonbeliever, she reduced her frequency of attending church for a period due to the busy family affairs and life pressures. Her efforts to evangelize her husband and his family did not go smoothly. Initially, her husband attended Sunday activities a few times at her request but showed no interest or eagerness for Christianity. In interviews, Sister Li expressed concerns about her husband's faith life and her own confusion about continuing to evangelize within the family. She also mentioned that sometimes her husband complained about her frequent church attendance, feeling neglected in terms of family care, especially considering the high living pressure they face in Shenzhen. When asked about the future and the possibility of reducing church activities due to family pressure, she indicated that she would have to prioritize her family more, "*pray more, and hope that the Lord can work more in my family.*"

Overall, the endeavors of Christian migrant women to enter into a Christian marriage or Christianize the family appear to revolve around self-fashioning and ethical conduct. Through this agency, they actively construct moral subjectivities in alignment with Christian values and, to some extent, empower themselves through these practices. This agency doesn't intent to subvert patriarchal power and traditional familial values, but rather discursively reconstructs them through Christian family morals, which opens a possible space for the agency in which female migrant Christians can claim a meaningful way of embodying the "perfect" woman and thereby psychologically empower themselves. In this sense, the Christian faith gives them a new language to to confront trauma and dysfunctions in life (Ma,2019), which helps to reproduce patriarchal structures.

It is also noteworthy that some aspects of this agency, such as submission to the leadership of their husbands in marriage and the performance of roles as good Christian wives and daughters-in-law during evangelization, sometimes intersect with the ethics of filial piety and submission rooted in the traditional Chinese family hierarchy, in which women's femininity is closely associated with their capacity to fulfill familial values and obligations. Certain studies on the Chinese church have observed that this agency reconstructs and may reinforce the traditional "husband-dominant" perspective among some Chinese female believers (Peng, Ma & Feng, 2017). In this study, the emphasis in church education on "*God's will plays the*

central role in Christian familial relationships, in which the wife and husband are obligated to submit to God" has somewhat mitigated the patriarchal undertones in Christian marriage, therefore the female Christian's role in the family cannot be understood simply as Chinese tradition hand in glove with Western religion in the contemporary Chinese background. However, the hierarchy remains clearly defined. As Cao (2011) noted in his study of female migrant Christians in Wenzhou, women's agency in submission paradoxically strengthens the leadership status of male elites within the church. In this sense, religious agency here, as manifested through its approach to the divine, can be understood as an integral part of the tactic that redefines familial power and relationships and, at times, as an outcome of reconciliation with patriarchal structures and secular realities.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter revolves around one of the most crucial problems: how to understand rural-urban migrant women's pious religious agencies in Shenzhen. In light of this, the chapter reviews a non-confrontational account of women's religious agency in terms of post-secular feminism, which moves beyond normative and secular definitions that reduce agency solely to resisting actions and counter-subjectivity and broadens to include the ethos of submission to social norms, self-discipline, and religious self-cultivation. In this sense, religious women's actions can be a situated act of agency but can be misinterpreted if only analysed from the perspective of patriarchal resistance or compliance, and women's religious agency can also be understood "in terms of ethical formation" within a specifically social and cultural context (Mahmood, 2005, p.32). Drawing on the postsecular feminism study, in this study, I argue to utizilise intersectionality to a nuanced understanding of religious agency of migrant women within specifically social and cultural contexts that religious subjects experience in urban life.

Then, this chapter examines the formation of Christian migrant women's religious subjectivity and agency under the intersectional power relations produced by the patriarchy within religious institutions and the family. These intersectional forms of domination have established structural oppression that defines rural migrant women's subaltern subjectivity. Within the church, Christian migrant women do not directly challenge dominant gender powers. Instead, they negotiate social inequalities through embodied practices and emotional narratives, ultimately constructing a "feminized community" that reshapes the traditionally male-dominated belief space. Regarding family-making, the idealization of "godly marriage" and piety to God in family also, in some way, help they to overcome the anxiety about future marriage and insecure urban life and the pressure of patriarchy in the family. As Mahmood (2005) observes in the context of mosque movement participants, "individual efforts toward self-realization are aimed not so much at discovering one's "true" desires and feelings, or at establishing a personal relationship with God, but at honing one's rational and emotional capacities so as to approximate the exemplary model of the pious self." Similarly, in the case of

Shenzhen, female rural-urban migrants' religious agency also achieves through "the ethics of becoming" (Braidotti, 2008, p.19) within current intersectional reality, that is, they engage in emotionally and embodied practices of Christian ethics to present a compliance and docility self within church and family settings, and this non-confrontational agency could vice versa somewhat empowers them against intersectional pressures in world. In this sense, Christians' technologies of self that transform themselves into meaningful ethical subjects (as discussed in **Chapter 5**) actually open up a kind of agency for migrant women.

Yet, we also note the limitations of female migrant Christians' agency that it cannot substantially alter the intersectional "matrix of domination" (Collins, 2002). Empowerment in the church or gaining recognition within religious marriage does not inherently dismantle neoliberal labor regime and gender structures pose on Christian women. As previously mentioned, a prerequisite for successful Christianization within the family is the requirement for religious women to better fulfill their family responsibilities and play the role of "a good wife and mother". These expectations are somewhat in line with traditional Chinese family values, which may lead to the internalization of these structural rationalities of social norms and power structures through this kind of "docility" agency. As Rosa Vasilaki (2016, p.118) observes, "religious practice and subjectivity manifest themselves not as counter-hegemonic and enabling, but as a central mechanism of social reproduction: no matter how much docility and submission can be meaningful from the perspective of ethical embodiment, they still produce real exclusions and inequalities, especially towards women."

Overall, this chapter contributes to geographical debates on postsecular feminism and migration by introducing intersectionality into the analysis of women's religious agency. It has examined how female migrant Christians' lived experiences are shaped by intersectional forms of structural oppression that construct their migrant labouring subjectivities, demonstrating that gendered inequalities are scalar, trans-local, and embedded in everyday life. Then, this chapter develops a framework of postsecular feminism that moves beyond the dualism between the positive and negative aspects of religion, and beyond normative understandings of agency as solely resistance or counter-subjectivity. Instead, it highlights the ethical formation of religious agencies. In this chapter, we observe diverse forms of religious agency that can manifest as counter-patriarchal subjects or through docile, tolerant, and self-sacrificial femininity, as female migrant Christians are neither morally responsible for nor structurally capable of dismantling the intersectional "matrix of domination" (Collins, 2002). Yet, their everyday religious practices—whether through compliance, self-cultivation, or small acts of resistance—still generate forms of affective and social empowerment. Such agency does not operate as a zero-sum struggle between domination and resistance, but rather as ongoing processes of ethical formation and becoming (Mahmood, 2005; Braidotti, 2008). Importantly, the strategic and ethical dimensions of women's agency often interweave, emerging relationally from specific intersectional contexts (Collins, 2019). In this sense, further scholarly investigation of postsecular feminism requires a more nuanced analysis of the multiple intersectional conditions under which women's religious agency is enacted, constrained, and transformed.

Chapter 8. Spheres in WeChat:

framing the 'WeChurch' during COVID-19 in China

8.1 Introduction

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in early 2020, many urban churches transitioned their services online. This chapter, therefore, draws attention to these online churches that became particularly active during the pandemic, using Peter Sloterdijk's sphere theory to conduct a socio-cultural and spatial analysis of these virtual congregations. Armed with this analytical perspective, this chapter is organised as follows: firstly, we briefly review the literature on the development of religion on WeChat in China and Peter Sloterdijk's sphere theory in the context of WeChat use in online religion. Secondly, drawing on the process of the development of the spheres of online religious communities, we examine how Chinese Christians use WeChat for religious practices, including the sharing of bible passages and Christian-themed videos, personal reflections on religious and social events, prayers, and pastoral care during the period of lockdown to maintain their religious communities and social networks online. We then explore the phenomenon of nationwide Bible study via WeChat during the pandemic, analyzing how a foam-like community emerged and ultimately dissipated on the platform. Finally, the chapter discusses the forthcoming challenges of using social media to foster online fellowship in light of new internet regulations that were set to take effect on March 1, 2022. This section will focus on how Christian organizations are responding to these regulatory changes and the implications for the morphology of online religious communities.

8.2 Rethinking online religion in China

8.2.1 Religion on digital media in China: WeChat

According to the latest figures released in 2021 by the China Internet Network Information Centre (CNNIC), the number of Internet users in China had reached 1.011 billion. In China, the Internet has been gradually playing an essential role in transforming social practices and extending users' religious engagement and spiritually motivated interactions online and offline. The earliest religion on the Internet emerged in the mid-1990s (Zhao, 2015; Zhang, 2016), and after that, few scholars in China came to notice the online religious phenomenon. At present, scholars have typically found that pre-existing religious communities have transferred religious content to online platforms, including "network religion" (Shi, 2016; Tang, 2008), "Internet religion" (Li, 2016; Wang, 2016), "online religion" (Tang, 2009), and "computer religion" or "virtual religion" (Xu, 2011). Meanwhile, an increasing number of studies have identified media technology as a source of new opportunities and conditions for religion, rather than as a source of restraints (Hoover & Clark,

2002; Hoover, 2006; Morgan, 2013). Online religion, as a new cultural and social niche, has taken over many of the cultural and social functions of institutionalized religions, opening up new spaces for spiritual guidance, rituals, and community identity (Hjarvard, 2011).

Recently, research interest has shifted from traditional digital technology to growing social media, with the inquiry of mediatization, or the long-term processes between media and social and cultural change. As for social media, "Religion 2.0", by and large, represents an amalgamation and assemblage of real and virtual-world practices (Cheong & Ess,2012). Compared with traditional digital technology, social media has two more obvious features: one is more instant online and offline interaction; the other is more decentralization, which means the possibility of a more grassroots-based religious network (Campbell, 2004; 2012; 2013; Mahan, 2012). In China, WeChat (*Weixin* 微信), which serves as the most representative mobile chat app of Religion 2.0, is the most widely used social media platform. Its "Moments" and chat features (individual or group chat) have become the most popular features (Harwit, 2017). Unlike other mobile apps like Weibo, a large-scale forum of information that allows national debate, WeChat is founded on comparatively closed personal networks or a semi-public platform. This app can be used for text, voice, or video chats and broadcasting between individuals or within a limited group that can accommodate as few as three people to as many as 500. Different from only being friends between two users who can have an individual chat, the group chat members can be strangers. But entering the public group chat needs an invitation from a group member. In this sense, WeChat users are constrained into small and dispersed groups, which limits its role in providing a nationwide virtual public sphere as the BBS and Weibo do, it is this closed network that allows WeChat to create an ecosystem of closely connected alternative spheres (Tu,2016), in which facilitates communication among Christians based on a same church or particular group of people on the WeChat. Apart from group chat, WeChat's official account (*Gongzhong Hao* 公众号) function allows registered organisations, businesses, and individuals to post content (articles, videos and audio) within the scope of WeChat's built-in ecosystem (as opposed to the open Web). Most official churches in Shenzhen own their official account where they post church news and other information about church activities. Some house churches also have their official account to disseminate church information and theological knowledge.

The discussion of the distinction between "religion online" and "online religion" (Helland, 2000) may help us advance our understanding of how WeChat is engaging in digital religious praxis in China. Helland (2000) used the term "religion online" to describe the online functions of traditional religious communities and to outline the information about religion that is accessible via computer-mediated networks. This encompasses how religious communities utilize digital media platforms to reaffirm their religious community, and faith identity, and engage in community outreach, all in support of their primary physical religious spaces (Campbell, 2012; Frost & Youngblood, 2014). The examples of "religion online" in China are related to the websites of many Christian organizations, both official and unofficial ones. Websites, such as 中国基督教网站

(The Protestant Churches in China), 基督时报 (Christian Times), and 福音时报 (Gospel Times), are official websites that provide information about their activities and various aspects of the Christian faith, such as key beliefs, history, evangelism, links with other Christian groups outside China, and so on. "Online religion," however, refers to the various ways in which religious faith is practised over these networks. The latter is characterized by "many-to-many" interactions (Helland, 2005), describing more dynamic forms of online interaction that allow for dialogue, the exchange of information, and reciprocal engagement (Helland, 2016). However, this distinction increasingly breaks down in WeChat. WeChat not only offers believers information and opportunities to practise their faith, such as the sharing of Bible passages in the WeChat group or Moment, engaging in debates over theological or pastoral matters with friends or in the WeChat group, and plugging into trans-local and transnational networks of Christian communities via group chat, but also enables its users to form online religious communities where members share information, hold debates, provide mutual support, plan activities, etc. Moreover, despite the CCP's strict regulation of state and commercial media, WeChat's smaller-scale and interactive forms enjoy greater acceptance, positioning it as the site with the most diverse religious content and a platform for "many-to-many" networks (Vala & Huang, 2019). And most importantly, WeChat groups are the key to achieving these needs among believers.

Recent literature has observed the impact of WeChat, the most popular social media app in China, on the transformation of religious spaces (Huang, 2016; Xu & Campbell, 2018; Harris & Isa, 2019). For example, in a collection of works on religion and media in China, Weishan Huang (2016) draws on Campbell's online religion theory and looks at the way in which the non-profit Tzu Chi organization in Shanghai and its members use social media—specifically WeChat—to construct a sacred space and religious community that connect them globally. In the Protestant case, Vala and Huang (2019) argue that WeChat creates an "alter-public" rather than a "counter-public" space like some online Muslim communities for the believers because although Protestants (like Uighur Muslims) share a subordinate status in China, their WeChat group is not cultivating an oppositional self-understanding. The censorship (or fear of censorship) and state intervention encourage the WeChat group organizers to cultivate a public that is not explicitly counter to the ruling authorities and their official agenda. This "alter-" rather than the oppositional character of the Protestant WeChat public meant that members rarely referred to offline religious persecution. Notwithstanding these studies offer a vivid depiction of religious practices and interactions in online religious communities, they neglect or don't particularly value the WeChat group's importance in online religious communities and social network forming, which became especially important during the pandemic. It is against this background that this chapter attempts to detailed consideration of the roles of WeChat groups in forming online religious communities and social connections for migrant Christians in Shenzhen during the pandemic, as they use WeChat for religious communication, including the sharing of bible passages and Christian-themed videos, personal reflections on religious and social events, prayers, and pastoral care during the period of lockdown.

8.2.2 Towards a spherical understanding of the online religion agenda in WeChat

In recent years, a growing interdisciplinary literature has sought to explore the question of how social media have become the most important tools of the contemporary mediatization of religion (Bellar, 2017; Campbell, 2013; 2017b). The development of media technology has not only brought major changes to people's ways of practising religion (Kong, 2001; Busch, 2010; Campbell *et al*., 2010a; Campbell, 2013) but also reconstructed time-space notions related to religion and religious experience (Tong & Kong, 2000). In terms of online religion studies, the word "network" seems to have become the key subject to consider in recent years. Many researchers define online religious practice as a set of common characteristics shaped by the network structure and functionality of information communication technologies (Campbell, 2012, p. 65). However, despite these studies providing valuable insights into fostering connections between diverse religious individuals or communities, they often overlook the intrinsic atmosphere of online religious communities and the resulting digital spaces of security they create. According to Peter Sloterdijk's (2016) perspective, the network metaphor represents an "anaemic" combination of two intersecting lines, which is even less believable than the vast global space it aims to replace. In other words, networks are effective at describing long-distance and unexpected connections starting from local points, but they fail to describe local, fragile, and complex "atmospheric conditions" (Latour, 2011). Previous research has also ignored the complexity of inclusion and social networks in online communities. This is because contact or networking on social media can't fully transform into being inclusive in online communities or an effective social network because of things like existing local conditions of entry (like WeChat groups) and the need for a foundation of previous offline communications in many cases. In this way, we need to go beyond traditional "networked" thinking, which is quite popular in the body of online religion research by far, and the sphere perspective might offer us a more specific lens through which to examine the inclusion agenda of online religious communities and their social networks on social media.

In this chapter, I re-examine the online religion agenda in WeChat through the lens of German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk's "theory of spheres." According to Sloterdijk, a sphere is a socially created, self-animated space that enables a commonality of experiences and provides human beings with a protective refuge from the outside world. According to Sloterdijk, as Latour notes, "spheres are not just points and links, but complex ecosystems in which forms of life define their 'immunity' by devising protective walls and inventing elaborate systems of air conditioning" (Latour, 2011, p. 1). The morphology of Sloterdijk's sphere theory motivates my investigation, enabling us to delve into the micro-spatial metaphors of Christian WeChat groups. It also illustrates the online religious practices of migrant churches and their efforts to strike a balance between the internal and external aspects of these cyber communities on social media platforms like WeChat, all in the context of online community development.

The Spheres trilogy of Peter Sloterdijk (2011; 2014; 2016) represents his main thought on sphere theory. In this thought-provoking and imaginative Spheres trilogy, Sloterdijk introduces a critical philosophical and

cultural view of the spatiality of current society by showing why and how people live (together) in immune-making spatial formations, which he calls spheres, and describes the topological conditions of society by means of three different forms of spherical conditions of life: bubbles, globes, and foams (Ernste, 2018; Morin, 2009). Sloterdijk's philosophical starting point is Martin Heidegger's Being and Time (1927), in which Heidegger dealt with the temporality of human existence (Dasein), which Sloterdijk tries to resolve in the form of ontology as the dimension before space, as the element that spatialises space—as a sort of matrix for dimensions in general (Ernste, 2018; Campbell, 2011). In the first book, Bubbles (2011), he theorizes the spatial configuration of human life on a micro-level by starting with the analysis of the womb, in which the child and his/her mother form a twofoldness of being, resembling the most intact and primary sphere of living. The prenatal sphere is thereby understood as a pure, inner, comfortable, and secure space, completely cut off from the outside world. According to this ontological view, the human being is never alone but is always accompanied by other human beings and things in a shared living space. Then, in the second book, Globes (2014), he moves on to the historical examination of thought in relation to "macro-spheres," which designate the expansion of the spherical metaphor into the realm of universalist metaphysics and theology, which provides us with a morphological history of globalisation by distinguishing three periods of globalisation—the metaphysical, the terrestrial, and the contemporary period of foams (Morin, 2009, p. 58). When it comes to the last of the trilogy, Foams (2016), Sloterdijk further develops his spherical theory in a more "life-celebrating" and less "traumatic" and troubled way (Gielis & Van Houtum, 2012) than in the first two books, in which he explains the evolution of the implosion and explosion of bubbles into a multitude of immune-place-productions, which he calls foam, by stressing that principally humans largely have become independent from the "where" of the micro-sphere of the womb, the macro-sphere of gods, or the nations (Klauser, 2010). And hence human beings now increasingly have the potential to construct their own, multiple, and constantly changing, island-like spheres (Sloterdijk, 2007). . Then, if we extend this metaphor to the social world, we might claim that "society" is not a single sphere nor a nonspatial communication process, but rather a collection of microspheres. Each bubble in this collection is "a 'world,' a place of sense, an intimate room that resonates or oscillates with its own (interior) animation/life(Morin, 2009, p.67). At the same time, each of these "worlds" is concurrent and interconnected, yet at once separated by a transparent and flexible boundary. Overall, within the Spheres trilogy, Sloterdijk provides us with an analysis of what he sees as a morphological transition in the history of human thought, as well as, introduces a critical philosophical and cultural view of the spatiality of current society, serving as an intriguing source for inspiration for geographers (Ernste, 2018).

When spheres come to WeChat groups of migrant churches, as private access to smaller, member-based groups' permission mechanism of WeChat groups (only enter if you are invited by a group member, and the group owner has the right to clear them out of the WeChat group), these religious groups in WeChat are, to a certain degree, forming bubble-like spheres by distinguishing unfamiliar and distrusted outside and familiar and trusted inside. In the bubble, by creating shared norms and values of how to jointly deal with irritations

and intrusions from the outside world by what Sloterdijk says “arecon-subjective” immunising strategies. Additionally, it also allows for a spherological interpretation of the bigger, non-member-based WeChat groups as foams that create fragile and potential connections between strangers or even between different migrant churches across China.

In contrast to traditional studies of online religion, which predominantly focus on networks by emphasizing connections between unextended points as interfaces of lines, this chapter offers a spatial approach to understanding online religious communities. The spatial metaphors drawn from Peter Sloterdijk’s sphere theory provide several critical contributions to this study. First, Sloterdijk’s sphere theory offers a valuable framework for exploring the spatial dimensions of online religious communities. It enables a nuanced investigation into the mechanisms of inclusion and security within these communities, particularly on social media platforms. This includes examining the criteria for group membership, the social networking dynamics within members’ internal spheres, and the ways these spheres interact with external policies and pressures. Second, adopting a spherical perspective of religious WeChat groups offers a conceptual tool to analyze the complex and ambivalent nature of cyber-boundaries in online religious communities. This approach is particularly useful for understanding their everyday practices in response to global crises, such as COVID-19, through the dynamic processes of expansion or contraction of these online spheres. Such an understanding sheds light on how these communities negotiate their spaces in times of uncertainty and challenge.

8.3 The WeChat group as bubble and foam

8.3.1 Working as a bubble: the online church during the COVID

Since the early stages of COVID, strict social distancing rules in China had banned religious gatherings to contain the virus. Because of this COVID-19 lockdown measure, Christian churches in Shenzhen had to find alternative ways to continue daily religious worship and teaching. These practices were imperative as they helped religious individuals and communities maintain a sense of belonging and identity and obtain the assistance of God in stressful times. Consequently, churches turned to social media to continue their services, and WeChat, China’s most popular messaging app, became the first choice of many churches.

First, the WeChat group, acting as a bubble, was crucial because it provided migrant church members with a sense of control over their social relationships, as evidenced by their constant efforts to strike a balance between the inside and the outside of the bubble. Since the lockdown restrictions began, church organizers have transferred offline Bible study classes and services to the Internet. For instance, following the lockdown in early February 2020, the Zhendao House Church merged all its members into a WeChat group. Of course, these WeChat groups were only open to church members or Christians who had participated in church activities for a certain period of time, but had not yet officially become members. Members of migrant

churches benefited from the limited entry mechanism of member-based WeChat groups, which, to a certain extent, isolated the online religious community from non-Christians and Christians who did not belong to the church. This mechanism provided them with bubble-like privacy and security, ensuring that the government cannot detect and continue their normal church activities, particularly worship activities, during the lockdown.

Given this, Christian congregations transitioned their church activities to WeChat. The pastor and other church staff members began scheduling Sunday worship and other church activities on WeChat. The offline Bible study on Tuesday was also arranged online. Throughout this process, believers with backgrounds in information technology or familiarity with the church's usage of WeChat became volunteers who were all actively involved in the deployment of digital technologies such as live broadcast equipment and worship software. They were responsible for posting the live link to the WeChat group before each Sunday service or teaching. Additionally, they produced animation and maintain the official website of the "Shenzhen Zhendao Reformed Church" (http://www.szggzzd.com /cn_index.html). During the lockdown, Christian churches also took advantage of WeChat as a vital social media networking platform to solicit donations and provide financial assistance to those in need. Christians were able to donate using WeChat Pay or Alipay by scanning the QR codes posted by organisers in the WeChat groups. Organizers could collect the donations and distribute them to those in need via WeChat. For instance, Pingan House Church raised approximately 10,000 RMB to support house churches and Christians in Wuhan, demonstrating a form of translocal solidarity during the height of the pandemic. Many official churches in Shenzhen also launched worship activities online for the people in Wuhan City on WeChat.

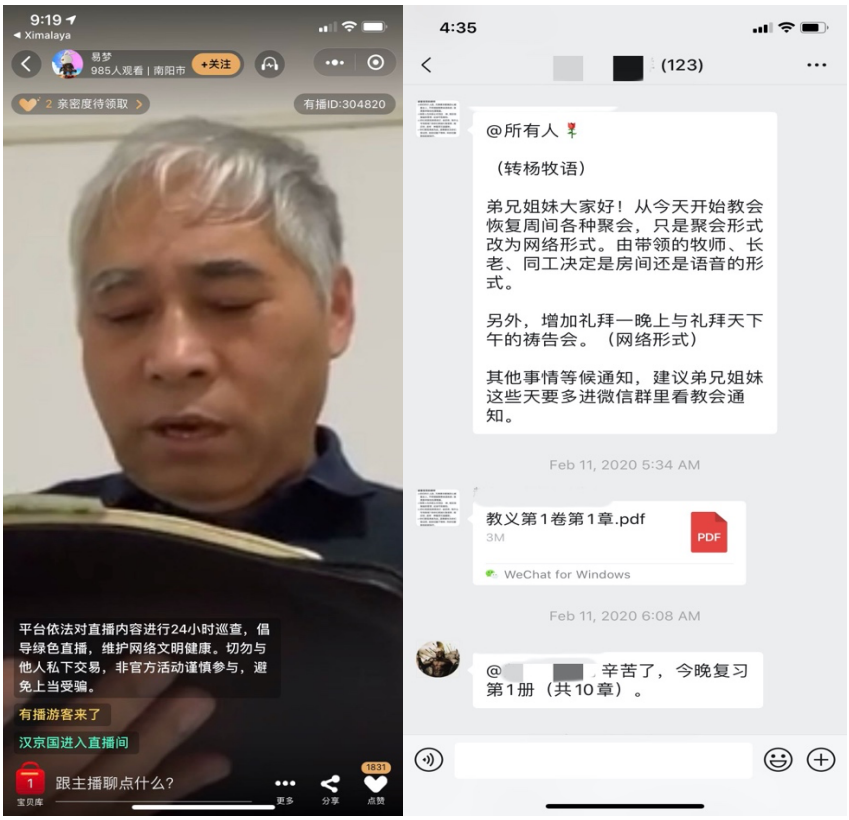

Figure 8-1 Online worship of Zhendao House Church during the lockdown(16th, Feb,2020)
Figure 8-2 The notification from *LH* house church WeChat group.“*Hello brothers and sisters! The church's various weekly events resume today, but the format has been changed to online. It is up to the leading pastors, elders, and co-workers to decide whether to use the live app or send voice messages in WeChat. Add prayer meetings on Monday evenings and Sunday afternoons as well(online). These days, brothers and sisters are recommended to go to the WeChat group to read the church notification*.” (Relevant member names and the WeChat group name have been anonymized)

In this sense, during the period of lockdown, mixing different media types on WeChat enabled religious practices, such as prayers, Bible sharing, meditation, preaching, and worship, to become more flexible in their daily lives. These practices were no longer confined to the specifically demarcated “religious” space, such as a physical church building and specific delineated times of “religious” services.

Apart from the above, providing online worship or learning for all the church members, there are smaller WeChat groups used for various church fellowships. WeChat can also be used for various church fellowships. There were dedicated WeChat groups for Sister Fellowship, Elder Fellowship, and Youth Fellowship. In these fellowship WeChat groups, all members could exchange messages, which helped them create intimate relationships on WeChat like they used to offline. In this sense, the bubble of the WeChat group further developed, accompanied by smaller, rounder, more mobile, and more autonomous bubbles (Sloterdijk, 2016)—the foam as more detailed emotional and relational needs arise. Within these specific fellowship groups, group members were more likely to feel free to communicate with different types of causal messages

(such as text, images, audio, video, and emoticons) than in church WeChat groups. Brother Wen, an active member of the Youth Fellowship WeChat group, expressed his opinion that being in the fellowship WeChat group is freer to communicate their feelings and emotions through the voice and video function between fellowship members:

"Our fellowship has also established a new group. Indeed, the group comprises all the young members of our church. We frequently socialise online in that group because it's important to have Christian friends to interact with during the lockdown. … The biggest advantage of WeChat is its convenience. It has a voice communication option. If you have something fascinating to say, you can just leave a voice message in the group. We can also have a complete video chat. And, thanks to Wi-Fi, we can see each other face to face and speak... It is simple to communicate your emotions. During that period, I shared a lot of my emotions through images and videos with other Christians."

In these foam-like WeChat groups, by posting and mutually referencing different media files on social media, migrant Christian members in Shenzhen and elsewhere were able to create, disseminate, and interpret religious content and encourage those who have received these media files to engage in religious practices in their daily lives. For example, a group member posted photos of his everyday life with a comment on scriptures, stressing that his situation was "much better" than that of the people suffering from COVID, adding, "*I am really grateful*." The pastor responded with, "*Grateful! At all times and in all places! God bless you!*" while other group members swiftly returned words or emoticons full of praise. The pastor then continued with generally uplifting statements such as, "*Peace! So thankful! God bless! Emanuel!*" and a Bible scripture about contentment in every situation through trusting in God. Various online WeChat groups functioned as online communities in which church members still become participants in mutual encouragement and monitoring. In these support-based online communities, members also shared information about COVID-19, such as exchanging knowledge on prevention measures and treatment suggestions during the early stages of the outbreak. When a member showed symptoms of a cold, others in the group actively offered advice, prayed for them, and provided psychological comfort. Even though the COVID-19 crisis came under control in Shenzhen in May 2020 and many offline church activities had resumed, these WeChat groups still remained active and had become online communities for Christians to share, express, and communicate.

To many religious groups, the online community was initially regarded as a mere extension of efforts to enhance offline devotion; subsequently, it evolved into a distinct platform for prayers, worship, and religious activities during the COVID lockdown. For some churches, the coronavirus has drawn more Christians closer to their beliefs. The congregation held small group meetings over WeChat three times a week, a step up in frequency from once a week before the epidemic. Vala and Huang's (2019) study on the 2019 Bible hand-copying movement on WeChat underlined that the grassroots origins, group membership including strangers,

shared awareness of subordinate status, and its particular forms of discourse mark this WeChat group as a type of public, similar in character to evangelistic and pietistic conservative unregistered "house churches" in China. Similarly, WeChat served as a bubble that creates spheres of safety and comfort that assist numerous Christian churches in establishing an alternative church and religious community during the lockdown, allowing fellow believers to hold one another accountable and strengthen one another's faith during the pandemic, thereby ensuring that "they are less likely to fall into sin and be distracted from the path of faith" (interviewee WXB). As a substance that was created by entrapping many gas bubbles in a liquid or solid, foam, by definition, also suggests a formation procedure (sloterdijk, 2016). In this chapter, in addition to the WeChat group for the entire church, many smaller WeChat groups for different fellowships have emerged for micro-sphered interaction and connection; consequently, the topology of religious WeChat groups has shifted from a bubble-like metaphor to a foam spatial structure. However, it is worth noting that a few interviewees[25] expressed dissatisfaction with online church and a desire to reopen the church since they relied more on actual interaction between members, and online religious connection appeared to be incapable of achieving the result they had expected before. Although WeChat could create a bubble of security space and atmosphere for members, in practice, religious actors and groups' own social and cultural background and everyday patterns may also need to be taken into consideration.

8.3.2 The expansion of foams nationwide

Many churches were forced to continue church activities during the lockdown, whereas others, such as Zhendao Church, saw the utilization of social media platforms as an excellent opportunity to interact with other Christians across the country, not only increasing the church's influence but also promoting reformed theology and dissemination, as everyone was required to stay at home and had plenty of free time. As a result, during the pandemic, their bible study classes became accessible to non-member believers. Although it could be more challenging for some elderly churchgoers to rely on a mobile device for access than it was for younger people, the online bible study quickly gained their welcome, especially among the people who cannot gain so many gospel learning resources. After deciding to organize a nationwide Bible learning activity, the co-workers and pastor actively shared messages in various Christian WeChat groups and sent them to pastors of other house churches they know, so that they could spread the information to their church members. After two weeks of preparation, they had organized 5 Bible learning WeChat groups, each with about 500 members (a WeChat group can hold up to 500 members).

This effort by the Zhendao Church to attract non-member Christians and even non-Christians may be viewed as the proliferation of WeChat group foams nationwide, as the majority of the"strangers" came from all over China, including the northern regions of Hubei and Jilin, the central plains of Anhui, Henan, and Hubei,

[25] During the interview, about 5 members expressed their inappropriateness to use WeChat to worship. The main complaints they had were, for example, "utilizing WeChat distracts me during worship", "I am more accustomed to offline face-to-face communication", or "I am not proficient in using WeChat functions."

and the southwest (Guizhou and Guangxi) joined into Bible-learning WeChat groups. Theologically, although the Zhendao house Church is a Calvinist church, the members of the study groups had diverse Christian backgrounds, as the bulk of participants were firmly evangelical, some would claim Calvinism, while others were rooted in the Pietist tradition. Given this, the clear focus of the group was Bible studying and reformed theology. After every member joins the group, the group rule mentioned repeatedly:

"This group is a group dedicated to the study of Bible Doctrine. Except for the administrator, other people are prohibited from posting any links, small programs and pictures, as well as content unrelated to the study of doctrines, and try to maintain a quiet learning environment in the group. If there is a violation and after a reminder, the administrator has the right to clear it out of the group."

Additionally, the main materials posted in the group were live links to Bible class, the textbook of Reformed Theology and other material about reformed church introductions. Zhendao Church also established a WeChat public account (Bible Doctrine Study) to share Reformed Christianity theology materials with the followers and encouraged every member in the learning group to follow.

Based on the above description, the bible learning WeChat groups took on a spatial form similar to foam. In this spatial structure of foam, each individual bubble co-existed and shared a wall with its adjacent cells as each member joins the groups for a unifying purpose—Bible learning, but highly interdependent of each other as individuals still retained their independent religious orientation with others. Each bubble resisted its dissolution and integration into a whole or a uniform sphere but without being opposed to or directly fighting against it since each of them required the whole for its own stabilisation" (Morin, 2009, p.68). At the same time, within the expansion, it contained the process of potential interact between different bubbles of the foam. Compared to the bubble, foam is an ensemble of more or less hermetically enclosed spheres of togetherness that are, essentially, composed of co-isolated individuals. The Bible learning members didn't need to remark names like church groups did, and became a digital avatar that was removed from the true self. Of course, doing so served to further anonymise the members of the group, and thus detracted from the affective power of a community-like church group or fellowship group, which was based on the communication between the "real" members of the church. As Bible learning increased the popularity of the church, many non-Calvinism churches contacted the staff of Zhendao Church, showing their interest in turning to reformed churches in the future. According to interviews with co-workers of Zhendao Church, several leaders of house churches in Hubei have encouraged their church members all join Bible learning WeChat groups during the lockdown period and expressed their desire to transform into a reformed church after the epidemic. Zhendao Church replied positively to their requests, provided pre-training for the pastors of those churches, and dispatched three preachers to assist in rebuilding those churches following the lifting of the lockdown. In this sense, this forming of foam reflected a state of what Sloterdijk called "simultaneous

isolation," where each cell defined a world of its own and a state of co-fragility since the annihilation of one cell would also affect its neighbouring cells (Sloterdijk, 2016).

For Zhendao Church leaders, apart from expanding the number of WeChat groups' members, to maintain the delicate balance of foam's internal ecology, regulating the reciprocal tension between the different bubbles was also vital. In this case, through quelled disputes among group members. As a group host or group owner(群主)was an admin who had permission to add or remove members, edit group chat information, and publish announcements, every Bible studying group has two co-workers from Zhendao house church working as "administrators" of the group who were responsible for posting the live link before each class, collecting questions raised by members in the group after class, reminding members not to post content unrelated to Bible learning at will, and keeping discipline in the group. All these efforts ensured Bible learning groups could operate sustainably and focus on the promotion and dissemination of reformed theology. For example, in the Bible study group 2, a member shared his thoughts after Bible class that he questioned the Three-Self church system and criticized some evangelical churches for failing to place a high premium on theological education, which generated dissatisfaction among several evangelical church members in the group. At this point, the group owner encouraged the member to "seek common ground while reserving differences(求同存异)," implying that the Lord protects members of all sects, and also reminded him that this group does not discuss any topic about Chinese Christian policies or systems. As we have seen thus far, the principle of focusing on learning and seeking the common guaranteed a self-equilibrating stable system of foam-like structure, by which the discourse in the WeChat group was remarkably divorced from discussion of practical realities of life that were directly related to Bible study, possibly to reduce the likelihood that the group would be scrutinized as a site of oppositional politics or to avoid the possibility that group members' conflicting theologies, church positions, or attitudes toward state policies would spark heated debates.

Meanwhile, we should also be aware that the stability of this foam system depended not only upon its ability to maintain sustainable tension between the different bubbles of the foam, but also upon its capacity to ensure that the pressure coming from the "more or less" ignorable outside remains the same(Morin, 2009, p.68). In daily practice, unexpected outside factors like religious policy will heavily affect the development of this religious foam within WeChat. During the bible learning, some older members were not used to electronic texts posted in groups and wished Zhendao Church could give paper teaching materials. Thus, the church had to locate a printing firm willing to print these holy publications (privately published or photocopied religious books are not permitted in China) and arranged for quick delivery. Certain books, however, were caught as a result of the severe mail censorship in various northern Chinese cities, and, therefore, the pastor of Zhendao Church got into big trouble with the widespread photocopying of these religious teaching materials. For the church's safety, the group administration had to voice regret and helplessness and disbanded these five Bible study groups after more than two months of study.

During the few months of learning group operation, the Bible study groups gained regulatory notice for several of their popular theological lectures. After being cautioned by the platform, they briefly interrupted their studies for a week. Elder Zhang, one of the main leaders of the Zhendao Church, argued that as an unofficial church, the church itself did not want to take the risk of being investigated because of these missionary-like activities, even though the Bible learning WeChat groups in fact promoted the church's reputation and propagated the Reformed beliefs to many Christians across the country through WeChat. In their daily operation, the staff *attempted to* "*strike a compromise between the risk of censorship and the promotion of theology*" (interviwee: ZHW). Once this equilibrium became harder to maintain, the church was more likely to prioritise its own security, as described previously, the final disbanding of the bible learning groups was also based on this consideration.

In sum, the example of Zhendao Church vividly demonstrated how religion-based nationwide foam extended, maintained and finally disappeared during the COVID-19 lockdown. In this process, foam-like WeChat groups can be described as the connected isolation of living apart together in a system of co-fragility and co-isolation (Morin, 2009, p. 67). Meanwhile, the stability of the foam came from a certain tonicity that was affected by the reciprocal stress exerted by each bubble on the surrounding ones and the balance of the internal and outer world.

8.4 WeChat Groups under Stricter Religious Regulation

In this section, we followed the interior response of these migrant church WeChat groups facing the harsh religious policy on social media in order to explore how these online communities dealt with the new policy challenge and what effects it had on these foam-sphere communities' morphology.

While WeChat provided technical assistance to believers and developed a grassroots religious relation that aided house churches in achieving propaganda goals during the epidemic, utilizing WeChat for religious promotion also contained challenges and risks in China's increasingly tight religious policy context. At the end of 2021, the State Administration of Religious Affairs (SARA) announced its "Measures on the Administration of Internet Religious Information Services," which took effect in March 2022 and restricted online ministry to Chinese government-approved religious organisations with special permits on government-approved websites[26]. According to the new measures, no organization or individual shall preach on the Internet, conduct religious education and training, publish sermon content, forward or link to related content, organise and conduct religious activities on the Internet, or live broadcast or post recorded videos of religious rituals without prior approval. The new regulation was jointly formulated by five government bodies, including the

[26] See http://www.sara.gov.cn/bmgz/364755.jhtml

Ministries of Public and National Security[27]. The new rules cast doubt on the future of Chinese Christianity on social media, leaving Chinese Christians and churches uncertain about their implementation and the potential impact on their social media missions.

Indeed, prior to 2022, a movement was directed against cyberspace, particularly WeChat; in May 2021, several popular Christian WeChat official accounts with titles relating to the "Bible" or "gospel" were banned[28]. When attempting to access these WeChat accounts, the platform's messages indicated that "(We) received complaints that (this account) violates the 'Internet User Public Account Information Services Management Provisions' and its account has been removed from use," or "This account has been deleted by the owner. The content cannot be viewed." Many house churches that used official accounts to share church information and gospel learning material with their followers were told by WeChat that they had violated rules but provided no details, forcing them to discontinue using their official WeChat account and instead share in church groups.

Against the external policy pressure exerted by the government, house churches in Shenzhen began to respond to the new measures. For example, Zhendao Church's WeChat group posted alert messages such as "suddenly cold, keep warm now" (天气骤冷, 立即保暖), "poor weather" (气候恶劣)or "heavily cloudy" (乌云密布). Many Christians used weather conditions to insinuate religious policies, avoiding the risk of being blocked, and lousy weather meant increasingly strict regulations toward Christian mission on WeChat. Additionally, group owners attempted to change the group's name to avoid being identified as religious WeChat groups, which run the danger of being shut down by the platform. Following widespread dissemination of the word about the new restrictions via the WeChat group, the majority of WeChat group names were adjusted to be less religious but retained religious components that Christians could understand. Within a few days, group names were changed to"green grass"(青草地), "stepping into the Jordan River"(迈进约旦河), "love brings us together" (爱使我们相聚在一起), and "flocks" (羊群们), and group owners reiterated the principle that every member should avoid talking about any sensitive topic in the group. Other tactics, such as the usage of Roman alphabets, puns, and homophones in the group, were quite common prior to the new regulation and were still employed by church members. Some Christians even use the abbreviation for sensitive terms that are actually spelt in Roman Pinyin. For instance, the term"jiaohui"(教会 church) was shortened to "JH," "mushi" (牧师 pastor) was abbreviated to "MS," "daogao" (祷告 worship)was simplified to "DG," "tuanqi" (团契 fellowship) was written as "TQ."

[27] See https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/internet-religious-information/
[28] See https://www.christianpost.com/news/china-shuts-down-bible-app-christian-wechat-accounts.html

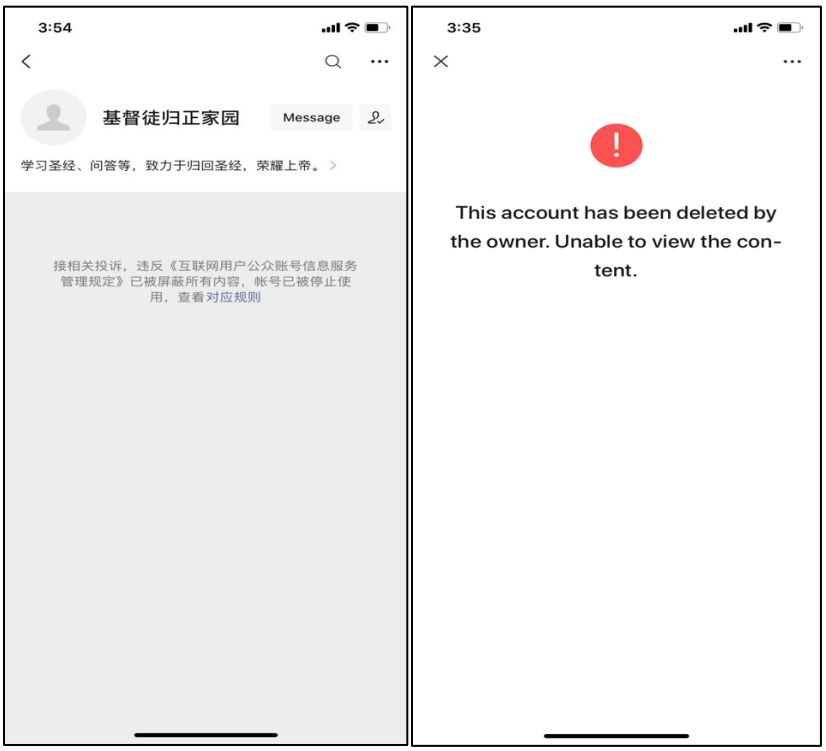

Figure 8-3 The WeChat account of *Reformed Christianity Home* was blocked
(The left picture showed that the account of *Reformed Christianity Home* was blocked because it violated the Internet User Account Information Service Management Regulations, and the contents cannot be viewed.*)*
Figure 8-4 The content in the link that the church posted before has been deleted

Inspired by Thomas Chen's(2015)work on literary censorship, in which he coins the term "alter-production" to describe how literary creativity under censorship may include content that is anti- or resistant to the party-state, but may also include content that is not, we argued that the attempt to publicise Christianity on WeChat under sticker religious policies constituted a "alter-community" for Christians in China. Rather than merely a binary struggle, Chen argues that censorship can contribute to the productive development of literature, not simply the negative, and he employs the term "alter-production" to better reflect this multiplicity of responses (Chen, 2015). In this case, we added the "alter-" prefix to "community" to capture how censorship (or fear of censorship) encouraged WeChat group organisers and members to employ a variety of tactics to maintain existing religious online communities and connections that were not explicitly antagonistic to the ruling authorities and their official agenda. By recognizing the possibility of oppositional outcomes without reducing the effect to a binary struggle between state and society or domination and resistance (Chen, 2015, p. 21), the term "alter-community" on the one hand, encompasses the possibility of state opposition without singling it out, on the other hand, similar to literary censorship mention above the fear of state intervention shapes and stimulates the content of the discourse circulating in the WeChat group. In this case, we argued that the immunity of the WeChat groups worked by avoiding the sensitivities of religious discourse to isolate certain social relations from the outside world (topics such as religious policies

and other social issues), and under this interior "atmosphere", migrant church members were encouraged to hold an inward and pragmatic attitude toward the outside world.

Simultaneously, the spatiality of these spherical communities underwent alteration or remodelling. Rather than criticising the authorities' continued repression or directly opposing the new regulations, shifting to Zoom, requesting prayers for the church under attack, suggesting dispersing into small groups, and especially stopping the use of some WeChat groups that contain a large number of non-church people, the organiser and administrator were more concerned with maintaining existing Christian groups and connections on WeChat. In this way, the spatiality of these spherical communities on WeChat gradually shifted from foam-like to bubble-like, as migrant churches seek to maintain their existing WeChat groups and avoid disputes with the government in light of the present more stringent religious policy environment.

In this section, I interrogated how online religious spheres adapted to the then-upcoming religious regulations of social media. Although the semi-public WeChat platform itself provided a kind of "insurgent space" (Zhang & Nyri, 2014) for grassroots religious actors to develop virtual communities that could serve as bubble-like online churches or create potential connections with Christians in and out the migrant churches through the foam, this is inextricably influenced by the policy environment. First, for Protestants, the "alter-community" in the WeChat connection promotes another identity that empowers as modus vivendi of living under a powerful Party-state that adopts a pragmatic approach, which involves a less direct engagement with political struggle or resistance, which promotes a different Protestant identity without casting itself and its antagonist, the state, in explicitly dichotomous terms (Vala & Huang, 2019). Second, we go on to argue that the spatial structure of online religious communities has changed from a foamed sphere into a bubble-like sphere. Bubbles and foams, in Sloterdijk's view, can easily and smoothly disappear and overflow into each other by means of the constant "airquaking" (Luftbeben) that is going on in spheres (Gielis & van Houtum, 2012, p. 813). In this case, the same phenomenon of "airquaking" is also occurring, to some extent, in the WeChat groups of migrant churches. To evade government censorship, church members employ various strategies to reproduce or even reframe religious discourse in ways that avoid attracting external attention. This process was accompanied by the contraction of WeChat groups, where some groups were deactivated to limit exposure, transforming what were once foamy, expansive networks into more contained, bubble-like spheres.

8.5 Conclusion

This case study demonstrates that WeChat was a crucial tool for migrant churches, functioning as an alter-online church that not only shielded Christians from the outside world through the relative privacy of migrant church WeChat groups—forming a protective "bubble" for all members—but also later evolved into "foams" that facilitated smaller fellowship groups, enabling the building of intimate relationships that persisted even

after the lockdown. In this sense, WeChat served as an ambivalent religious space during the pandemic. On the one hand, it provided a secure environment that fostered belonging and refuge during the lockdown, offering an alternative church space where members could withdraw from external pressures. On the other hand, these bubble-like communities were also sites where believers engaged in complex, multidimensional relations with one another, generating a more fluid and overlapping network of connections.

Some churches, especially those more sensitive to the promotional impact of digital content, were more responsive in their digital media strategy. Social media not only served as a tool of an alternative online religious community for migrant churches but also provided more possibilities to build up social networks among members online or even extend religious connections with trans-local Christians and churches via WeChat. Through these practices, the online religious communities on WeChat underwent constant transformations, evolving from a secure bubble-like environment to a multidimensional foam-like space. Yet, these digital engagements carried a tendency toward depoliticisation, shaped by the anticipation of strict regulations on religious expression in online spaces. Simultaneously, this spatiality of spherical online religious communities was constantly evolving. When external pressures—such as tightening religious policy—intervened, these foams could easily "burst," contracting back into the protective but more insular form of bubbles.

Building on this discussion, the case study illustrates how WeChat-based migrant church communities extend Sloterdijk's theory of spheres by bringing it into dialogue with digital religion in a non-Western context. By tracing how these communities oscillate between the protective security of bubbles and the multiplicity of foams, this chapter shows that online religious spaces are not static metaphors but dynamic formations shaped simultaneously by internal interactions and external constraints. In particular, the Chinese context reveals how regulatory pressures actively configure the shifting spatiality of these digital spheres, forcing them to expand or contract in response to political conditions. The ambivalence and adaptability of online religion in contemporary China thus contribute to Sloterdijk's theory by providing a vivid empirical case that highlights the tensions between the inside and outside of bubbles and the situated production of spherical spaces in practice.

This chapter also broadens debates within the geographies of sacred space by analysing the spatial transformations of virtual religious communities through the lens of spherical theory. By approaching digital religious spaces in terms of their geometric and affective reconfigurations, it illustrates how "invisible" sacred spaces undergo continual reshaping between internal interactions (fellowship, emotional bonding) and external constraints (state regulations, online censorship). This creative initiative of temporal–spatial transformation during the lockdown demonstrates how religious communities on digital platforms generate fluid, provisional, and immaterial sacred spaces. In doing so, it resonates with recent geographical scholarship that has moved away from a fixed conceptualisation of sacred space as a bounded container of

religious people, objects, and rituals, toward a more fluid, relational, and unbounded understanding (Gao *et al*., 2024; Woods, 2020). Sacred space, as this case shows, may be generated temporarily through domestic gatherings or extended through the adaptive use of communication technologies and social media platforms. Yet, this raises further questions: how might these online digitally-mediated religious practices engender new subjectivities and ethical–political spaces? And what might the relationship between online and offline sacred spaces look like in a post-pandemic urban context? These questions warrant sustained scholarly attention.

Chapter 9. Conclusion

9.1 introduction

At the conclusion of this thesis, I would like to provide a comprehensive summary of the principal arguments and contributions that have been presented thus far, in response to the initial research questions outlined in the previous introductory chapter. I then offer reflections on the challenges and considerations associated with conducting research on Christianity amidst the backdrop of the pandemic and politically sensitive environments. Following these discussions, finally, I consider the implications of this research for the possible future trajectory in interdisciplinary studies exploring the intersections of postsecularity, neoliberalism and migrant studies within the Chinese context.

9.2 Main arguments and critical contributions of this research

9.2.1 Main arguments

In the Introduction, I outlined two main themes I sought to explore in this doctoral thesis concerning the emerging postsecularity in post-reform China. The first was from the individual perspective to comprehend the complex and intertwined process of faith-making and subjectivity-making among rural-urban migrants, which involves crossover narratives of multiple secular and religious values, including neoliberal governance and nation-secularization. To elaborate on their nuanced everyday religious practices and go beyond an emphasis on the political and symbolic dimensions of religion, this thesis focused on rural-urban migrant Christians and seekers' embodied systems of beliefs and processes of meaning-making in daily life, such as everyday worship, religious interpretations or other religiosities, which is further to comprehend the impact of Christianity on the lived experiences, everyday embodied practices, and transient or long-term social relationships that emerge in these excluded groups' religious lives within the city. The second theme I investigated was from the FBOs level: how can urban official and/or unofficial religious organizations provide public services to the rural-urban migrants within such a neoliberal, highly secular city—Shenzhen? The inquiries include possible theo-ethics within these "migrant churches" and rural-urban migrants' interaction with Christian Churches and their potential encounters in/outside the sacred places. In so doing, I aimed to explore the possible new solidarity networks among the migrants and these faith-based institutions and contribute to the growing literature on the FBOs in the context of the non-western world.

In this thesis, I aimed to refine the exploration of these two themes into the following four research questions:

1) How does Christianity engage in rural-urban migrants' daily life, and how does their religiosity interact with other secular values within a neoliberal city?
2) To what extent do urban churches engage in providing services to migrants in Shenzhen, how does possible theo-ethics work within these urban churches?
3) How does the interplay between the gender factor and religious agency among rural-urban migrant Christians, and how does their agency influence their life in the highly neoliberal context?
4) During the pandemic, how do these religious communities in Shenzhen experience, and what are their corresponding responses to this global health crisis?

In the preceding chapters, the thesis has provided responses to the aforementioned inquiries and endeavoured to elaborate on the two central themes intended to explore. **Chapter 5** addresses the first research question by focusing on gradually popular Calvinist theology among the young migrant Christians in Shenzhen. It reveals that young migrant Christians, on the one hand, adopt Calvinist theology as tools to navigate the prevalent neoliberal economy and governance, particularly within their work environments. On the other hand, their religiosities within the post-secular and "labour regime" reality of Shenzhen are also influenced and reconfigured by secular values, such as the neoliberal ethic of self-development. In essence, this chapter demonstrates how Christianity provides opportunities for migrant Christian believers to construct "new narratives" that enable them to reconcile their faith with secular pursuits within the context of their new and uncertain urban lives. Moreover, it sheds light on the increasingly blurred religious-secular boundary within the spiritual landscape of postsecular China.

Chapter 6 re-examines the role of urban churches in providing care for rural–urban migrants through the combined lens of social infrastructure and theo-ethics. It foregrounds migrants' everyday and embodied religious practices within church communities, highlighting how these practices intersect with secular settings in the metropolitan environment. At the same time, it explores how urban churches operate as forms of social infrastructure in the neoliberal megacity, where Christian theo-ethics are mobilised to offer emotional support, social networks, and a sense of justice for marginalised migrant workers. The chapter concludes by advancing a nuanced account of how sacred and social spaces overlap: showing how lived religious practices are continuously reconfigured through theo-ethical enactments, and how these enactments shape, and are shaped by, the urban migrant church as a space of hope under conditions of precarity.

Chapter 7 answers the third research question by delving into the intricate relationship between gender and religious agency among migrant women Christians. In this chapter, I explore the religious agency exhibited by young migrant women by examining their individual perspectives and experiences of nonconfrontational negotiation within intersectional gendered social norms. Such exploration underlines the significance of adopting an intersectional perspective in considering women's religious agency within post-secular feminism

studies. The chapter focuses on the lived experiences of female Christians, such as their participation in church life, choice of marriage partners, and family dynamics, offering a detailed investigation of the religious women's agency, specifically the "non-confrontational" one, within the intersection of secular values, traditional culture, and church teachings in Shenzhen City.

The question regarding how religious communities respond to the pandemic is addressed in **Chapter 8**. By employing Peter Sloterdijk's sphere theory as a conceptual framework, the final empirical chapter focuses on the development of online religious communities and the utilization of the social application WeChat by Chinese Christians for religious practices during the Covid-19 lockdown. Through the examination of the formation and subsequent dissolution of these foam-like online religious communities on WeChat, this chapter explores the evolving spatial dimensions of online religious communities, highlighting the potential for trans-local connections and online solidarity networks that were forged during the pandemic for theology teaching and mutual support.

Overall, through these case studies, this thesis contributes to the geographies of neoliberalism, migration, and religion by demonstrating how migrant subjectivities and sacred spaces are relationally produced within China's neoliberal–authoritarian order. These insights collectively highlight the embodied, affective, and infrastructural dimensions of Christianity in urban China, offering a relational perspective on the intersections of migration, urban space, and postsecular life. The following sections will elaborate on this thesis's key geographical contributions to the scholarly debates on secularity and postsecularity and lived religion.

9.2.2 Mapping secularity and postsecularity in the urban Chinese context

This thesis focuses on China in the post-reform era, where the consolidation of secular values coexists paradoxically with the significant revival of various forms of religious practice. Drawing on the case study of Shenzhen, it highlights the complexities and geo-historical contingencies that shape the emergence of postsecularity in the Chinese context. This "postsecular" condition challenges the conventional Western modernisation narrative, which presupposes that secularisation inevitably leads to religious decline. The study also demonstrates the complicated dynamics of secularisation and postsecularity in China, which opens up new possibilities for rethinking the relationship between secularity and religion beyond the Eurocentric trajectory and enriches the understanding of postsecularism within non-Western geographical and social contexts.

First, this thesis demonstrates how, within the context of postsecular religious revival, secularity exerts intersectional influences on religious individuals, ultimately giving rise to forms of "disengaged belief" and an immanent consciousness at the levels of community, everyday life, and the self. In this study, Chinese secularity presents as an assemblage of neoliberal governance, state developmentalism, and authoritarian

political rationalities, which collectively work to produce secular, productive, docile, and governable subjects, aligning individual subjectivities with broader projects of socio-political order. For example, in the context of this study, the widely circulating discourse of suzhi, which valorises distinctions between "high-quality" and "low-quality" migrant bodies, exemplifies how such moral logics of secularity are mobilised to sustain regimes of social stratification and bodily governance. Within this context, religious faith offers believers a potential means to transcend the reductionist suzhi discourse and assert alternative moral subjectivities. Moreover, the neoliberal rhetoric of relentless self-improvement and "self-making" exerts a profound influence on the religiosity and aspirations of young migrant Christian groups, shaping their pursuit of a disciplined self and self-development. The ascetic and "progress-oriented" ethos of Calvinist theology, resonating with the broader socio-political imperative of self-disciplining and improvement in contemporary urban China, makes it growing popular among the young migrant Christians. Finally, under such socio-political conditions, theo-ethics emerge within urban churches, transforming them into social infrastructures that provide spiritual support and deliver material assistance to their congregants.

Second, as I have argued, postsecularity is best conceptualized not as a linear transition from secularity back to religion, but as a contingent space of cohabitation in which religious and secular forms of life intersect, overlap, and mutually reconfigure. Within this space, new and hybrid subjectivities—as well as emergent ethical frameworks—take shape. In the Chinese context, this means that the question of religious revival cannot be reduced to a binary of more or less religiosity. Rather, it necessitates an inquiry into how religion becomes entangled in broader projects of moral cultivation—particularly in ways that align with developmentalist aspirations and shifting socio-political zeitgeists. Religion, in this view, is not merely revived; it is refunctioned as a resource for producing governable, aspirational, and ethically attuned subjects in a rapidly transforming society. **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 7** have shown that although migrant Christians always anchor their religiosity and agency to other-worldly redemption (e.g., glorify the lord, not capital), concurrently, secular concerns such as economic pursuits, social inequality, and labour alienation, also have an impact on their religious praxis and, ultimately, co-constitute their subjectivity. In other words, secular beings are integral to or even constitutive of migrant Christians' religiosity in their daily religious praxis, and the boundary between the sacred and the secular is blurred within the postsecularity context. From this point of view, the inquiry of the migrant Christians can enrich the understanding of the postsecular approach in human geography by considering how the secular and the postsecular are co-constituted and co-evolving.

As Cloke *et al*. (2019, p. 186) observe, postsecularity can be understood as "a hopeful and non-binary way of being that troubles neat divisions between religion and secularism, ethics and politics, faith and reason, and mystery and structure." Building on this perspective, this thesis argues that postsecularity in China constitutes a dynamic and contingent space in which religion and secularity co-exist, intersect, and co-produce new, hybrid subjectivities and ethical orientations. Within this landscape, religion for migrant

Christians is not merely a source of emotional comfort or communal solidarity; it becomes embedded in broader projects of moral cultivation, often in ways that converge with state-led developmentalist aspirations and emerging zeitgeists attuned to a neoliberal, value-plural social order. Based on an in-depth study of rural-to-urban migrants, I contend that while religion may serve as a strategic cultural resource for navigating rapid socio-economic change, political authority, and welfare gaps, it does not fundamentally disrupt the prevailing structures of authoritarian governance. Rather, it tends to operate within those structures, reshaping individual aspirations and practices in ways that are compatible with state and market priorities. This finding resonates with Gao and Qian's (2020, p. 63) conclusion that Christianity among Chinese migrant workers is "better understood as a dynamic process through which Christianity is implicated in the existing social exclusion and domination" than as "a harbinger of an alternative, critical class consciousness" capable of challenging dominant framings of sociocultural differentiation and inequality. Similarly, Cao Nanlai (2010) underscores that China's postsecular religious revival is inherently contested and hybrid, resisting simplistic interpretations that cast it as an inherently anti-secular or anti-hegemonic symbolic universe. The case of Shenzhen illustrates this complexity in concrete form. As shown in **Chapter 5**, the religiosity and everyday practices of young migrants—shaped by Calvinist ethics—reflect and reinforce the Weberian linkage between religiously informed discipline and economic life. Yet in the Chinese context, this "Protestant ethic" is recalibrated: it provides a moral vocabulary and sense of divine purpose that can temper market excesses, but it simultaneously embeds believers more deeply in the very political–economic order that sustains authoritarian–neoliberal governance. In **Chapter 6**, Christian theo-ethics can also function as a mediating force between the sacred and the secular within churches, offering both emotional care and social support for rural–urban migrants, and thereby creating spaces of hope within conditions of precarity. However, these social infrastructures have not yet developed into forces of wider social transformation; rather, they risk masking exploitation of migrant labour within the dominant neoliberal labour regime.

In this sense, the Chinese experience illustrates that secularisation is not necessarily about the decline of religion per se, but about state reconfigurations of what counts as religion, often replacing it with political religion or folding it into cultural governance. This often involves the substitution of traditional religious forms with political religion or the incorporation of religious practices into the frameworks of cultural governance. Within this process, Christian theo-ethics—particularly those of love, unconditional care, and disciplined work—are rendered compatible with the state's aspirations to construct a "harmonious society." By filling gaps in social welfare and service provision, and by fostering self-disciplined, law-abiding, and economically productive citizens, Christian communities contribute to state-led governance objectives. This observation also echoes Cao's (2010, p.7) findings in Wenzhou, which suggest that "the state increasingly uses ideological power rather than domination and coercion" to integrate Christianity into local governance efforts aimed at promoting social stability and the construction of a harmonious society.

However, this argument does not revert to a binary framework that pits state domination against church resistance, which would imply that the state's power unilaterally determines the trajectory of religious development, ultimately reducing Christianity to being merely co-opted or instrumentalised by state regulatory mechanisms and neoliberal governance logics. As Kong and Qian (2018) observe, postsecularity in China is instead a tortuous and uncertain process, characterised by "moving back and forth between multiple priorities of governance and creating ebbing and flowing spaces of visibility and invisibility for religions" (p. 263). Cloke *et al*. (2019) similarly emphasise that fissures in modern existential and phenomenological life have shaped the logic of acquiescence and resistance. Neoliberal disenchantment, therefore, opens out a deeply contested terrain of ethical and political subjectivity in which emergent postsecularity should be considered a nascent opportunity rather than a certainty in these cracks. In this sense, this thesis emphasises that the postsecular religious revival in China operates through a more complex dynamic, wherein religious practices and subjectivities continuously reproduce and rearticulate the moral discourses of secularity, even as they give rise to new and context-specific forms of religious life.

Crucially, what emerges are hybrid cultural formations in which the religious and the secular are mutually referential and dynamically intertwined. Within these hybrid spaces, Protestant faith among rural-urban migrants is neither a purely reactionary force against state power nor entirely subsumed within it. Rather, it represents a site of ongoing negotiation, where new aspirations and discursive articulations of faith are cultivated. These processes enable forms of postsecular reflexivity that move beyond reductive dichotomies of resistance versus co-option, highlighting the entanglement of religious subjectivities with broader socio-political and economic transformations in contemporary urban China (Gao *et al*., 2018; Kang, 2019; Yoo, 2021).

9.2.3 Bring lived religion to Chinese religion studies

This research also responds to recent calls to explore the "lived religion" (Olson *et al*., 2013; Knott, 2010; Bartolini *et al*., 2017; Gökariksel & Secor, 2015; Finlayson, 2012), then to re-examine migrant Christians beliefs as "lived" and highlight their religious practised in the realms of everyday life and embodied experience. As research on lived religion underlining research foci should move beyond the artificial line between institutional religion and everyday life (Ammerman, 2016), this thesis focuses on rural-urban Christians' emotional and affect experience as well as their embodied practices, especially in their workplace and other unofficial sacred space. Through the lens of lived religion analysis, this thesis challenges the mainstream perspective in China's religion studies that adopted a dichotomous perspective, viewing the religious issue in China through the framework of state dominance and church resistance, presenting the nunaned and vivid experience of religious individuals' daily religious pactices and interaction within the urban China.

In this study, I argue for the "embodied" nature of the Christianity: the theo-ethics of migrant Christians can be derived from and make sense of context-specific lived religious experiences, such as collective prayer and bodily sensations of pain and joy; simultaneously, Christianity also function "body techniques" for migrant Christians, assisting them in coordinating and negotiating with the secular world they encounter daily through everyday practises. In this way, this research broadened the scope of past studies on rural-urban migrants' faith in the neoliberal context, which enabled going beyond an emphasis on the political and symbolic dimensions of religion to examine embodied systems of beliefs and processes of meaning-making in daily life, trying to inspire further a more nuanced understanding of individuals especially exclude groups' everyday spiritual landscapes within neoliberal China context.

At the same time, this thesis adopts an intersectional approach in research of the lived religion of rural-urban migrants, which echoes the call within lived religion studies that religion is not merely a separate sphere or category but is inherently intertwined with various everyday practices and social environments (Ammerman, 2014; Orsi, 2003). This calling moves beyond the clear-cut distinction between immanence and transcendence by positioning religion within "a field of diverse social meanings to re-examine social relationships between the sacred and the profane." Intersectionality involves relationality, social context, power relations, complexity, social justice, and inequalities, going beyond a simple cumulative way of multiple identities and forms of inequality, as it recognizes how specific forms of discrimination can change in nature when they interact with other forms of prejudice (Hopkins, 2019; McDowell, 2008).

In this study, the intersectional approach is not merely used in empirical chapters like Chapter 7 but throughout the whole project, in which I comprehensively explore rural-urban migrant Christians' experiences and critically reflect upon specific challenges they encounter in the urban through their religious belief, inequality exposed by the current migrant regime, and other diverse range of secular value experienced, and how these aspects intersect in the specific conditions. Through intersectional thinking toward the rural-urban migrants in Shenzhen, this thesis challenges the mainstream perspective in China's religion studies, which unwittingly or deliberately emphasises an anti-secular and antihegemonic sensibility, and in which China's modernisation is sometimes uncritically associated with the domination of secular and capitalist ethics. Instead, this study presented a further sophisticated understanding of migrant Christians' lived religion as it constantly interacted with intersectional secular conditions. Drawing on the intersectional inequalities rural-urban migrant Christian groups encounter enables readers to appreciate the complex, multi-layered and intricate nature of their identities and everyday life experienced and understand their lives, not just as migrants, or as Christians, but as people whose lived experiences are an intersecting combination of social and economic inequalities where power relations cannot be easily packaged. Through the lens of intersectional analysis, this thesis challenges the mainstream perspective in Chinese religious studies that unwittingly or deliberately overlook the complexity of religious individuals' daily religious pactices and interaction.

9.2.4 Re-envisioning religious geographies in urban China

This thesis also provides an empirical study in response to Ley's (2010) call for research that examines how migrants reshape the changing landscape of religion. It has shown how the massive inflow of rural migrants into cities has substantially remade the geographies of faith, both at the level of church organisation and at the level of migrant religiosity. This rural-to-urban migration in China has not merely shifted the geographic distribution of the Christian population—giving rise to what Huang Jianbo (2014) has described as the "rural church in the city"—but has also transformed the demographic composition and functional roles of urban churches. These congregations are no longer simply "rural churches" transplanted into the city; rather, they have developed new services and practices that more directly address the needs of migrants within a neoliberal urban context. For instance, Chapter 5 illustrates how Calvinist theology provides moral guidance for young migrant Christians in their work and everyday lives, while Chapter 6 highlights the churches' more direct involvement in providing forms of social care and support for migrants. Moreover, as Chapter 8 shows, the adoption of new digital technologies has further reshaped the structures and interactions of migrant churches. Collectively, these cases demonstrate the profound impact of migration on reshaping the urban religious landscape.

This transformation is evident not only within faith-based communities but also in the religiosity of rural–urban migrants themselves. Their religiosity is not merely a residual inheritance of rural theological traditions, but rather a situated, lived response to secular modernity and neoliberal capitalism in the new socio-economic environments of the city. For example, the Christian theologies of work ethic and femininity (discussed in Chapters 5 and 7), though partly influenced by rural Pentecostal traditions, have largely emerged in response to the lived circumstances and new socio-economic pressures of urban life. Migrants' religiosity is thus hybrid and contextually constituted. This finding resonates with Casanova's (2007) argument that migrant religiosity should not be understood as a static residue of traditions brought from a place of origin, but as an adaptive response to the challenges of a new world. In other words, migrants' religiosity rarely rests on a fixed, pre-given religious identity; rather, it represents an ongoing, hybrid construction through which migrants live out and negotiate their religious selves, cultivating self-awareness and self-governance within new socio-economic contexts.

9.3 Critical reflections on this research

As emphasized in earlier chapters, the state plays a significant role in religious development in China, exerting considerable influence over processes of religious transmission. In this thesis, I adopt a distinct perspective on the urban Christian church, diverging from the prevalent focus in prior studies that predominantly employed a dichotomous framework of the religion-state relationship or examined the dynamics of suppression and resistance at a macro-level (Ashiwa & Wank, 2009). Instead, my research

focuses on the everyday practices of rural-urban Christians and the daily routines of urban churches. However, this approach may prompt the question of whether this study overlooks the power dynamics imposed by the state. Or specifically, as a study of urban Christianity in China, how do we comprehend the state's impact in the context of discussing the postsecularity in Shenzhen?

Indeed, I cannot and will not decline the importance of the state's power in consideration of Christianity's development in urban China. However, this project's excessive focus on the state-religious relationship from a macro perspective may not accurately capture the specific context of state power on the ground. In reality, government officials themselves always adjusted how they implement religious policies concerning political circumstances. Since the 1980s, governmental approaches to religious matters have oscillated between "hard" and "soft" management styles, depending on the prevailing social conditions (Chan, 2016; Huang, 2014; 2021). After the reform and opening up in the 1970s, the state adopted a somewhat more tolerant perspective on religion as economic development became the central task of the state (Peng,1996). The "soft" policy for the freedom of religious belief and social issues caused by rapid economic growth led to a fast growth in the number of religious believers, especially the rural-urban migrants. Concern over the rapidly rising number of adherents to unofficial religions such as *Falun Gong* and the Christian church's crucial roles in the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s led to a shift in religious policy during the 1990s. The government has issued a series of regulations and policies, such as "Document No. 6" and "Method on Registration and Management of Religious Organizations," to strengthen control over religious activities. Despite the repression campaign against the *Falun Gong* in 2000–2001, Party policy continued to follow a theme of adaptation between religion and socialism in general but fluctuated sometimes. For example, the church demolitions and cross removals campaign in Zhejiang Province from 2013 to 2016 revealed some uneasiness in the religion-state relationship during this period. In recent years, the concept of "sinicizing religions" *(zongjiao zhongguohua* 宗教中国化)—officially introduced at the 19th Congress of the CCP in October 2017 –has emerged as a guiding principle in China's religious policy, indicating a state-led initiative to encourage religions in China to incorporate Chinese characteristics into their beliefs and practises, which leads to the implementation of new regulations and the imposition of restrictions on religious organisations (Vermander, 2019). While Kuei-min Chang (2018) characterized the sinicization policy as "new wine in old bottles," this shift does reflect the party's deep concern over foreign influence, signifying "hardening" of religious policy and a shift towards the Party assuming a more regulatory role rather than being a purveyor of sacredness in Xi's new era (Vermander, 2019).

The uncertainty surrounding Chinese religious policy needs a dynamic and processual understanding of the state-religion relationship, recognizing its generative and grounded nature, rather than viewing it as a static relation. Rather than solely focusing on the macro-level interactions between the state and religion, this study adopts a micro-level approach by examining the practices and responses of religious actors within specific contexts. During my fieldwork, I also observed the shift in religious policy, from relative tolerance in 2019 to

increasing tension in 2021, leading to different responses within the urban Christian church in Shenzhen when faced with attempts to restrict previously tolerated Christian practices in Shenzhen. Official churches had to adhere to the latest regulations and adjust their activities to align with the party's requirements. This included establishing the Shenzhen Christian Theology Research Centre and cancelling Sunday school for teens.

While the responses from unofficial churches varied depending on their specific circumstances, as in many urban churches, the exercise of state power was not characterized by direct confrontation but rather manifested in their daily lives and embodied practices. As a geographer conducting sensitive research in a highly policed environment, much of the information about the state-religion relationship is derived from micro-level observations. For instance, many church leaders of unofficial churches experienced considerable pressure to evade official surveillance and maintain a delicate balance in their relationship with the government or other official churches, which made it hard for them to openly discuss everyday experiences and share opinions towards the government, given the tightening religious policy. Nonetheless, subtle embodied reactions, such as gestures and eye contact, often conveyed messages that interviews couldn't capture.

Additionally, the attitudes of unofficial churches towards the government vary depending on their specific contexts. While some underground churches adopt pragmatic cooperation with official churches through personal networks of church leaders or pastors, others forced to disband upon discovery by authorities are more inclined towards negative or intense resistance. It is essential to recognize that unofficial religious groups are not monolithic within the framework of the religion-state relationship, and the narratives of their daily negotiations with the government are more critical. This perspective directs attention to the series of complex micro-politics within the daily practices of urban faith-based organizations and brings readers closer to understanding religious lives as "concrete, on-the-ground practices" rather than "Chinese religions as systems of thought" (Chua, 2019, p.193).

Lastly, this thesis does not overlook the influence of state power, although the central focus of my discussion is migrant Christians' subjectivity and religiosity within the interweaved context of neoliberal and postsecularity in urban China. The shadow of the state's influence on Christianity is woven throughout my thesis, particularly evidenced in **Chapter 6** and **Chapter 8**, which discuss the daily negotiations between care infrastructures and the government, as well as the formation and dissolution of WeChat groups within urban migrant churches during the pandemic. These instances illuminate intricate micro-political dynamics, motivations, and relationalities shaped by the state's power over religion at the everyday and micro-level. This nuanced exploration contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between the state and religion in urban contexts.

Overall, it would be easier to understand this tension between the state and the religion if we understood local religious practices as complex, dynamic, ever-changing clusters of institutions, practitioners and consumers, knowledge and practices, sociopolitical relations and hierarchies, albeit fully influenced by the increasingly restrictive atmosphere from the state all the time. In this project, I argue that the religion-state relationship can be understood as "a dynamic process of the actors' alternating co-optation and conflict on the ground, more than a fixed state of either cooperation or confrontation determined on paper and by institutional arrangements"(Huang, 2014, p.2). I cannot predict how this relationship will be in the future, nor say the religious landscape I present in this thesis is comprehensive. However, I hope this document might provide some useful insights for going beyond the one-dimensional framework of church-state relations and offering a multifaceted analysis of the everyday religious scene in the complicated and variegated contexts of the interaction of dominant modernity and invisible but vigorous religious markets in urban China.

Nevertheless, even based on what I have presented here, this thesis's analyses still have several limitations. Although I explain the reasons for this study's micro-level perspective on state power in discussing the postsecular in urban China, the analyses still have several limitations. Notably, the insights obtained from the government, which serves as a key actor in the development of urban Christianity, are comparatively scarce vis-à-vis the extensive data collected within urban churches. This disparity is the result of restricted access to government insiders and the difficulties presented by the pandemic lockdown during my fieldwork. Additionally, despite this study's efforts to cover the observations from official churches and institutions, the research on official churches was limited due to the epidemic blockade from time to time and the unwillingness of staff within official churches to take political risks(mentioned in the methodology chapter), resulting in a disproportionate emphasis on underground churches. To address these limitations, I turned to collect the official discourse instead, bridging the absence of official roles in post-secular discussions, and future research may also compensate for the weakness by the deeper investigation into the internal workings of the government and official churches, which would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the state in the dynamics shaping urban Christianity in the context of state-religion interactions.

9.4 Potential directions for future study

As I noted in the introduction, far from being an exhaustive study of the postsecularity in China, this thesis, and its sustained focus on the Christianity development among the rural-urban migrant groups in one city of China—Shenzhen, which offers a partial glimpse into the broader postsecular landscape within a highly neoliberal and "migrant regime" backdrop. Therefore, there remain several new avenues for future geographic research that might prove fruitful for advancing our comprehension of the intricate

interconnections between neoliberalism, rural-urban migration, and postsecularity within the Chinese context.

9.4.1 New understandings of postsecularity in the post-pandemic era

Building on **Chapter 5** and **Chapter 7**'s interrogation of the rural-urban young Christians'religiosity and women Christians' religious agency under the intersection of secular values and their religious beliefs, this thesis highlights the increasing cross-over in the boundary of religion and secularity in urban life, which presents the complexity of postsecualrity.

The meaning of postsecularity might not only pertain to the persistence, reformulation, or resurgence of religion in the public sphere but also to the critique of the traditional understanding of the secular/religious schism, as well as the embracing of new spiritual forces and gods in the context of modern religion. According to Latour, secularization has always been an attempt to reinforce the "one God, one society" argument (Latour,2018,p.29). When we think about postsecular society, it becomes imperative to abandon not only the notion of natural groups but also the tendency to ascribe secular or non-secular religious meanings to these groups. The diversification of social structures and the fluidity of the meanings of secular and non-secular demands a re-evaluation of society as a complex network where these distinct beliefs circulate and differentiate(Beaumont, Eder & Mendieta, 2020). Inspired by the discourse on the meaning of postsecularity, we have opened up new possibilities for discussing the relationship between nature and humans in the post-pandemic era, as the post-secular embraces new spiritual forces and gods in the context of modern religion, no longer subscribing to "any strict or stable boundary between what is spiritual and what is material" (Crockett, 2021).

In recent years, an increasing number of scholars have attempted to think about the interaction between humans and non-humans in the Anthropocene from a different perspective. For example, what anthropologists call "new animism" (Alberti, 2016; Wilkinson, 2017) addresses the intricacies of animistic practice and worldviews previously regarded as indigenous and non-modern superstitions. Other scholars like Bruno Latour also articulate their thoughts concerning agents everywhere in existence rather than solely in the intentional consciousness of rational human beings. In Latour's work, "We Have Never Been Modern," he challenges the artificial separation between human politics and non-human nature in Western liberal modernity as this division leads to a fragmented understanding of politics and nature, limiting our ability to address ecological concerns. Traditionally, ethical and moral values have been attributed solely to the human realm, disregarding non-human objects. Latour argues that nature itself resists political ecology because it is denied agency and moral value (Latour, 2004). Ecological movements, bound by this limited view of nature, perpetuate the very division that Latour seeks to overcome. In his Gifford Lectures, "Facing Gaia," Latour (2017) further argues that the Gaia hypothesis introduced by James Lovelock is a (finally secular) figure for

nature under the new climate regime. In this sense, Gaia becomes a framework to understand the interconnectedness of agents and systems throughout Earth's history, enabling a true political ecology in the wake of modern liberalism. Gaia insists upon our understanding in a secular but not secularist way, because it forces us to grapple with the animation of all of existence, although that is configured by and through our specific planetary habitat, Earth. From rivers to ecosystems, from bacteria to global networks, various entities can all be examples of agents here, which in some way echo what postsecularists highlighting no longer subscribes to any strict or stable boundary between what is spiritual and what is material(Crockett, 2018; 2021).

Following that, the post-secular point of view toward the whole ecological system in late capitalist times allows us to comprehend better the relationship between humans and non-humans and may also inspire new possibilities for thinking, including what Elizabeth Povinelli (2016) has termed "geontopower." Specifically, I have gone through an extremely potent representation of the Virus during the time of COVID-19 and have been confronting consistent extreme climate events. New ideas could aim for a deeper understanding of what nature means after the global pandemic in terms of how humans and non-humans cross over, contest with, and how they mingle under the wider ecological system around the globe. According to Beaumont *et al*. (2020), as a social scientist, "taking a postsecular perspective" to observe this postsecular world (p.14), the future scholarship can explore the immanentist and postmetaphysical connotations of postsecularity, linking the research to the Anthropocene agenda that the geographic consideration of the agency of non-human and even non-living systems may help us comprehend what is going on in broadly ecological terms.

9.4.2 Faith in social caring

As noted in **Chapter 6**, this thesis has engaged in the discussion of FBOs working as social infrastructures which offer emotional and financial support to their migrant worker members. The significance of faith participation in the social welfare system has been loom large, particularly in China's current socioeconomic context. In recent years, the government of China has prioritized the elimination of poverty as a crucial objective, leading to substantial reforms aimed at providing support to individuals residing on the fringes of society. However, the Chinese government faces a number of pressing economic and demographic issues that require resolution. Take the ageing population issue, for example; in recent years, China has experienced an unprecedented rate of population ageing. According to the Seventh National Population Census, there were 190.64 million citizens aged 65 and older, representing 13.50% of the total population. By 2050, nearly one-third of China's population will be aged 60 or over. Whilst this demographic transformation, local governments are facing a huge financial dilemma as the three years of strict pandemic controls in China and a

real estate crash have drained local government coffers, leaving authorities across the country struggling with mountains of debt which inhibits the government's ability to maintain or expand public services[29].

Meanwhile, new forms of care infrastructures have emerged outside the state during the COVID-19 pandemic, with not-for-profit agencies taking up new roles, and individuals setting up neighbourhood networks to address unmet essential needs(Power *et al*., 2022; Springer, 2020). Christian churches also provided online emotional care and health advice to church members during the pandemic. As we suggest in **Chapter 8**, the online WeChat group of migrant churches played the role of what Power *et al*. (2022) note as "shadow care infrastructures" in establishing online mutual aid networks among believers, which create effect caring networks outside the state welfare system for church members and even non-Christians in need. Considering the inevitable shrinkage in state-sector care and welfare alongside emerging care networks in/outside the church, there may be more potential space for official/unofficial FBOs to bridge the possible social care divide. The question of how faith-based care infrastructures interact with state welfare will become only more vital in post-COVID-19 China.

The first key concern of future work could be how we can understand the position of the faith-based social care within the "coordinate system" of the Chinese welfare system. China's faith charity landscape is characterized by its complexity. On the one hand, the party began to encourage the development of the charitable sector, partly to implement its social welfare policies, and partly to cultivate communitarian values and mutual aid as a response to rising social ills(Lim,2020; Luova,2017). The establishment of officially approved religious social service centres reflects the party's commitment to bureaucratize and professionalize religious charity organizations under the narrative of "doing good deeds" sanctioned by the state (Wu, 2017). Even though the 2018 regulations on religion stipulate stricter control, they also encourage religious organizations to engage in charity work. On the other hand, the swinging and cautious attitude of the local government toward religious charity makes these faith-based charity institutions have to negotiate with the uncertainty in their local political context(for example, in Tam & Hasmath, 2015). Therefore, engaging in a comprehensive discussion on how these FBOs and religious care resources become embedded, intersect, or even contest with the state welfare system in local socio-spatial contexts is vital, especially since the situations of official churches and underground FBOs might be quite different. Scholarship can also focus on how faith-based individuals, organisations, or networks entangle and cohere under the calling to help the "Other" and become a reliable means of urban welfare and care provision as the call to explore how the "postsecular becomes a constitutive element in new solidarities rather than merely the contextual canvas of it" (Beaumont, 2022, p.8). For example, exploring the possibility of the co-constitution of religion, the

[29] see https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/31/economy/china-local-governments-basic-services-debt-crisis-intl-hnk/index.html

government and the family in healthcare for the elderly or providing a "common space" for marginalised people in the city. And if so, what are the implications of this for Chinese postsecularism?

Secondly, questions need to be asked of the individuals within these faith-motivated organizations. For those working in religious organizations, the question could pertain to a deeper interrogation of their "theo-ethics;" for instance, how do they claim, negotiate, and reconcile their "theo-ethics" with the neoliberalised austerity affect and other secular values dominant in Chinese society during their everyday practices? And what kind of new religious practices, affective atmospheres, ethical-political spaces and subjectivities will be engendered and reconfigured through this process? Recalling the recent "affective turn" within social care and austerity research(Cloke & Conradson, 2018; Denning, 2021; Hall, 2019; Hitchen, 2021), for those receiving assistance, further research could probe quite what are the marginalized individuals, families, and fragmented communities' affectual responses to their everyday experiences of poverty and this religious support. Could their experience of encountering the "Other" (Beaumont, 2022) within these faith-motivated organizations transform themselves into possible new "postsecular" or "enlightened" subjects in the process of faith-based caring?

9.4.3 Digital postsecularity

In **Chapter 8**, the initial analysis has been adopted to the emerging form of the online church through the innovative use of digital technologies during the enforced Covid-19 lockdown in Shenzhen, addressing the inconvenience due to the mandated "pause" and even establishing a trans-local theology learning network through social media. Even before the pandemic, online videos, blogs, and other digitally-mediated technologies were extensively employed in the transmission of Christianity. By way of the Internet and social media, foreign theological education courses and other Christian literature flow into China and get increasingly welcome among the rural-urban migrant Christians. In the post-pandemic era, the significance of digital technology is growing in the discussion of postsecualrity, not only for digital technologies serving as new "infrastructures" for proselytisation, highlighting the transformation of church-based proselytisation to individual or even collective sharing via more accessible methods, but also for offering new forms of affordable everyday enactment of religion for individuals beyond the "officially sacred" limit(Kong,2010).

Against this backdrop, future geographic research on this emerging "digital postsecularity" in the post-pandemic era could be required in the following two perspectives: online transmission and online affect. First, given that digital technologies have significantly expanded and reshaped the socio-spatial networks of religious communities, resulting in the emergence of novel opportunities and affordances for religious communication and participation (Campbell, 2017a), future research can investigate the extent to which this digitally mediated technology empowers believers and religious groups, particularly the significant population of migrant Christians and unofficial churches in China. The convenient and readily accessible

infrastructure of smartphones, along with popular platforms such as WeChat and other live apps, endow them with greater freedom to establish trans-local networks and potentially facilitate the transition from online interactions to offline encounters, as previously discussed in **Chapter 8**. Following this logic, it becomes imperative to inquire about the implications of the digital utilization of online worship for the impact on institutional boundaries between individuals, religious groups, and religious leaders, particularly within the context of the officially-approved Chinese religious regime. The emergence and growth of online worship have, to some extent, posed a challenge to the authority wielded by institutional religion (Ammerman, 2016)and its impact and implications for the existing religious structures and hierarchies warrant further examination. Further, what would this change bring to the relationship between physical and digital forms of religion in a post-pandemic world?

Second, following the existing body of literature on the influence of digital technologies on the ways of communication and interaction in which religiosity is felt and performed by individuals(Hjarvard, 2013; Bialecki, 2014; Husein & Slama, 2018; Venkatraman, 2017), the further discussion could consider how digital technology shapes the affective capacities of believers and creates new relations among them within the online religious space or communities. For believers, digital technology is more than a mere space where they can perform and engender their religious subjectivities. In fact, the structures and relations of digital technologies themselves have the capacity to actively generate affective atmospheres that shape the affective capacities of individuals engaged with them(Ash, 2013; 2015). Gao, Woods, Kong, and Shee (2022) argue that the use of digital technology in religious prayer forms an assemblage of the human body, social media, and technical structures (particularly code and software), which collectively influence how individuals come together and interact. In this sense, digital prayer can be understood as an "affective assemblage," comprising a complex configuration of diverse elements, media, and technologies organized around the act of prayer (Gao *et al*., 2022). Therefore, a more nuanced capture of the affective capacity of "the digital" in shaping the ways that religious practices and communications of the believers are affectively felt is needed. For instance, what influences does digital technology have on individuals in terms of affective connections with the church and other Christians? And how does digital technology reconfigure their subjectivities through these processes?

Bibliography

Aikman, D. (2006). Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is transforming China and changing the global balance of power. Regnery Publishing.

Alberti, B. (2016). Archaeologies of ontology. Annual review of anthropology, 45, 163-179.

Alexander, P., & Chan, A. (2004). Does China have an apartheid pass system?. Journal of ethnic and migration studies, 30(4), 609-629.

Altay, S., & Clark, J. (2023). 'The city's other face': Postsecular feminism and the creation of sacred space by women in Kurdish Turkey. Social & Cultural Geography, 24(7), 1224-1241.

Amin, A. (2002). Ethnicity and the multicultural city: living with diversity. Environment and planning A, 34(6), 959–980.

Amin, A. (2008). Collective culture and urban public space. City, 12(1), 5–24.

Amin, A. (2014). Lively infrastructure. Theory, Culture & Society, 31(7-8), 137-161.

Ammerman, N. T. (Ed.). (2007). Everyday religion. Observing Modern Religious Lives Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Ammerman, N. T. (2013). Sacred stories, spiritual tribes: Finding religion in everyday life. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ammerman, N. T. (2014). 2013 Paul Hanly Furfey Lecture: Finding Religion in Everyday Life. Sociology of Religion, 75(2), 189-207.

Ammerman, N. T. (2016). Lived religion as an emerging field: An assessment of its contours and frontiers. Nordic Journal of religión and Society, 29(2), 83-99.

Ammerman, N. T. (2020). Rethinking religion: Toward a practice approach. American Journal of Sociology, 126(1), 6–51.

Anagnost, A. (1997). National past-times: Narrative, representation, and power in modern China. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Anagnost, A. (2004). The corporeal politics of quality (suzhi). Public culture, 16(2), 189-208.

Anagnost, A. (2008). From 'Class' to 'Social Strata': grasping the social totality in reform-era China. Third World Quarterly, 29, 497–519.

Anderson, B. (2016). Neoliberal affects. Progress in Human Geography, 40(6), 734-753.

Anthias, F. (2002). Where do I belong? Narrating collective identity and translocational positionality. Ethnicities, 2(4), 491–514.

Anthias, F. (2008). Thinking through the lens of translocational positionality: An intersectionality frame for understanding identity and belonging. Translocations, Migration and Change, 4(1), 5–20.

Anthias, F. (2012). Transnational mobilities, migration research and intersectionality. Nordic journal of migration research, 2(2), 102-110.

Asad, T. (1993). Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Asad, T. (2003). Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity. Berkeley: Stanford University Press.

Ashiwa, Y., & Wank, D. L. (Eds.). (2009). Making religion, making the state: The politics of religion in modern China. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Atia, M. (2012). "A way to paradise": Pious neoliberalism, Islam, and faith-based development. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 102(4), 808-827.

Avishai, O. (2008). "Doing religion" in a secular world: Women in conservative religions and the question of agency. Gender & Society, 22(4), 409-433.

Bailey, A. R., Brace, C., & Harvey, D. C. (2009). Three geographers in an archive: positions, predilections and passing comment on transient lives. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 34(2), 254-269.

Barker, E. (2003) The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must Be Joking! In Dawson, L. (Ed.), Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader(pp. 7-25). Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell

Bartolini, N., Chris, R., MacKian, S., & Pile, S. (2017). The place of spirit: Modernity and the geographies of spirituality. Progress in Human Geography, 41(3), 338-354.

Bateson, G. (1972). Steps to an ecology of mind: Collected essays in anthropology, psychiatry, evolution, and epistemology. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Bays, D. H. (2003). Chinese protestant Christianity today. The China Quarterly, 174, 488-504.

Bellar, W. (2017). Private practice: Using digital diaries and interviews to understand evangelical Christians' choice and use of religious mobile applications. New Media and Society, 19(1), 111–125.

Beaumont, J. (2008). Faith action on urban social issues. Urban Studies, 45(10), 2019-2034.

Beaumont, J. (Ed.). (2019). The Routledge handbook of postsecularity. London: Routledge.

Beaumont, J. (2022). The enlightened city. Political Geography, 97, 102616.

Beaumont, J., & Baker, C. (Eds.). (2011). Postsecular cities: Space, theory and practice. London: A&C Black.

Beaumont, J., & Cloke, P. (Eds.). (2012). Faith-Based Organisations and Exclusion in European Cities. Bristol: Policy Press.

Beaumont, J., & Dias, C. (2008). Faith-based organisations and urban social justice in the Netherlands. Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie, 99(4), 382-392.

Beaumont, J., Eder, K., & Mendieta, E. (2020). Reflexive secularization? Concepts, processes and antagonisms of postsecularity. European Journal of Social Theory, 23(3), 291-309.

Beckford, J. A. (2012). SSSR presidential address public religions and the postsecular: Critical reflections. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 51(1), 1-19.

Bender, C. (2003). Heaven's kitchen. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Bender, C., Cadge, W., Levitt, P., & Smilde, D.(2012).Introduction Religion on the Edge: De-centering and Re-centering. In Bender, C., Cadge, W., Levitt, P., & Smilde, D (Eds.), Religion on the Edge: Decentering and Re-centering the Sociology of Religion(pp.1-20). New York: Oxford University Press.

Blommaert, J. (2014). Infrastructures of superdiversity: Conviviality and language in an Antwerp neighborhood. European Journal of Cultural Studies, 17(4), 431-451.

Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (2005). The new spirit of capitalism. International journal of politics, culture, and society, 18(3), 161-188.

Bourgois, P. (2006). Anthropology in the global state of emergency. In Sanford, V., & Angel-Ajani, A. (Eds.), Engaged Observer: Anthropology, Advocacy, and Activism (pp. ix-xii). New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Brace, C., Bailey, A., Carter, S., Harvey, D., & Thomas, N. (2011). Emerging geographies of belief. In Brace, C., Brace, A. Bailey, S. Carter, D. Harvey, & N. Thomas (Eds.), Emerging geographies of belief (pp. 1-8). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Printing

Braidotti, R. (2008). In spite of the times: The postsecular turn in feminism. Theory, Culture and Society, 25(6), 1-24.

Brenner, N., Peck, J., & Theodore, N. (2010). Variegated neoliberalization: geographies, modalities, pathways. Global networks, 10(2), 182-222.

Brenner, N., & Theodore, N. (2002). Cities and the geographies of "actually existing neoliberalism." Antipode, 34(3), 349–379.

Brown, W. (2005). Edgework: Critical essays on knowledge and politics. Princeton University Press.

Brown, A. (2009, May 27). Chinese Calvinism Flourishes. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2009/may/27/china-calvin-christianity

Brydon-Miller, M. (2004). The terrifying truth: Interrogating systems of power and privilege and choosing to act. In P. Maguire, M. Brydon-Miller, & A. McIntyre (Eds.), Travelling companions: feminism, teaching and action research (pp. 3–19). Praeger Publishers.

Buckley, M. (2013). Locating neoliberalism in Dubai: Migrant workers and class struggle in the autocratic city. Antipode, 45(2), 256-274.

Bukamal, H. (2022). Deconstructing insider–outsider researcher positionality. British Journal of Special Education, 49(3), 327-349.

Cai, H. (2006). *蔡惠堯. 晚清深圳地區基督教傳播史論.* (Essay on the History of Spreading Christianity in Shen Zhen in Late Qing Dynasty.) *臺灣師大歷史學報*, (36), 131-152.

Calvey, D. (2008). The art and politics of covert research: doingsituated ethics' in the field. Sociology, 42(5), 905-918.

Calvey, D. (2017). Covert research: The art, politics and ethics of undercover fieldwork. Sage.

Campbell, H. A. (2012). Understanding the relationship between religion online and offline in a networked society. Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 80(1), 64-93.

Campbell, H. A. (Ed.). (2013). Introduction: The rise of the study of digital religion. In: H. A.Campbell, ed. Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds.London: Routledge. Pp. 1-21.

Campbell, H. A. (2016). Framing the human-technology relationship: How Religious Digital Creatives engage posthuman narratives. Social compass, 63(3), 302-318.

Campbell, H. A. (2017a). Surveying theoretical approaches within digital religion studies. New media & society, 19(1), 15-24.

Campbell, H. A. (2017b). Religious communication and technology. Annals of the International Communication Association, 41(3-4), 228-234.

Campbell, T. C. (2011). Improper life: Technology and biopolitics from Heidegger to Agamben. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Cao, N. (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, N. (2009). Raising the Quality of Belief. Suzhi and the Production of an Elite Protestantism. China Perspectives, 4, 54-65.

Cao, N. (2010). Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, power, and place in contemporary Wenzhou. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Cao, N. (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.

Cao, N. (2017). Spatial modernity, party building, and local governance: Putting the Christian cross-removal campaign in context. The China Review, 29-52.

Cao, N. (2018). The rise of field studies in religious research in the People's Republic of China. China Review, 18(1), 137-164.

Caretta, M. A., & Jokinen, J. C. (2017). Conflating privilege and vulnerability: A reflexive analysis of emotions and positionality in postgraduate fieldwork. The Professional Geographer, 69(2), 275-283.

Carlson, E. R. (2005). China's new regulations on religion: a small step, not a great leap, forward. BYU Law Review, 2005(3), 747-798.

Carspecken, F. P. (1996). Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide. Routledge.

Casanova, J. (1994). Public religions in the modern world. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Casanova, J. (2006). Rethinking secularization: A global comparative perspective. In Religion, globalization, and culture (pp. 101-120). Leiden: Brill.

Casanova, J. (2011). The secular, secularizations, secularisms. In C. Calhoun, M. Juergensmeyer, & J. VanAntwerpen (Ed), Rethinking secularism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Casanova, J. (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. Cambridge: Polity Press, 27-48.

Chan, K. W., & Zhang, L. (1999). The hukou system and rural-urban migration in China: Processes and changes. The China Quarterly,160, 818-855.

Chan, K. W. (2009). The Chinese hukou system at 50. Eurasian geography and economics, 50(2), 197-221.

Chan, K. W. (2010). The global financial crisis and migrant workers in China: 'There is no future as a labourer; returning to the village has no meaning'. International journal of urban and regional research, 34(3), 659-677.

Chan, K. W. (2018). Urbanization with Chinese Characteristics: The Hukou System and Migration. Routledge.

Chan, K. W., & Buckingham, W. (2008). Is China abolishing the hukou system?. The China Quarterly, 195, 582-606.

Chan, K. W., & Ren, Y. (2018). Children of migrants in China in the twenty-first century: trends, living arrangements, age-gender structure, and geography. Eurasian Geography and Economics, 59(2), 133-163.

Chan, S. H. (2016). Changing church–state relations in contemporary China: The case of Wenzhou Diocese. International Sociology, 31(4), 489-507.

Chattopadhyay, S. (2012). Getting personal while narrating the 'field': a researcher's journey to the villages of the Narmada valley. Gender, Place & Culture, 20(2), 137-159.

Chau, A. Y. (2008). Miraculous response: Doing popular religion in contemporary China. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Chau, A. Y(ed.) (2011). Religion in Contemporary China: Revitalization and Innovation. Routledge.

Chau, A. Y. (2019). Religion in China: Ties that bind. Medford: Polity.

Chen, C., & Fan, C. C. (2016). China's Hukou Puzzle: Why Don't Rural Migrants Want Urban Hukou? China Review, 16(3), 9-39.

Chen, C., & Huang, T. (2004). The emergence of a new type of Christians in China today. Review of Religious Research, 183-200.

Chen, L. (2014). *陳麗華. 香港客家想像機制的建立: 1850-1950 年代的香港基督教巴色會* (The Mechanism of the Hakka Imagination in Hong Kong: the Role Played by The Basel Mission in the 1850s-1950s.) *全球客家研究, (3), 139-162.*

Chen, N. (2017). Secularization, sacralization and the reproduction of sacred space: Exploring the industrial use of ancestral temples in rural Wenzhou, China. Social & Cultural Geography, 18(4), 530-552.

Chen, T. (2015). The workshop of the world: Censorship and the Internet novel Such Is This World. In China's Contested Internet, 19-43. Edited by Guobin Yang. NIAS Press: Copenhagen.

Chen, X. P., & Chen, C. C. (2004). On the intricacies of the Chinese guanxi: A process model of guanxi development. Asia Pacific Journal of Management, 21, 305-324.

Chen, X. & Song, Q. (2012, Auguest 30). *陈新华 & 宋钦年. 城市化进程中我国基督教信仰的变迁.*(The Changes of Chinese Christians' Faith in the Process of Urbanization). *普世社会科学研究网.* *http://www.pacilution.com/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=3652*

Chen, Y., & Williams, M. (2016). Subjective well-being in the new China: religion, social capital, and social status. The British Journal of Sociology, 67(4), 719-746.

Cheong, P. H., & Poon, J. P. (2009a). Weaving webs of faith: Examining Internet use and religious communication among Chinese Protestant transmigrants. Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, 2(3), 189-207.

Cheong, P. H., Poon, J. P., Huang, S., & Casas, I. (2009b). The Internet highway and religious communities: Mapping and contesting spaces in religion-online. The Information Society, 25(5), 291-302.

Cheong, P. H., & Ess, C. (2012). Introduction: Religion 2.0?: Relational and Hybridizing Pathways in Religion, Social Media, and Culture. Digital religion, social media and culture, 1-24.

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 38(4), 785-810.

Chow, A. (2014a). Calvinist public theology in urban China today. International Journal of Public Theology, 8(2), 158-175.

Chow, A. (2014b). New Calvinism in China? Posted on May 22. Available online: http://www.cswc.div.ed. ac. uk/2014/05/new-calvinism-in-china/ (accessed on 17 May 2020)

Chow, A. (2018). Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Chow, C. C. S., & Lee, J. T. H. (2016). Covert and Overt Activism: Christianity in 1950s Coastal China. Frontiers of History in China, 11(4), 579-599.

Cloke, P. (2010). Theo-ethics and radical faith-based praxis in the postsecular city. In: Molendijk A, Beaumont J, and Jedan C (eds) Exploring the Postsecular: The Religious,the Political and the Urban(pp. 223–241). Leiden: Brill.

Cloke, P. (2011). Emerging geographies of evil? Theo-ethics and postsecular possibilities. cultural geographies, 18(4), 475-493.

Cloke, P., & Beaumont, J. (2013). Geographies of postsecular rapprochement in the city1. Progress in Human Geography, 37(1), 27-51.

Cloke, P., Baker, C., Sutherland, C., & Williams, A. (2019). Geographies of postsecularity: Re-envisioning politics, subjectivity and ethics. London: Routledge.

Cloke, P., & Conradson, D. (2018). Transitional organisations, affective atmospheres and new forms of being-in-common: Post-disaster recovery in Christchurch, New Zealand. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 43(3), 360-376.

Cloke, P., Johnsen, S., & May, J. (2005). Exploring ethos? Discourses of 'charity ' in the provision of emergency services for homeless people. Environment and Planning A, 37(3), 385-402.

Cloke, P., May, J., & Williams, A. (2020). Postsecularities of care: In-common ethics and politics of 'the meantime (s)'. Cities, 100(2020) 102667.

Cloke, P., & Williams, A. (2018). Geographical landscapes of religion. In Baker, C., Crisp, B. R. & Dinham, A. (Ed.), Re-imagining Religion and Belief (pp. 33-54). Bristol: Policy Press.

Collins, P. H. (1986). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of Black feminist thought. Social problems, 33(6), s14-s32.

Collins, P. H. (1999). Reflections on the outsider within. Journal of Career Development, 26(1), 85-88.

Collins, P.H. (2000). Black Feminist Thought. London: Routledge.

Collins, P.H. (2015). Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas. Annual Review of Sociology 41: 1–20.

Collins, P.H. (2019) Intersectionality as critical social theory. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Annual Review of Sociology 41: 1–20.

Collins, P.H., & Bilge, S. (2016) Intersectionality. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Collins, R. (2004). Interaction ritual chains. Princeton university press.

Conradson, D. (2003). Spaces of care in the city: the place of a community drop-in centre. Social & Cultural Geography, 4(4), 507-525.

Conradson, D. (2008). Expressions of charity and action towards justice: faith-based welfare provision in urban New Zealand. Urban Studies, 45(10), 2117-2141.

Conradson, D. (2011). Care and caring. In Del Casino, V., Thomas, M., Cloke, P., & Panelli, R. (Eds.), A companion to social geography(pp. 454-471.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Cook, R. R. (2007). Wang Mingdao and the evolution of contextualized Chinese churches. In: Contextualization of Christianity in China: an evaluation in modern perspective,edited by Peter Chen-main Wang(pp. 209-223). Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica.

Crang, M., & Cook, I. (2007). Doing ethnographies. London: Sage.

Crockett, C. (2018). What is Postsecularism? American Book Review, 39(5), 6-14.

Crockett, C. (2021). Neoliberalism, Postsecularism, and the End of Religion. Religions, 12(8), 631.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum 140: 139–167.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. Stanford Law Review 43: 1241–1299.

Darling, J. (2011). Giving space: Care, generosity and belonging in a UK asylum drop-in centre. Geoforum, 42(4), 408-417.

Davelaar, M., & Kerstens, W. (2012). A Shelter from the Storm: Faith-Based Organisations and Providing Relief for the Homeless. In Beaumont, J., & Cloke, P. (Eds.), Faith-based organisations and exclusion in European cities (pp. 199-218). Cambridge MA: Policy Press.

Davie, G. (1999). Religion and modernity: the work of Danièle Hervieu-Léger. In Postmodernity, sociology and religion (pp. 101-117). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Davie, G. (2007). The sociology of religion. London: Sage.

Deng, G. (2007). *邓国胜. 宗教类NGO:宗教社会服务的新模式.* (Religious NGOs: the new model of religious social service.) *中国宗教, (8), 42-43.*

Denning, S. (2021). Three foodbanks in a decade of austerity: Foodbank affective atmospheres. Antipode, 53(4), 1018-1037.

Denning, S., Scriven, R., & Slatter, R. (2022). Three participatory geographers: reflections on positionality and working with participants in researching religions, spiritualities, and faith. Social & Cultural Geography, 23(6), 892-910.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. Medical education, 40(4), 314-321.

Dierckx D., Vranken J., Elander I. (2012). Changing Policies: How Faith-Based Organisations Participate in Poverty Policies. In Beaumont, J., & Cloke, P. (Eds.), Faith-based organisations and exclusion in European cities (pp. 155-172). Cambridge MA: Policy Press.

Dobbelaere, K. (2009). China challenges secularization theory. Social Compass, 56(3), 362-370.

Duan, Q. (2014). *段琪. 城镇化对中国基督教的影响.* (Impact of Urbanization on the Christianity in China). *中国宗教*,(2), 38-39.

Duara, P. (1996). Rescuing history from the nation: Questioning narratives of modern China. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Dunch, R. (2008). Christianity and 'adaptation to socialism'. In Yang, M. M. H. (Ed.), Chinese religiosities: Afflictions of modernity and state formation (pp. 155–178). Berkeley: University. of California Press.

Dwyer, C. (2015). Faith in suburbia: A shared photographic journey. Cultural Geographies, 22, 531–538.

Dwyer, C. (2016). Why does religion matter for cultural geographers?. Social & Cultural Geography, 17(6), 758-762.

Dwyer, C., Gilbert, D., & Shah, B. (2013). Faith and suburbia: Secularisation, modernity and the changing geographies of religion in London's suburbs. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 38(3), 403-419.

Eder, K. (2002). Europäische Säkularisierung—ein Sonderweg in die postsäkulare Gesellschaft? Eine theoretische Anmerkung. Berliner Journal für Soziologie, 12, 331-343.

Edgell, P. (2012). A cultural sociology of religion: New directions. Annual Review of Sociology, 38(1), 247-265.

Ehrkamp, P., & Nagel, C. (2014). "Under the radar": undocumented immigrants, Christian faith communities, and the precarious spaces of welcome in the US South. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 104(2), 319-328.

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (1995). Writing ethnographic fieldnotes. Chicago and London : University of Chicago Press.

Ernste, H. (2018). The geography of spheres: an introduction and critical assessment of Peter Sloterdijk's concept of spheres. Geographica Helvetica, 73(4), 273-284.

Ezzy, D.(2020). Lived religion in Possamai, A., & Blasi, A. J. (Eds.). The SAGE Encyclopedia of the Sociology of Religion. SAGE.

Fällman, F. (2009, June 6). Chinese Christianity Is More than Calvin. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/jun/05/religion

Fällman, F. (2010). Useful Opium? 'Adapted religion' and 'harmony' in contemporary China. Journal of Contemporary China, 19(67), 949-969.

Fällman, F. (2012). Calvin, Culture and Christ? Developments of Faith among Chinese Intellectuals. In Lim, F. K. G. (Ed.), Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-Cultural Perspectives(pp. 153–168). London and New York: Routledge.

Fan, C. C. (2004). The state, the migrant labor regime, and maiden workers in China. Political Geography, 23(3), 283-305.

Fan, C. C., & Chen, C. (2013). New-generation migrant workers in China. In F. Wu, F. Zhang & C. Webster (Eds.), Transient urbanism: migrants and urbanized villages in Chinese cities. New York: Routledge.

Fan, L., & Chen, N. (2014). *范丽珠 & 陈纳. 宗教信仰与城市新移民"乡—城"刍议—社会融入问题的另一个视角.* (Religion and Rural-Urban Immigration: An Approach to Study Assimilation in China.) *世界宗教文化,(2), 21-26.*

Fan, L., & Chen, N. (2015). The Religiousness of "Confucianism", and the Revival of Confucian Religion in China Today. Cultural Diversity in China, 1(1), 27-43.

Fan, L., Whitehead, E. E., & Whitehead, J. D. (2005). The Spiritual Search in Shenzhen Adopting and Adapting China's Common Spiritual Heritage. Nova Religio, 9(2), 50-61.

Fei, X. (1992). From the soil. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Feuchtwang, S., & Ming-Ming, W. (1991). The politics of culture or a contest of histories: representations of Chinese popular religion. Dialectical Anthropology, 16, 251-272.

Feuchtwang, S., & Wang, M. (2001). Grassroots charisma: four local leaders in China. London: Routledge.

Fiedler, K. (2010). China's "Christianity Fever" Revisited: Towards a Community-Oriented Reading of Christian Conversions in China. Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 39(4), 71-109.

Finlayson, C. C. (2012). Spaces of faith: incorporating emotion and spirituality in geographic studies. Environment and Planning A, 44(7), 1763-1778.

Firth, R. (2016). Somatic pedagogies: Critiquing and resisting the affective discourse of the neoliberal state from an embodied anarchist perspective. Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization, 16, 121-142.

Fisher, K. T. (2015). Positionality, subjectivity, and race in transnational and transcultural geographical research. Gender, Place & Culture, 22(4), 456-473.

Florence, E. (2017). How to Be a Shenzhener: Representations of Migrant Labor in Shenzhen's Second Decade. In O'Donnell, M. A., Wong, W., & Bach, J. (Eds.), Learning from Shenzhen: China's post-Mao

experiment from special zone to model city(pp.86-103). Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

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

Fong, V. L. (2004). Only hope: Coming of age under China's one-child policy. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Frost, J. K., & Youngblood, N. E. (2014). Online religion and religion online: Reform Judaism and web-based communication. Journal of Media and Religion, 13(2), 49-66.

Gandy, M. (2005). Cyborg urbanization: complexity and monstrosity in the contemporary city. International journal of urban and regional research, 29(1), 26-49.

Gao, Q. (2021). Reconstituting the neoliberal subjectivity of migrants: Christian theo-ethics and migrant workers in Shenzhen, China. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47(12), 2725-2744.

Gao, Q., & Qian, J. (2020). Migrant workers in an era of religious revival: industrial capitalism, labour and Christianity in Shenzhen. The China Quarterly, 241, 62-86.

Gao, Q., Qian, J., & Yuan, Z. (2018). Multi-scaled secularization or postsecular present? Christianity and migrant workers in Shenzhen, China. Cultural Geographies, 25(4), 553-570.

Gao, Q., Yin, D., Zhu, H., & Chen, X. (2021). Lived religion under neoliberal transition: work/leisure and migrant workers in Shenzhen, China. Social & Cultural Geography, 22(8), 1122-1142.

Gao, Q., & Hopkins, P. (2022). Using intersectionality to explore social inequalities amongst Christian family migrants in China. The Geographical Journal, 188(2), 177-189.

Gao, Q., Woods, O., Kong, L., & Shee, S. Y. (2024). Lived religion in a digital age: technology, affect and the pervasive space-times of 'new' religious praxis. Social & Cultural Geography, 25(1), 29-48.

Gao, S. (2011). *高师宁. 城市化过程与中国基督教.* (The Process of Urbanization and Christianity in China.) *宗教学研究,(2),117-123*.

Gershon, I. (2011). Neoliberal agency. Current Anthropology, 52(4), 537-555.

Gielis, R., & Van Houtum, H. (2012). Sloterdijk in the house! Dwelling in the borderscape of Germany and The Netherlands. Geopolitics, 17(4), 797-817.

Gladney, D. C. (2009). Islam in China: State policing and identity politics. Making religion, making the state, 151-178.

Gökarıksel, B. (2009). Beyond the officially sacred: religion, secularism, and the body in the production of subjectivity. Social & Cultural Geography, 10(6), 657-674.

Gökarıksel, B., & Secor, A. J. (2009). New transnational geographies of Islamism, capitalism and subjectivity: the veiling-fashion industry in Turkey. Area, 41(1), 6-18.

Gökarıksel, B., & Secor, A. (2010). Islamic-ness in the life of a commodity: veiling-fashion in Turkey. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 35(3), 313-333.

Gökarıksel, B., & Secor, A. (2015). Post-secular geographies and the problem of pluralism: Religion and everyday life in Istanbul, Turkey. Political Geography, 46, 21-30.

Gökarıksel, B., & Secor, A. (2017). Devout Muslim masculinities: The moral geographies and everyday practices of being men in Turkey. Gender, Place & Culture, 24(3), 381-402.

Goossaert, V., & Palmer, D. A. (2011). The religious question in modern China. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Graham, S., & Marvin, S. (1995). Telecommunications and the city: Electronic spaces, urban places. London: Routledge.

Graham, S., & Marvin, S. (2001). Splintering urbanism: Networked infrastructures, technological mobilities and the urban condition. London: Routledge.

Greenhalgh, S., & Winckler, E. A. (2005). Governing China's population: From Leninist to neoliberal biopolitics. Stanford University Press.

Gutierrez, C. O., & Hopkins, P. (2014). Introduction: young people, gender and intersectionality. Gender, Place & Culture, 22(3), 383–389.

Habermas, J. (2006). Religion in the public sphere. European Journal of Philosophy, 14(1), 1-25.

Habermas, J. (2008). Notes on post-secular society. New perspectives quarterly, 25(4), 17-29.

Habermas, J. (2010) An awareness of what is missing. In: Habermas, J., Brieskorn, N., Reder, M., Ricken, F., & Schmidt, J.(Eds.), An Awareness of What Is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Postsecular Age(pp. 15–23). Cambridge: Polity Press.

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

Hall, D. D. (Ed.). (1997). Lived religion in America: Toward a history of practice. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Hall, M. (2019). Everyday Life in Austerity: Family, Friends, and Intimate Relations. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Han, J., Meng, Y., & Qin, S. (2018). House Church: Investigating Chinese Urban Christians' Choice of Religious Practicing Site in Wuhan, China. Religions, 9(4), 100.

Han, S., & Nasir, K. M. (2015). Digital culture and religion in Asia. New York, NY: Routledge.

Haraway, D. (1988). Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. Feminist Studies 14(3), 575-599.

Harrington, A. (2007). Habermas and thePost-Secular Society'. European Journal of Social Theory, 10(4), 543-560.

Harris, R., & Isa, A. (2019). Islam by smartphone: reading the Uyghur Islamic revival on WeChat. Central Asian Survey, 38(1), 61-80.

Harwit, E. (2017). WeChat: Social and political development of China's dominant messaging app. Chinese Journal of Communication, 10(3), 312-327.

He, S., & Wang, K. (2016). China's new generation migrant workers' urban experience and well-being. In Wang, D., & He, S. (Eds.), Mobility, sociability and well-being of urban living (pp. 67-91). Berlin : Springer.

Helland, Christopher. (Ed.). (2000). Online-Religion/religion-online and Virtual Communities. In Religion on the Internet: Research Prospects and Promises. Edited by Jeffrey K. Hadden and Douglas E. Cowan. New York: JAI Press.

Herod, A. (1999). Reflections on interviewing foreign elites: praxis, positionality, validity, and the cult of the insider. Geoforum, 30(4), 313-327.

Hervieu-Léger, D. (1986). Vers un nouveau christianisme?: introduction à la sociologie du christianisme occidental. Paris: Cerf.

Hervieu-Léger, D. (2002). Space and religion: new approaches to religious spatiality in modernity. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 26(1), 99-105.

Hingley, L., Vermander, B., & Zhang, L. (2016). (Re) locating sacredness in Shanghai. Social Compass, 63(1), 38-56.

Hitchen, E. (2021). The affective life of austerity: Uncanny atmospheres and paranoid temporalities. Social & Cultural Geography, 22(3), 295-318.

Hjarvard, S. (2011). The mediatisation of religion: Theorising religion, media and social change. Culture and religion, 12(02), 119-135.

Hjarvard, S. (2016). Mediatization and the changing authority of religion. Media, Culture & Society, 38(1), 8-17.

Hoffman, L. M. (2010). Patriotic professionalism in urban China: Fostering talent. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2005). Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind (Vol. 2). New York: Mcgraw-hill.

Holloway, J. (2006). Enchanted spaces: The séance, affect, and geographies of religion. Annals of the association of American geographers, 96(1), 182-187.

Holloway, J. (2011). Tracing the emergent in geographies of religion and belief. In C. Brace, A. Bailey,S. Carter, D. Harvey, & N. Thomas (Eds.), Emerging geographies of belief (pp. 30–52). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars

Holloway, J. (2013). The space that faith makes: Towards a (hopeful) ethos of engagement. In J. Hopkins, L. Kong, & E. Olson (Eds.), Religion and place: Landscape, politics, and piety (pp. 203–218). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Holloway, J., & Valins, O. (2002). Placing religion and spirituality in geography. Social & Cultural Geography,3(1), 5-9.

Holstein, J. A., & Gubrium, J. F. (Eds.). (2008). Handbook of constructionist research. Guilford Publications.

Homer, L. 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.

Hoover, S. M., & Clark, L. S. (2002). Practicing religion in the age of the media: Explorations in media, religion, and culture. New York: Columbia University Press.

Hoover, S. M. (2006). Religion in the media age. London and New York:Routledge.

Hopkins, P. (2009). Women, men, positionalities and emotion: Doing feminist geographies of religion. ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies, 8(1), 1-17.

Hopkins, P., Kong, L., & Olson, E. (Eds.). (2013). Religion and place: Landscape, politics and piety. Dordrecht: Springer.

Hopkins, P. (2019). Social geography I: Intersectionality. Progress in Human Geography, 43(5), 937–947.

Hopkins, P., & Noble, G. (2009). Masculinities in place: situated identities, relations and intersectionality. Social & Cultural Geography, 10(8), 811–819.

Hovorka, A. (2015). Feminism and animals: exploring interspecies relations through intersectionality, performativity and standpoint. Gender, Place and Culture, 22(1), 1-19.

Howell, J. (2019). NGOs and Civil Society: The Politics of Crafting a Civic Welfare Infrastructure in the Hu–Wen Period. The China Quarterly, 237, 58-81.

Huang, J., & Yang, F. (2005). The cross faces the loudspeakers: a village church perseveres under state power. In Yang, F., & Tamney, J. (Eds.), State, Market, and Religions in Chinese Societies (pp. 41–62). Leiden: Brill.

Huang, J. (2012). *黄剑波. 都市里的乡村教会: 中国城市化与民工基督徒.* (Village Church in the City: Chinese Urbanization and Migrant Christian.) *香港:道风书社.*

Huang, J. (2014). Being Christians in urbanizing China: the epistemological tensions of the rural churches in the city. Current Anthropology, 55(S10), S238-S247.

Huang, J., & Hu, M. (2017). Becoming Christians: prayers and subject formation in an urban church in China. Approaching Religion, 7(1), 46-54.

Huang, K. H. (2014). Dyadic Nexus Fighting Two-Front Battles: A Study of the Microlevel Process of the Official-Religion-State Relationship in China. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 53(4), 706-721.

Huang, K. H. (2015). *黃克先. 区隔但交缠互赖的信仰复振:中国城市教会中农村移民的宗教生活.* (Segmented yet Entangled, Interdependent Faith Revivals: Rural Migrants' Lived Religion in Urban Chinese Churches.) *台灣社會學*, (30), 55-98.

Huang, K. H. (2021). Governing an "Undesirable" Religion. In K. S. Tsai, C.C. Chang, & S.C. Hsu (Eds.), Evolutionary Governance in China(pp.362-386). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center.

Huang, W. (2016). WeChat Together about the Buddha: The Construction of Sacred Space and Religious Community in Shanghai through Social Media. In Religion and Media in China (pp. 124-142). Routledge

Huang, W. (2020, Octorber 19). Why China might have had the largest unknown modern Calvinist revival movement in recent history. MercatorNet. https://mercatornet.com/why-china-might-have-had-the-largest-unknown-modern-calvinist-revival-movement-in-recent-history/67455/

Jacka, T. (2009). Cultivating citizens: Suzhi (quality) discourse in the PRC. positions: Asia Critique, 17(3), 523-535.

Ji, Z. (2008) Secularization as religious restructuring: Statist institutionalization of Chinese Buddhism and its paradoxes. In Yang, M. M. H. (Ed.), Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation(pp.233–260). Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jin, Z., & Qiu, Y (2012). *金泽 & 邱永辉. 宗教蓝皮书——中国宗教报告 2012.* (Religious Blue Book—China Religion Report 2012.) *北京:社会科学文献出版社*

Johnson, I. (2017). The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao. New York: Pantheon Books Christian Values in Communist China.

Kang, J. (2016). House church Christianity in China: from rural preachers to city pastors. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kang, J. (2019). The Rise of Calvinist Christianity in Urbanising China. Religions, 10(8), 481.

Kang, J. (2020). Rural to urban Protestant house churches in China. In Feuchtwang, S. (Ed.), Handbook on religion in China (pp. 450-476). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Kao, C. Y. (2009). The Cultural Revolution and the emergence of Pentecostal-style Protestantism in China. Journal of Contemporary Religion, 24(2), 171-188.

Kartch, F. (2017). Narrative interviewing. The SAGE encyclopedia of communication research methods, 1, 1072-1075.

Kipnis, A. (2007). Neoliberalism reified: suzhi discourse and tropes of neoliberalism in the People's Republic of China. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 13(2), 383-400.

Kluver, R., & Cheong, P. H. (2007). Technological modernization, the Internet, and religion in Singapore. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 12(3), 1122-1142.

Knapp, G. A. (2005). Race, class, gender: Reclaiming baggage in fast travelling theories. European Journal of Women's Studies, 12(3), 249-265.

Klinenberg, E. (2002). Heat wave: A social autopsy of disaster in Chicago. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Klinenberg, E. (2018). Palaces for the people: How social infrastructure can help fight inequality, polarization, and the decline of civic life. London: Penguin.

Knibbe, K., & Kupari, H. (2020). Theorizing lived religion: introduction. Journal of Contemporary Religion, 35(2), 157-176.

Koesel, K. J. (2013). The rise of a Chinese house church: The organizational weapon. The China Quarterly, 215, 572-589.

Kong, L. (2001). Mapping 'new'geographies of religion: politics and poetics in modernity. Progress in human geography, 25(2), 211-233.

Kong, L. (2010). Global shifts, theoretical shifts: Changing geographies of religion. Progress in human geography, 34(6), 755-776.

Kong, L., & Qian, J. (2018). Dialogue with religious life in Asia. In Beaumont, J. (Ed.), The Routledge Handbook of Postsecularity (pp.258-268). London and New York:Routledge.

Kusek, W. A., & Smiley, S. L. (2014). Navigating the city: gender and positionality in cultural geography research. Journal of Cultural Geography, 31(2), 152-165.

Laikwan, P. (2022). China's post-socialist governmentality and the garlic chives meme: Economic sovereignty and biopolitical subjects. Theory, Culture & Society, 39(1), 81-100.

Lancione, M., & McFarlane, C. (2016). Life at the urban margins: Sanitation infra-making and the potential of experimental comparison. Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 48(12), 2402–2421.

Larner, W. (2003). Neoliberalism?. Environment and planning D: society and space, 21(5), 509-512.

Latham, A., & Layton, J. (2019). Social infrastructure and the public life of cities: Studying urban sociality and public spaces. Geography Compass, 13(7), e12444.

Lather, P. (2001). Postbook: Working the ruins of feminist ethnography. Signs: Journal of women in culture and society, 27(1), 199-227.

Latour, B. (2011). Some experiments in art and politics. E-flux Journal, 23(23), 1-7.

Latour, B. (2018). Beyond belief: Religion as the 'dynamite of the people'. In The Routledge handbook of postsecularity (pp. 25-37). Routledge.

Lee, J. (2007). Christianity in contemporary China: An update. J. Church & St., 49, 277.

Lee, J. T. H. (2014). Church-State Accommodation in China's 'Harmonious Society'. In Clark, A. E. (Ed.), A Voluntary Exile: Chinese Christianity and Cultural Conversion since 1552 (pp. 173-198). Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press.

Ley, D. (2008). The immigrant church as an urban service hub. Urban Studies, 45(10), 2057-2074.

Ley, D. (2011) Preface. In: Beaumont, J., & Baker, C. (Eds.), Postsecular Cities: Religious Space, Theory and Practice (pp. xii-xiv). London: Continuum.

Ley, David, & Tse, J. K. (2013). Homo religiosus? Religion and immigrant subjectivities. In: Kong L, Olson E, and Hopkins PE (Eds.), Religion and place: Landscape, politics, piety (pp. 149-165). New York: Springer.

Li, X., Stanton, B., Fang, X., & Lin, D. (2006). Social stigma and mental health among rural-to-urban migrants in China: A conceptual framework and future research needs. World health & population, 8(3), 14.

Liang, Y. (2014). Religious Revival in Rural China: Ethnographic Reflections on the State and Morality. The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology, 15(5), 391-395.

Liang, Y. (2017). Religious revival in rural China and the fate of 'religion' in China. Chinese journal of sociology, 3(2), 268-290.

Lim, K. G. F. (2020). Religion and development ethics in global perspective: a case study of a foreign Christian NGO in China. Journal of Contemporary Religion, 35(1), 13-30.

Liu, Y., He, S., & Fulong, W. U. (2008). Urban pauperization under China's social exclusion: A case study of Nanjing. Journal of Urban Affairs, 30(1), 21-36.

Liu, Y., Li, Z., & Breitung, W. (2012). The social networks of new-generation migrants in China's urbanized villages: A case study of Guangzhou. Habitat International, 36(1), 192-200.

Lövheim, M. (2005). Young people and the use of the internet as transitional space. Online–Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, 1(1).

Lu, Y., Wu, Y., & Zhang, C. (2019). *卢云峰, 吴越, &* 张春泥. *中国到底有多少基督徒?——基于中国家庭追踪调查的估计*. (How Many Protestants Are There in China: An Estimate Based on China Family Panel Studies.) *开放时代*, (01),165-178.

Luo, X., & Wang, C. (2003). *罗霞 &王春光. 新生代农村流动人口的外出动因与行动选择*. (Causes and Choices of Migration for the New Generation of Rural-Urban migrants). *浙江社会科学*, (01),109–113.

Luova, O. (2017). Charity paradigm change in contemporary China: From anti-socialist activity to civic duty. China Information, 31(2), 137-154.

Lutz, J. G., & Lutz, R. R. (2015). Hakka Chinese Confront Protestant Christianity, 1850-1900: with the autobiographies of eight Hakka Christians, and commentary. Routledge.

Ma, L., & Li, J. (2018). Surviving the state, remaking the church: A sociological portrait of Christians in Mainland China. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications.

Maddrell, A., & Della Dora, V. (2013). Crossing surfaces in search of the Holy: landscape and liminality in contemporary Christian pilgrimage. Environment and Planning A, 45(5), 1105–1126.

Madsen, R. (2010). The upsurge of religion in China. Journal of Democracy, 21(4), 58-71.

Madsen, R. (2012). Signs and wonders: Christianity and hybrid modernity in China. In Christianity in contemporary China, ed. Francis Khek Gee Lim,17–30. Oxon: Routledge.

Madsen, R. (Ed.). (2021). The Sinicization of Chinese Religions: From Above and Below. Leiden: Brill.

Mahan, J. H. (2012). Religion and media. Religion Compass, 6(1), 14-25.

Massey, D. (2004) Imagining the field. In Pryke, M., Rose, G. & Whatmore, S.(Eds.),Using Social Theory: Thinking Through Research(pp. 71-88). London: Sage

Matheus, F. D. B., Pavanini, M., & Lemmens, P. (2023). Peter Sloterdijk's Philosophy of Technology: From Anthropogenesis to the Anthropocene. Technophany: A Journal for Philosophy and Technology, 1(2), 84-123.

May, J., & Cloke, P. (2013). Modes of attentiveness: Reading for difference in geographies of homelessness. Antipode, 46(4), 894–920.

McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 30(3), 1771–1800.

McCarthy, S. K. (2013). Serving society, repurposing the state: Religious charity and resistance in China. The China Journal, (70), 48-72.

McDowell, L. (1992). Doing gender: feminism, feminists and research methods in human geography. Transactions of the institute of British Geographers, 399-416.

McDowell, L. (2008). Thinking through work: complex inequalities, constructions of difference and transnational migrants. Progress in human geography, 32(4), 491-507.

McFarlane, C., & Robinson, J. (2012). Introduction—experiments in comparative urbanism. Urban Geography, 33(6), 765–773.

McFarlane, C., Silver, J., & Truelove, Y. (2017). Cities within cities: intra-urban comparison of infrastructure in Mumbai, Delhi and Cape Town. Urban Geography, 38(9), 1393–1417.

McGregor, J. (2012). Rethinking detention and deportability: Removal centres as spaces of religious revival. Political Geography, pp. 31, 236–246.

McGuire, M. B. (2008). Lived religion: Faith and practice in everyday life. Oxford University Press.

McGuire, M. B. (2016). Individual sensory experiences, socialized senses, and everyday lived religion in practice. Social Compass, 63(2), 152-162.

McGinty, A. M. (2023). Lived Islam: Embodied Identities and Everyday Practices among American Muslim Youth. Annals of the American Association of Geographers, 113(3), 756-770.

Monbiot G (2017) Out of the Wreckage: A New Politics for an Age of Crisis. New York: Verso Books.

Morin, M. E. (2009). Cohabitating in the globalised world: Peter Sloterdijk's global foams and Bruno Latour's cosmopolitics. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 27(1), 58-72.

Moss, P. (1995). Embeddedness in practice, numbers in context: the politics of knowing and doing. The Professional Geographer, 47(4), 442-449.

Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. Geoforum, 30(4), 337-350.

Nagar, R., & Geiger, S. (2007). Reflexivity and positionality in feminist fieldwork revisited. In: A. Tickell, E. Sheppard, J. Peck, and T. Barnes, eds. Politics and practice in economic geography. London: Sage, 267–278.

Nast, H. J. (1994). Women in the field: critical feminist methodologies and theoretical perspectives: opening remarks on "women in the field". The professional geographer, 46(1), 54-66.

Neitz, M. J. (2011). Lived religion: Signposts of where we have been and where we can go from here. In Giordan, G., & Swatos Jr, W. H. (Eds.), Religion, spirituality and everyday practice (pp. 45-55). Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands.

Ng, E. (2020). The mind and the Devil: porosity and discernment in two Chinese charismatic-style churches. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, 26(S1), 95-113.

Ngok, K. (2012). Serving Migrant Workers: A Challenging Public Service Issue in China. Australian Journal of Public Administration, 71(2), 178–190.

Nilsson, M., & Tesfahuney, M. (2019). What Space for Female Subjectivity in the Post-Secular? Theory, Culture & Society, 36(7-8), 173-192.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2011). Sacred and secular: Religion and politics worldwide. Cambridge University Press.

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: The hermeneutics of snowball sampling in qualitative research. International Journal of social research methodology, 11(4), 327-344.

O'Donnell, M. A., Wong, W., & Bach, J. (Eds.). (2017). Learning from Shenzhen: China's post-Mao experiment from special zone to model city. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Olson, E., Hopkins, P., Pain, R., & Vincett, G. (2013). Retheorizing the postsecular present: Embodiment, spatial transcendence, and challenges to authenticity among young Christians in Glasgow, Scotland. Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 103(6), 1421-1436.

Ong, A. (2006). Neoliberalism as exception: Mutations of citizenship and sovereignty. Durham: Duke University Press.

Ong, A. (2007). Neoliberalism as a mobile technology. Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 32(1), 3-8.

Oosterbaan, M. (2014a). Public religion and urban space in Europe. Social & Cultural Geography, 15(6), 591-602.

Oosterbaan, M. (2014b). Religious experiences of stasis and mobility in contemporary Europe: undocumented Pentecostal Brazilians in Amsterdam and Barcelona. Social & Cultural Geography, 15(6), 664-682.

Orsi, R. (1997). Everyday miracles: The study of lived religion. In D. Hall (Ed.), Lived religion in America: Towards a history of practice (pp. 3–21). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Orsi, R. (2003). Is the study of lived religion irrelevant to the world we live in? Special presidential plenary address, Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Salt Lake City, November 2, 2002. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 42(2), 169-174.

Orsi, R. A. (2010). The Madonna of 115th Street: faith and community in Italian Harlem, 1880-1950. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Overmyer, D. L. (2003). Religion in China today: introduction. The China Quarterly, 307-316.

Palmer, D. A., & Winiger, F. (2019). Secularization, sacralization and subject formation in modern China. In Dean, K., & Van der Veer, P. (Eds.), The Secular in South, East, and Southeast Asia, (pp. 83-105). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Park, J. K., Cho, K., & Han, S. (2017). Religion and Media: No Longer a Blindspot in Korean Academia: Guest Editors' Introduction. Journal of Korean Religions, 8(2), 5-10.

Peng, L. (1996). Church and state relations in China: Characteristics and trends. Journal of Contemporary China, 5(11), 69-79.

Potter, P. B. (2003). Belief in control: Regulation of religion in China. The China Quarterly, 174, 317-337.

Povinelli, E. A. (2016). Geontologies: A requiem to late liberalism. Durham: Duke University Press.

Power, E. R., & Mee, K. J. (2020). Housing: an infrastructure of care. Housing Studies, 35(3), 484-505.

Power, E. R., Wiesel, I., Mitchell, E., & Mee, K. J. (2022). Shadow care infrastructures: Sustaining life in post-welfare cities. Progress in Human Geography, 46(5), 1165-1184.

Probst, B. (2015). The eye regards itself: Benefits and challenges of reflexivity in qualitative social work research. Social work research, 39(1), 37-48.

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

Pun, N. (2004). Engendering Chinese modernity: the sexual politics of dagongmei in a dormitory labour regime. Asian Studies Review, 28(2), 151-165.

Pun, N. (2005). Made in China: Women factory workers in a global workplace. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Pun, N. (2016). Migrant labor in China: Post-socialist transformations. London, England: Polity.

Pun, N., & Lu, H. (2010). Neoliberalism, urbanism and the plight of construction workers in China. World Review of Political Economy, 127-141.

Pun, N., & Smith, C. (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, G., Liang, Z., & Li, X. (2014). Christian conversion and the re-imagining of illness and healthcare in rural China. Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology, 15(5), 396-413.

Qian, J. (2019). Redeeming the Chinese modernity? Zen Buddhism, culture-led development and local governance in Xinxing County, China. Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 51(1), 187-205.

Qian, J., & An, N. (2021). Urban theory between political economy and everyday urbanism: desiring machine and power in a saga of urbanization. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 45(4), 679-695.

Qian, J., & Florence, E. (2021). Migrant worker museums in China: public cultures of migrant labour in state and grassroots initiatives. Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47(12), 2706-2724.

Qian, J., & Guo, J. G. (2019). Migrants on exhibition: The emergence of migrant worker museums in China as a neoliberal experiment on governance. Journal of Urban Affairs, 41(3), 305-323.

Qu, H. (2011). Religious Policy in the People's Republic of China: an alternative perspective. Journal of Contemporary China, 20(70),433-448.

Reny, M. E. (2018). Compliant Defiance: Informality and Survival Among Protestant House Churches in China. Journal of Contemporary China, 27(111), 472-485.

Robbins, J. (2009). Pentecostal networks and the spirit of globalization: On the social productivity of ritual forms. Social Analysis, 53(1), 55–66.

Rose, G. (1997) 'Situating knowledge, positionality, and other tactics', Progress in Human Geography 21(3): 305–20.

Rose, M. (2010). Pilgrims: An ethnography of sacredness. cultural geographies, 17(4), 507-524.

Rubin, J. W., Smilde, D., & Junge, B. (2014). Lived Religion and Lived Citizenship in Latin America's Zones of Crisis: Introduction. Latin American Research Review, 7-26.

Secor, A. (2007). Afterword. In K. M. Morin., & J. K. Guelke(Eds.), Women, Religion and Space: Global Perspectives on Gender and Faith (pp.148–58). Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.

Schinkel, W., & Noordegraaf-Eelens, L. (2011). Peter Sloterdijk's spherological acrobatics: An exercise in introduction. In Schinkel, W., & Noordegraaf-Eelens, L.(Eds), Media Res: Peter Sloterdijk's Spherological Poetics of Being(pp. 7-28). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Schinkel, W., & Van Houdt, F. (2010). The double helix of cultural assimilationism and neo-liberalism: citizenship in contemporary governmentality. The British journal of sociology, 61(4), 696-715.

Schroeder, R., Heather, N., & Lee, R. M. (1998). The Sacred and the Virtual: Religion in Multi-User Virtual Reality. Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 4(2).

Schumaker, J. (2016, April 2016). The Demoralized Mind. The New Internationalist. https://newint.org/columns/essays/2016/04/01/psycho-spiritual-crisis

Shi, L. (2016). *石丽. 网络宗教、网络社会与社会治理研究—以 S 市调研为例.* (Research on network religion, network society, and social governance: a case study of S city) *世界宗教文化*,2016(5):18-23.

Simandan, D. (2019). Revisiting positionality and the thesis of situated knowledge. Dialogues in human geography, 9(2), 129-149.

Sloterdijk, P. (2007). Foam-City. Log, No. 9(Winter/Spring 2007), 63-76.

Sloterdijk, P. (2009). Airquakes (E. Mendieta, Trans.). Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 27(1), 41-57.

Sloterdijk, P. (2011). Spheres Volume I: Bubbles Microspherology. Los Angeles: Semiotexte.

Sloterdijk, P. (2014). Spheres Volume II: Globes Macrospherology. Los Angeles: Semiotexte.

Sloterdijk, P. (2016). Spheres Volume III: Foams Plural Spherology. Los Angeles: Semiotexte.

Smith, C., & Pun, N. (2006). The dormitory labour regime in China as a site for control and resistance. The international journal of human resource management, 17(8), 1456-1470.

Smith, J. (2014) How (not) to be secular: Reading Charles Taylor. Michigan and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Solinger, D. (1999). Contesting citizenship in urban China: Peasant migrants, the state, and the logic of the market. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Soyini Madison, D. (2006). The dialogic performative in critical ethnography. Text and Performance Quarterly, 26(4), 320-324.

Springer, S. (2020). Caring geographies: The COVID-19 interregnum and a return to mutual aid. Dialogues in Human Geography, 10(2), 112-115.

Star, S. L. (1999). The ethnography of infrastructure. American Behavioural Scientist, 43(3), 377–391.

Starr, C. (2016). Wang Yi and the 95 theses of the Chinese reformed church. Religions, 7(12), 142.

Stewart, A. (2016). Chinese Muslims and the global ummah: Islamic revival and ethnic identity among the Hui of Qinghai Province. London and New York: Routledge.

Sultana, F. (2017). Reflexivity. In International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology (Eds D. Richardson, N. Castree, M.F. Goodchild, A. Kobayashi, W. Liu and R.A. Marston). https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118786352.wbieg0686

Sutherland, C. (2017). Theography: Subject, theology, and praxis in geographies of religion. Progress in Human Geography, 41(3), 321-337.

Sun, W. (2009). Suzhi on the move: Body, place, and power. positions: east asia cultures critique, 17(3), 617-642.

Sun, W. (2014). Subaltern China: Rural migrants, media, and cultural practices. Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Szonyi, M. (2009). Secularization theories and the study of Chinese religions. Social Compass, 56(3), 312-327.

Tam, J., & Hasmath, R. (2015). Navigating uncertainty: The survival strategies of religious NGOs in China. Journal of Civil Society, 11(3), 283-299.

Tang, D., & Wang, Y.(2015). *唐冬眉& 王艳霞. 虔贞女校.* (Pious Virgins Girls' School.) *广州:花城出版社.*

Tang, M. (2009). *唐名辉. 在线宗教浏览行为的基本特征探索*. (Basic traits of browsing behaviours in online religion.) *宗教研究*,(3), 163-166.

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

Taves, A. (2009). Religious experience reconsidered: A building-block approach to the study of religion and other special things. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Taylor, C. (2007). A secular age. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Taylor, Y., Falconer, E., & Snowdon, R. (2014). Sounding religious, sounding queer: finding spaces of reconciliation through congregational music. Ecclesial Practices, 1(2), 229-249.

Tiedemann, R. G. (2020). Protestant Christianities in contemporary China. In Handbook on religion in China (pp. 394-449), edited by Stephan Feuchtwang. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Tong, C.K., & Kong, L. (2000). Religion and modernity: Ritual transformations and the reconstruction of space and time. Social & Cultural Geography, 1(1), 29-44.

Truelove, Y., & Ruszczyk, H. A. (2022). Bodies as urban infrastructure: Gender, intimate infrastructures and slow infrastructural violence. Political geography, 92, 102492.

Tse-Hei Lee, J. (2007). Christianity in contemporary China: An update. J. Church & St., 49, 277.

Tse, J. K. (2014). Grounded theologies: 'Religion' and the 'secular' in human geography. Progress in Human Geography, 38(2), 201-220.

Tu, F. (2016). WeChat and civil society in China. Communication and the Public, 1(3), 343-350.

Vala, C., & Huang, J. (2019). Online and Offline Religion in China: A Protestant WeChat "Alter-Public" through the Bible Handcopying Movement. Religions, 10(10), 561.

Vala, C. T., Huang, J., & Sun, J. (2015). Protestantism, community service and evangelism in contemporary China. International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church, 15(4), 305-319.

Van der Veer, P. (2011). Religion and education in a secular age: A comparative perspective. Extrême-Orient Extrême-Occident, (33), 235-245.

Vasilaki, R. (2016). The politics of postsecular feminism. Theory, Culture and Society, 33(2), 103-123.

Vásquez, M. (2011). More than belief: A materialist theory of religion. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Vrasti, W. (2009). "How to use affective competencies in late capitalism", paper presented to British International Studies Association (BISA) Annual Conference, University of Leicester, 14–16 December, http://tiny.cc/d344s

Wang, B., Li, X., Stanton, B., & Fang, X. (2010). The influence of social stigma and discriminatory experience on psychological distress and quality of life among rural-to-urban migrants in China. Social Science & Medicine, 71(1), 84-92.

Wang, C. (2001). Social Identity of the New Generation of Rural Hobo and Merger of Urban and Rural. Sociological Research, 3(2), 63-76.

Wang, C. (2006). *王春光. 农村流动人口的"半城市化"问题研究.* (A Study of Floating Rural People's 'Semi-urbanization'.) *社会学研究, 5(7), 107-122.*

Wang, Y. (2015). The mystery revealed—Intersectionality in the black box: An analysis of female migrants' employment opportunities in urban China. Hypatia, 30(4), 862-880.

Wang, Y., & Tong, X. (2004). *王毅杰 & 童星. 流动农民社会支持网探析.* (The social support network of rural-urban migrants.) *社会学研究, 2004, (2), 42-48.*

Watson, A., & Till, K. E. (2010). Ethnography and participant observation. The SAGE handbook of qualitative geography, 1, 121-137.

Weber, M. (2001). The Protestant ethic and the spirit of Capitalism. New York: Routledge.

Wilkinson, D. (2017). Is there such a thing as animism? Journal of the American Academy of Religion, 85(2), 289-311.

Wong, P. W., Pang, W. N., & Tong, J. (2000). The Three-Self Churches and 'Freedom' of Religion in China, 1980–1997. Chinese Law and Government, 33(6), 37-39.

Wu, F. (2008). China's great transformation: Neoliberalization as establishing a market society. Geoforum, 39(3), 1093-1096.

Wu, F. (2010). How neoliberal is China's reform? The origins of change during transition. Eurasian Geography and Economics, 51(5), 619-631.

Wu, K. (2017). The philanthropic turn of religions in post-Mao China: Bureaucratization, professionalization, and the making of a moral subject. Modern China, 43(4), 425-455.

Wielander, G. (2013). Christian values in communist China. Oxon and New York: Routledge.

Wilford, J. (2010). Sacred archipelagos: geographies of secularization. Progress in Human Geography, 34(3), 328-348.

Williams, A. (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.

Williams, A. (2016). Spiritual landscapes of Pentecostal worship, belief, and embodiment in a therapeutic community: New critical perspectives. Emotion, Space and Society, 19, 45-55.

Williams, A. (2020). Lived religion, worship and conversion: Ethnographic reflections in an abstinence-based Christian therapeutic community. In Sremac, S., & Jindra, I. W. (Eds.), Lived religion, conversion and recovery: Negotiating of self, the social, and the sacred (pp.13-42.). London: Palgrave.

Williams, A., Cloke, P., & Thomas, S. (2012). Co-constituting neoliberalism: Faith-based organisations, co-option, and resistance in the UK. Environment and Planning A, 44(6), 1479-1501.

Williams, R. R. (2010). Space for God: Lived religion at work, home, and play. Sociology of Religion, 71(3), 257–279.

Wikle, T. A. (2015). Technology and the changing geography of religious media. In Brunn, S. D.(Ed.), The Changing World Religion Map: Sacred Places, Identities, Practices and Politics (pp. 3751-3764). New York and London: Springer.

Woods, O. (2020). The Creation of Digitally-Mediated Christian Migrant Communities. In O. Woods, C. Gomes, & L. Kong (Eds.), Religion, Hypermobility and Digital Media in Global Asia: Faith, Flows and Fellowship (pp. 27–46). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Wu, Q. (2016). *吴启琳. 虔贞女校: 近世深圳客家文化符号的折射.* (Pious Virgins Girls' School: Reflections of Modern Shenzhen's Hakka Cultural Symbol.) *地方文化研究,* (6), 87-93.

Xu, Q., Guan, X., & Yao, F. (2011). Welfare program participation among rural-to-urban migrant workers in China. International Journal of Social Welfare, 20(1), 10-21.

Xu, S., & Campbell, H. A. (2018). Surveying digital religion in China: Characteristics of religion on the Internet in Mainland China. The Communication Review, 21(4), 253-276.

Xue, X., & Ma, C. (2012). *薛熙明, & 马创. 20 世纪以来广东基督教文化区的形成与演变.* (Formation and Evolution of Christian Culture Area in Guangdong since the 20th Century.) *地理研究, 2010, (2): 303 - 312.*

Xue, X., Zhu,H.,&Chen,X.(2010). *薛熙明, 朱竑, &陈晓亮. 19 世纪以来基督教新教在广东的空间扩散模式.* (Spatial diffusion patterns of Protestants in Guangdong since 19th century.) *地理研究, (2), 303 -312.*

Yan, H. R. (2003). Neoliberal governmentality and neohumanism: Organizing suzhi/value flow through labor recruitment networks. Cultural Anthropology, 18(4), 493-523.

Yan, L.K. (2013). Zhalie zhi (The chronicle of Zhalie). Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, Shanghai.

Yang, C. K. (1961). Religion in Chinese Society. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Yang, F. (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, F. (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, F. (2006). The red, black, and gray markets of religion in China. The Sociological Quarterly, 47(1), 93-122.

Yang, F. (2010). Religion in China under communism: A shortage economy explanation. Journal of Church and State, 52(1), 3-33.

Yang, F. (2011). Religion in China: Survival and Revival under Communist Rule. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yang, F. (2017). From cooperation to resistance: Christian responses to intensified suppression in China today. The Review of Faith & International Affairs, 15(1), 79-90.

Yang, F. (2018). The Failure of the Campaign to Demolish Church Crosses in Zhejiang Province, 2013–2016: A Temporal and Spatial Analysis. Review of Religion and Chinese Society, 5(1), 5-25.

Yang, F., Pettit, J., & White, C. (2021). Shades of gray in the changing religious markets of China (Vol. 28). Leiden: Brill.

Yang, F., & Tamney, J. B. (2006). Exploring mass conversion to Christianity among the Chinese: An introduction. Sociology of Religion,67(2),125-129.

Yang, M. M. H. (Ed.). (2008). Chinese Religiosities: Afflictions of Modernity and State Formation. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Yang, M. M. H. (2011). Postcoloniality and religiosity in modern China: the disenchantments of sovereignty. Theory, Culture & Society, 28(2), 3-44.

Yang, Y. (2013). *杨友仁. 流动与疏离: 深圳富士康工人的都市状态*.(Drifting and alienation: an exploration of the migrant workers' urbanism in Shenzhen's FOXCONN city)*人文地理*, 28(6), 36-42.

Ying, F. T. (2014). The CPC's Policy on Protestant Christianity, 1949–1957: an overview and assessment. Journal of Contemporary China, 23(89), 884-901.

Yoo, W. (2021). Neither laziness nor workaholism: The Protestant ethic and economic prosperity among young urban Christians in contemporary China. Social Compass, 68(3), 447-463.

Yu, C. A. (2005). State and Religion in China: Historical and Textual Perspectives. Chicago: Open Court.

Yue, Z., Li, S., Jin, X., & Feldman, M. W. (2013). The role of social networks in the integration of Chinese rural–urban migrants: A migrant–resident tie perspective. Urban Studies, 50(9), 1704-1723.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2015). Situated intersectionality and social inequality. Raisons Politiques, 2, 91–100.

Zhao, B. (2010). *赵冰. 中国宗教互联网状况简析.* (A Brief Analysis of the Status of Internet religion in China.) *理论界*, (4), 162-163.

Zhao, B. (2015). *赵冰. 网上宗教"现象在中国的现状、特征与影响.* (The situation, peculiarities and influence of the phenomenon of religion on the Internet in China.) *世界宗教文化*, (1), 100–105.

Zhang, C., Cui, Q, & Sheng, H. (2022). *张春泥, 崔琪 & 盛禾. 当代中国城市基督教何以兴起.*(The Rise of Urban Christianity in Contemporary China.) *世界宗教文化*,(1),66-73.

Zhang, C. (2014). Untangling the intersectional biopolitics of neoliberal globalization: Asia, Asian, and the Asia-Pacific Rim. Feminist Formations, 26(3), 167-196.

Zhang, C. (2018). Governing neoliberal authoritarian citizenship: theorizing hukou and the changing mobility regime in China. Citizenship Studies, 22(8), 855-881.

Zhang, J., & Nyiri, P. (2014). 'Walled' activism: transnational social movements and the politics of Chinese cyber-public space1. International Development Planning Review, 36(1), 111-131.

Zhang, L. (2001). Strangers in the city: Reconfigurations of space, power, and social networks within China's floating population. Stanford University Press.

Zhang, L. (2012). Afterword: Flexible postsocialist assemblages from the margin. positions: east Asia cultures critique, 20(2), 659-667.

Zheng, X. (2016). *郑筱筠. 全方位开展互联网宗教研究.* (Carrying out omni bearing research on the internet religion.) *中国宗教*, (7), 38–39.

Zhou, L., & Baptista Nunes, M. (2013). Doing qualitative research in Chinese contexts: Lessons learned from conducting interviews in a Chinese healthcare environment. Library Hi Tech, 31(3), 419-434.

Zhu, H., & Guo, C. (2009). *朱竑 &郭春兰. 本土化与全球化在村落演化中的响应—深圳老福音村的死与生.* (Response of Indigenization and Globalization in the Changes of Villages: Contabescence and Renascence of Gospel Villages in Shenzhen.) *地理学报,64(8),967-977.*

Zhuo, X . (2006). The Role of Christianity in the Construction of a Harmonious Society Today.In M. N. C. Poon (Ed.), Pilgrims and Citizens: Christian Social Engagement in East Asia Today (pp.197-199). Hindmarsh: ATF Press.