Re-enchanting Modernity

Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou, China

MAYFAIR YANG

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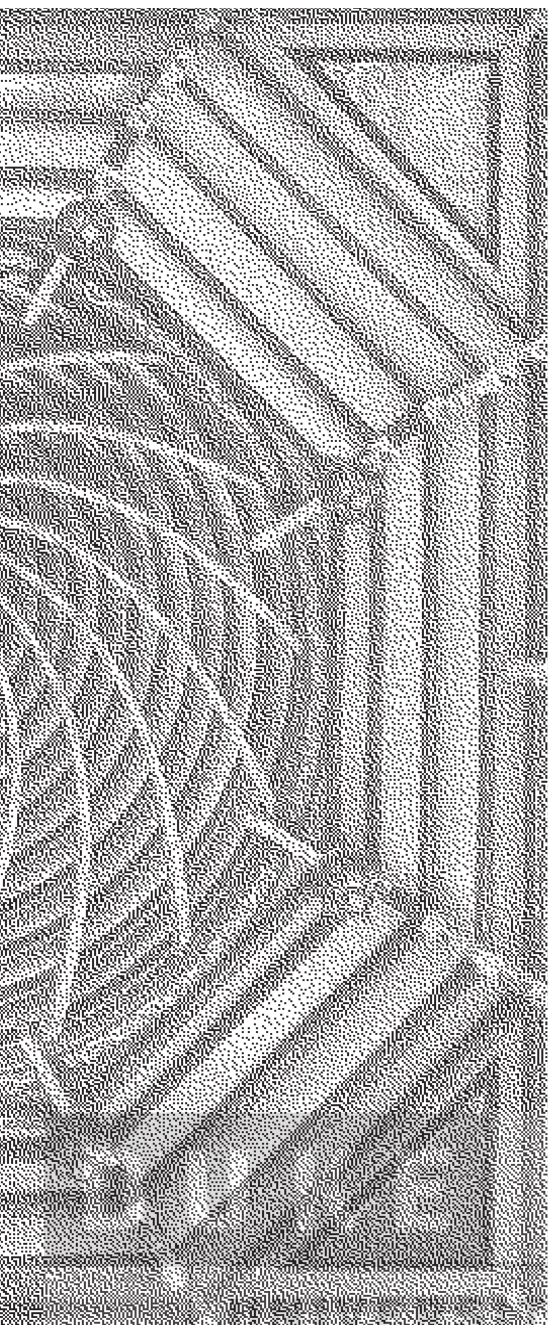

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Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou, China

MAYFAIR MEI-HUI YANG
楊美惠

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Cover art: Wooden ceiling of a deity temple in Rui'an City, China, 2005. Photo by Mayfair Mei-hui Yang.
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To two people who gave generous
and crucial support:

Philip T. Myers,
my husband, who gave continuous and tireless
moral and practical support,
with a great sense of humor

and

Wang Qinsheng 王勤生*,*
the local Wenzhou diviner and geomantic
master who initiated the revival of the Yingqiao
Wang Lineage in Yongchang Township;
may he rest in peace!

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Part I

INTRODUCTION

1 From "Superstition" to "People's Customs"

An Ethnographic Discovery of Key Questions in Wenzhou

使俗之漸民久矣, 雖戶說以眇論, 終不能化. 故善者因之, 其次利道之, 其次教誨之, 其次整齊之, 最下者與之爭.

(Cultural customs have gradually flowed and become sedimented among the common people. Even though one goes to every household and engages in subtle persuasion, in the end, one cannot change these customary practices. This is why the wise and noble ruler will go along with the flow of these customs. The next best thing is to try to lead and guide them. A lesser choice is to try to educate them. An even lesser policy is to try to set up rules to regulate and reorder them. The worst is to denounce and struggle against them.)

—司馬遷著 (史記. 貨殖列傳) [Si-Ma Qian, *Historical Records* (ca. 135–86 BCE)]

The history of our Party is a history of upholding science and smashing superstition. . . . In recent years, . . . ignorance and superstition have raised their heads and anti-science and pseudo-science activities have taken place. . . . [Even] some Party members and cadres . . . now believe in constellations, divination, *fengshui*, and fortune-telling by physiognomy. They worship gods and Buddhas and have become the prisoners of idealism. . . . In some places, science cannot overcome superstition, materialism cannot overcome idealism, and atheism cannot overcome theism.

—Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe, *Smashing Superstitions*

The paranoid pharaoh and the passional Hebrew? In the case of the Jewish people, a group of signs detaches from the Egyptian imperial network of which it was a part and sets off down a line of flight into the desert.

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

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I did not set out to study religious culture but was confronted with its salience and importance in the course of fieldwork on rural "civil society" and non-governmental organizations. In 1990 I made my first visit to the Wenzhou (溫州) area in southern Zhejiang Province on the southeastern coast of China. I stayed only a few days, but returned the next year. At first I interviewed people involved with the Wenzhou Writers' Association, private kindergartens, a private technical middle school called Dawn Light Middle School, a local chapter of the Wenzhou Chamber of Commerce, and a local Individual Entrepreneurs Association. I soon realized that these organizations were either state-penetrated or market-penetrated. The organizations that showed a truly independent grassroots character and self-organizational ability in a bottom-up, spontaneous development all had a ritual or religious orientation. These were deity temples, Daoist and Buddhist temples, lineages and their ancestor halls, and Christian churches. I was impressed by the sheer energy, persistence, and ingenuity with which their organizers and congregations stubbornly established and maintained these organizations in the face of local government obstacles. Based on ethnographic material gathered in rural and small-town Wenzhou on repeated trips from 1990 to 2016, this book explores these grassroots organizations.

The title is inspired by Max Weber, who wanted to confront the "disenchantment of the world" ([1919] 1946: 153). In his 1919 speech to Munich university students, he stated that although science no longer engages in "prophecy" with the old tools of "miracle" and "revelation," he still believed that science could be a "vocation" rather than a mere occupation. For Weber, science cannot answer the question that is most important to us: "What shall we do and how shall we live?" That is why modernity calls us as scholars to reveal and teach "inconvenient facts," to have the intellectual integrity to go against "party opinions," and to help people clarify "the ultimate meaning[s] of their own [religious] conduct" ([1919] 1946: 147, 152). In this book I try to engage in this kind of science, one that does not merely describe, nor try to predict, but explores the social significance of "re-enchanting modernity" in one corner of China after a century of powerful discourses of scientism, social evolutionism, materialism, revolution, nationalism, and progress. Trained in cultural anthropology, with its scientific and empirical legacy, on the one hand, and its recent "interpretive turn" and engagement with critical theory, on the other, I offer a "hybrid science" that combines ethnographic and historical inquiry with analysis of the significance and promise of religious imaginaries with regard to economic development and nation-state power.

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This book explores religious and ritual practices among ordinary people in rural and small-town Wenzhou: peasants, shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, family enterprise owner-managers, mothers and wives, and workers of Wenzhou origin, as well as ritual practitioners and Buddhist and Daoist clerics. I focus on Chinese "popular religion," including deity worship, shamanism, ancestor worship, divination, and Chinese geomancy (*fengshui*); and also popular Daoist and Buddhist practices, rather than the elite, highly literate and philosophical realms of these two complex religious traditions. Although Wenzhou is known as the "Jerusalem of China" (中國的耶路撒冷) because Christians comprise one-eighth of its population of 8 million, I will not include detailed discussions of Christianity. I was repeatedly warned by officials in Wenzhou to stay away from Christians, so although I had some furtive contacts with Catholics and Protestants, in the interest of safeguarding my fieldwork access, I did not pursue research on Christians. Given the strong links of contemporary religiosity to the past, I will frequently refer to "late imperial China," which covers the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing dynasties (1644–1911), or the past six hundred years.

MODERNITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS: "PURIFICATION," SECULARIZATION, AND A "POSTSECULAR SOCIETY"

While Michel Foucault's (1979, 1991) scrutiny of modernity focused on the shift from monarchical power to disciplinary and biopolitical power, our concern with modernity is with the processes of "disenchantment" and "re-enchantment." Here we can benefit from Bruno Latour's approach to modernity as a "purification process" whereby "two distinct ontological zones are created: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other" (1993: 10–11). In chemistry, purification is accomplished through separation: it involves removing nonessential or contaminating substances. As an anthropologist in science studies, Latour focused on modernity's insistent separation of the categories of nature from culture, of the natural world from human society and politics. These radical separations enabled and sharpened the instrumental reason that produced our modern surfeit of material goods and technologies, but they also led to the false dichotomy of objective, referential knowledge versus subjective, interpretive, and religious knowledge, and the notion that nature is merely *out there*, independent of the knowledge and actions of the human world. Since Einstein's theory of relativity and Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, we have understood that nature cannot be known without taking into account both the positioning of the knowing subject and the measurement tools mediating the access to quantum objects in nature.

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While Latour was not focused on religiosity, his schema can also highlight modernity's radical separation of a third opposition to both nature and culture: the *super*natural, where nonhumans include not only animals, but also gods, ancestors, spirits, demons, ghosts, and spiritually animated material objects. Indeed, European modernity's purification process was launched from within a deeply religious world. The Virgin Mary and the multitude of Catholic saints were like most Chinese gods: once human, they became divine figures of worship through their self-sacrifice, miracles, and contributions to humanity and other beings (Overmyer 1997). During the Reformation in Europe, however, they were separated and expelled from the Christian pantheon. With the earlier Catholic human-divine traffic gone, in Protestant faiths the "true God" was elevated and set apart from humans all the more; and later, in more secular contexts, God's divine handiwork evolved into the "laws of Nature." Thus, modernity, in Latour's definition as radical purification and separation of human and nonhuman categories, cannot be understood as merely the global dissemination of modern science; it must also be seen as the result of Protestant missionizing.

A related opposition that was introduced into modern China was that between religion and economy, with the conviction that they are mutually exclusive. This was perhaps born of Protestantism's struggles against the Catholic Church's elaborate ritual expenditures. In the hands of Chinese modernizers and revolutionaries, this meant that religion must be eliminated in order to push for economic development, thus erasing the historical memory of the Song dynasty's (960–1279 CE) commercialization and the rapid growth of its religio-economy a thousand years ago.

Webb Keane (2007) extended Latour's thesis to examine how Dutch Calvinist missionaries in Indonesia separated and elevated the agency of the "true God" from human agency, while casting aspersions on the nonhuman agencies of indigenous spirits and ancestors, which the Dutch called "fetishes" or false agencies. Charles Taylor also highlights this separation of agencies in modern secularism, so different from the enchanted world in which "the line between personal agency and impersonal force was not at all clearly drawn" (2007: 32). For Taylor, the replacement of the enchanted "porous self" of spirit possession and human-god interactions with the impermeable "buffered self" was the hallmark of modern secular society.

However, I must also take issue with Latour's too-quick denial that we have ever attained the state of modernity. Latour claims that we have actually always been engaged in what he calls "hybridization," "mediation," or "translation," the crossing and merging of nature and culture. As a discussant for Latour's lecture at UC Santa Barbara in May 2002, I noted that, while I found his

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discussion of the purification of categories extremely stimulating and useful, I also felt uncomfortable with his statement "We have never been modern." This may have been true for the modern West, but for a while, China may have "outmodernized" and "outpurified" the West! I share Andrew Pickering's sentiment that those of us who wish to interrogate the modern "would not want to ratify what we have always done without first getting clear on the specifics of history" (1994: 258), especially in non-Western contexts, where there is often an urgent ethos of "catching up" with the modern West. This book, then, addresses the effects of China's radical twentieth-century purification program, in which social, political, and economic practices were disembedded not only from nature but also from cosmology, ritual-liturgical procedures, and the divine agencies of deities and ancestors. It also explores the post-Mao-era movement toward "hybridization" as attitudes toward religiosity soften, but remain guarded in China. Contemporary re-enchanting practices, which are strong in places like Wenzhou, can be understood as an indictment of, as well as forms of redress and repair for, the excesses of Chinese modernity's purification procedures.

Modernity's purification project was at work throughout twentieth-century China, where in order to catch up with the West, the equivalent of the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the French and Russian Revolutions, and the establishment of a modern secular state all had to be collapsed into less than a century's time. We can see it in nineteenth-century Protestant missionary condemnations of Chinese "idolatry," "heathenism," and excessive ritualism (Reinders 2004). It is evident in twentieth-century May Fourth intellectuals' calls to rid China of ignorant peasant religions, such as Chen Duxiu's article in the journal *New Youth* (新青年), entitled "On the Smashing of Idols" (偶像破壞論):

> These idols made of clay and carved in wood are really useless things; but just because someone respects them, worships them, burns incense and kowtows to them, and says they have magical efficacy, ignorant villagers become superstitious of these manmade idols and believe that they really possess the power to reward good deeds and punish evil. . . . All religions are idols that cheat people. (Chen D. 1918: 99; my translation)[1]

We also see it in Marxist-Maoist revolutionary romanticism and realism, where human agency is elevated above false deities as the true agency of revolution. The suppression of Buddhist notions of transmigration between human and other life-forms, and its notion that human beings can attain divine Buddhahood, paved the way for the massive efforts to conquer nature.

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The removal of gods and ancestors who had sacralized local communities and territories facilitated the new identification with a massive new and abstract nation-state.

Intertwined with the purification process, modernity in China also involved the rise of antitraditional discourse, secularization, the closure of local sacred spaces, and the discrediting of transcendence over worldly life. Neo-Confucian discourse had often denigrated popular religion, Daoism, and Buddhism. However, it was not until the modern era that both the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party mounted campaigns of state secularization to dismantle temples, ban or restrict religious rituals and festivals, change local religious customs, and return clerics to lay life (Duara 1991; Goossaert and Palmer 2011: 43–65, 139–165; Nedostup 2008, 2010; M. Yang 2008b). The English word "secularization," which originally referred to the seizure of Christian monastic lands and church buildings, such as during the French Revolution (Casanova 1994: 13), also describes Chinese modernity well. In a similar way, the movement of "converting temple property into schools" (廟產興學) that started at the end of the Qing dynasty initiated the secularizing process in modern China. However, China's secularization was much more radical than in the modern West; its extreme was the reign of terror and systematic destruction of traditional religiosities in the "Smashing of the Four Olds" campaign (破四舊, 1966–1968) during the Cultural Revolution.

Given the extremes of Chinese secularization, the aim of this book is to come up with "postsecular" argument(s) for the historical significance of the "re-enchantment of modernity" in Wenzhou. One of the earliest thinkers to invoke the term "postsecular" was, ironically, Jürgen Habermas, the German philosopher and defender of Enlightenment rationality. From a European perspective, the recent rise of religious conflicts around the world, and the need in Europe to integrate recent migrants and refugees, who tend to be religious, have "undermine[d] the secularistic belief in the foreseeable disappearance of religion" (Habermas 2008: 20). José Casanova (1994) observed that, although the religious domain has in most modern societies shrunk in terms of social function, religious practice and discourse have not simply retreated to the private sphere; they remain public. For postsecular societies to challenge the secularization thesis and high-modernist projects, their religious and nonreligious people and members of different faiths must be able to engage with and concede to each other in the public sphere. This book hopes to show that the significance of Wenzhou as a postsecular regional society in contemporary China is the reenergizing of indigenous religiosities and rituals in the reassertion of community, locality, and religious civil society, and the

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resurgence of a "ritual economy" whose logic and values moderate or challenge capitalist logic.

THE ELEVATION OF HUMAN AGENCY AND THE HUBRIS OF "HIGH MODERNISM"

Modernity gave rise to what James C. Scott has called "high modernism" (1998), a modern affliction shared by both Communist and Western liberal discourses. Scott describes three elements of high modernism: "the aspiration to the administrative ordering of nature and society"; "the unrestrained use of the power of the modern state as an instrument for achieving these designs"; and "a weakened or prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans" (1998: 88–89). An offshoot of the European Enlightenment, "high modernism" permeates diverse thinkers and their radical projects of modernity—from Swiss architect and urban planner Le Corbusier to the shah of Iran—all propelled by a desire for totalizing social engineering projects that would speedily overturn the hated traditional ways and institute new utopian futures. In China, Maoist high modernism deemed popular religion "backward" (落後) and "feudal superstitions" (封建迷信) as useless old elements that must be swept away to clean the slate for progress toward the ideal Communist society. I frequently encountered this rhetoric among local officials and intellectuals in Wenzhou in the 1990s, but it has subsided a decade into the new millennium. The language of high modernism in China has now become less utopian, less vilifying, and more rational. Nevertheless, the radical push for "progress" and "development" continues unabated, along with state efforts at control and containment of religiosity.

Overcoming the discourse of high modernism means that secular intellectuals need to show more tolerance, understanding, and engagement with religious discourse. Thus, this book treats Wenzhou religiosity not as a stubborn "cultural remnant" (文化遺留) but as an active engagement with modernity, a willed *re-enchantment*. I also try to extend the notion of the postsecular to the epistemological and methodological realm. That is to say, the postsecular can also be understood as a new form of modern knowledge-making, where secular knowledge seeks a dialogical engagement with religiosity. Postsecular knowledge does not merely stand outside its object of study, religion, but can infuse some religio-ethical-cosmological logic into its discourse, creating a hybrid religio-scientific way of thinking.

The twentieth century may prove to be the one that has most violated the ancient Chinese theory of statecraft known as Huang-Lao Thought, which promoted the Daoist notion of *wu-wei* (無為), or "noninterventionist action,"

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as the ideal mode of governing. As espoused by China's ancient historian, Si-Ma Qian (司馬遷, ca. 145–86 BCE), Huang-Lao Thought taught that the best form of government allowed a certain flexibility and tolerance toward popular culture and going with the flow of local customs. When we contrast Si-Ma Qian's statement with the antisuperstition campaign rhetoric in the next epigraph, we see how the modern nation-state deployed the discourse of scientism and progress in its radical state intervention in popular customs. Of course, traditional Chinese culture had severe problems that required reform, such as monarchical-despotic power; social hierarchy and the treatment of lower class-status groups and youth; patriarchy and the treatment of women; and the terrible impoverishment of a vast population. However, in the process of addressing these problems, totalizing modernist discourses have enabled the modern state penetration of grassroots society and closed off traditional mechanisms of community self-governance and social change. In contrast, late imperial grassroots communities comprised a realm where the imperial state did not often heavily insert itself. They generated cultural, ritual and religious mechanisms for community self-governance, economic redistribution, and local community welfare and problem-solving.

FLEXIBLE RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES AND THE MODERN NATION-STATE

In global modernity, we have seen the triumph of nation-state as the overwhelming aspiration of the new age. Since nationalism emerged very early in Europe, we must examine its relationship with the Christian culture and identity that preceded it. Prasenjit Duara (2015) suggests that positing a single omnipotent God and Truth leads the Abrahamic faiths, especially Christianity and Islam, to proselytize and convert, resulting in historical conflicts with other religious persuasions, and with each other. Even before modernity, these faiths, which Duara describes as "radical transcendence," were prone to periodic "purification" drives, excluding other faiths, divinities, and alternative modes of worship, even as they also experienced periods of syncretic hybridization and encompassment of other religious practices. For Duara, the drive for conversion and exclusivistic religious ideology have been weaker among traditional Asian religions of "dialogical transcendence," which are more open to relative truths, multiple modes of devotion, and mutual dialogical encompassment. After the major purification drive of the Reformation, the European Wars of Religion raged for a century until the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

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For Duara, the outcome of this treaty was the modern nation-state: the radical exclusivism of each Christian faith and the tight boundedness of their collective religious identities served as the unconscious model for the first modern territorial nation-states. The positing of a single God and single Truth meant that the emerging nation-state was informed by the model of one territory having a single faith, and other faiths had difficulty coexisting.

Indeed, I am writing this passage while living in Göttingen, Germany, where in 1531 the town leaders accepted the heterodox teachings of Martin Luther. They could not coexist with Catholics, however, and eventually drove them out of town. Today all of the churches in Göttingen remain Lutheran, except one small Catholic church (St. Michael's), which was only allowed to be built in 1787. While attending a conference at the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands, I saw in St. Martin's Cathedral (*Domkerk*), a Catholic church, a stone wall carving of the faces of the Virgin Mary, the Christ child, Mary's grandmother St. Ann and sister St. Elizabeth, and other relatives of the Holy Family—all of which had been chiseled out in 1580 by Protestant religious fanatics who took offense at graven images of divinities. Such smashing of "idols" predates China's twentieth-century smashing, and there may be a genealogical connection, since the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries featured heavy Protestant missionizing in China.

The Treaty of Westphalia was not the only model for modern nation-states, but most models differed from premodern empires and civilizations in their striving for an internal mass cultural integration, a common identity and language, shared religion and ethnicity, and clear territorial borders. Once this model became globalized, demands for national homogeneity sometimes triggered horrifying ethnic and religious cleansing. This new integrated nation-state became a powerful engine of labor discipline and large-scale social mobilization for the capture of natural resources in global capitalist competition.

Moving to Asian nation-state building, what Duara calls Asian "dialogical transcendence," had to be overcome in order to integrate and homogenize the nation. Meiji Japan was perhaps the earliest to take the path of modern religious nationalism. It solved the problem of having multiple religious traditions by sidelining Buddhism, centralizing its dispersed local Shinto cultures, and inventing a modern divine emperorship (Hardacre 1989). Peter van der Veer shows how in anticolonial India, traditional religiosity was not attacked like it was in China, but deployed as a new kind of national identity, and only the Indian state, but not Indian society, became secularized (2013: 157–162). However, this path to

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nation-state status has created problems down the line, such as the hardening of Hindu nationalism, which seeks to desecularize the state and suppress other Indian religious traditions, especially Islam (van der Veer 1994).

In the case of China, the relative tolerance of its multiple religious traditions in the imperial-civilizational mode also did not lend themselves to constructing a modern nation-state. Nor could the old monarchical power be deployed for the Chinese nation-state, since it was foreign (Manchu) and had been toppled by the Republican Revolution. China took the radical path: the modern state positioned itself outside of and in opposition to traditional religiosities, mounting campaigns to stamp them out. In their place, Chinese modernity instilled the new "radical transcendence" of secular nationalism, Leninist-Maoist ideologies, and a grand linear and teleological narrative of history. This meant that, instead of having a religious nationalism that privileges one religious tradition against others (as in India and Meiji Japan), China has been a dominant secular state that suppresses and constrains multiple religious traditions struggling to survive and grow.

While Duara (2015) uncovers the *trans*national "circulating histories" of modern nationalist discourses, I will focus instead on religious constructions of *sub*national or local identities. In other words, while Duara challenges nation-states' self-narratives of independent invention, showing that they were actually constructed out of the dense "traffic" of globalizing discourses, I show how the revival of local and regional identities through ritual and religious practice can moderate the intense emotional attachments to the centralizing nation-state. Instead of focusing, as Duara does, on Axial Age universal religions, with their elite textual and clerical traditions, I pay more attention to the religiosity of the common people, whose genealogies trace back to archaic *pre*–Axial Age religiosity, such as deity and ancestor cults and shamanism. I have often felt that, although Chinese peasants have since ancient times been repeatedly deterritorialized and inserted into the spatialities and jurisdictions of imperial state administration, they have stubbornly and repeatedly *re*territorialized, ritually and economically reconstructing their local communal identities. The post-Mao religious resurgence examined by many scholars (Chau 2006; I. Johnson 2017; M. Wang 2004) and described here in rural Wenzhou seems just the latest historical reiteration.

MAJOR QUESTIONS AND THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

In part I, chapter 1 provides a brief social history of religious culture and secularization in modern Wenzhou, from the late nineteenth century to the present, and discusses my ethnographic methodology and experience. Chapter 2

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lays out the dynamic local economy of post-Mao Wenzhou, which sets the context for the resurgence of ritual and religious life. In part II, chapters 3 through 5 provide ethnographic and historical accounts of different forms of religious and ritual life in contemporary Wenzhou: popular religion, Daoism, and Buddhism. These chapters are mainly description and survey, so if one is more interested in hearing out my theoretical arguments, one could go straight to part III, or chapters 6 through 10.

I raise three key questions in the latter half of this book. *First*, if modernity has greatly expanded the reach and penetration of the modern state, how can we understand the resurgence of religiosity and ritualism in post-Mao Wenzhou? If the construction of nation-state identity depended on radical deterritorialization and new imaginaries of space, then what is the role of the ritual reterritorialization of locality in Wenzhou? Why have the native categories of the nonstate "realm of the people" (*minjian*, 民間), counterposed to "officialdom" (*guanfang*, 官方), reappeared since the 1980s? Four chapters take up the issue of "religious civil society." Chapter 6 deals with grassroots-initiated temple organizations and the management of religious associations, which, I propose, represents an "indigenous and religious civil society." Chapter 7 focuses on the activities of the Wang Lineage revival in Longwan District. Although I engaged with other Wenzhou lineages as well, the book length allows only a focus on one lineage. Chapter 9 examines the ritualization of "the local" and "community," calling for a broadening of the modern category of "civil society" to accommodate the particular conditions of non-Western, nonurban, and religious cultures.

Second, given the historical injustices to women perpetrated by traditional patriarchal social institutions and discourses, what are the gender dynamics of today's religious revival? The Chinese Communist Revolution brought state feminism's vow to liberate women from the shackles of patriarchal authorities, such as family and lineage, but what about the patriarchy of the state itself? Chapter 7 examines how men are at the forefront of lineage revival, given that its patrilineal descent favors the birth of sons. What is the gender dimension of religious revival in Wenzhou, and is there any difference or tension between kinship and religious institutions, in terms of gendered agency? Chapter 8 addresses rural women's religious agency in spearheading temple reconstruction and launching religious civil society. It explores female agency in Wenzhou, which is often conservative, modest, and self-sacrificing despite the fact that that women play a crucial role in fueling the religious drive.

My *third* issue has to do with the economic significance of Wenzhou religiosity and the religious significance of its economy. Chapter 10, on "ritual

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economy," links back to chapter 2, on the "Wenzhou Model" of economic development, challenging the Wenzhou Model as conventionally conceived by economists and sociologists, by asking, "What's missing in the Wenzhou Model?" I suggest that what I call Wenzhou's "ritual economy" of religious and gift expenditures is at once a stimulus for, a product of, and a countermovement to profit-oriented industrial productivism and the ascent of the capitalist market. How has religiosity been a stimulus for economic development? How did Wenzhou's old religious culture persist and reinvent itself, despite rapid economic development, unless it was a substantive partner of the new economy? Finally, how might Wenzhou's religious economy offer the possibility of redemption and provide a check on or counterbalancing mechanism to the market economy's powerful ethos of profit accumulation?

BRIEF SURVEY OF WENZHOU GEOGRAPHY AND LANGUAGES

The Wenzhou area is located on the southeastern coast of Zhejiang Province, lying south of Shanghai and northwest of the island of Taiwan. Wenzhou is crossed by two major rivers, which flow from the mountainous west to the East China Sea: the Ou River (甌江), which flows along the northern banks of Wenzhou City; and the Feiyun River (飛雲江) to the south. Much of Wenzhou's northeastern and southwestern regions are shielded by the Yandang Mountains, and Wenzhou has historically suffered from a scarcity of arable land. The Wenzhou area is composed of six counties with large rural populations: Yongjia (永嘉縣) in the north; Dongtou (洞頭縣) on islands in the East China Sea; Wencheng and Taishun (文成縣, 太順縣) in the southwest; Pingyang (平陽縣) in the south; and Cangnan (蒼南縣), the southernmost county, which borders with Fujian Province. Cangnan County was only created in 1981, when it was split off from Pingyang. The total population of registered native residents in the entire Wenzhou region in 2018 was 8.28 million (9.25 million if one includes migrant laborers and other residents).[2]

The population of Wenzhou City, the largest city and the seat of the municipal government, is 1.52 million, which leaves about 6.57 million Wenzhounese who live in rural or mountainous areas, or in small to large towns. Wenzhou City encompasses three rapidly urbanizing rural areas that are now called "urban districts" (市區): Lucheng District (鹿城區) to the city's northwest, Ouhai District (甌海區) to the south, and Longwan District (龍灣區) to the east, where the airport lies and where I first started my fieldwork in the 1990s amidst rice paddies. Besides Wenzhou City, two other areas were counties but are now designated as "municipalities" (市)—Rui'an and Yueqing

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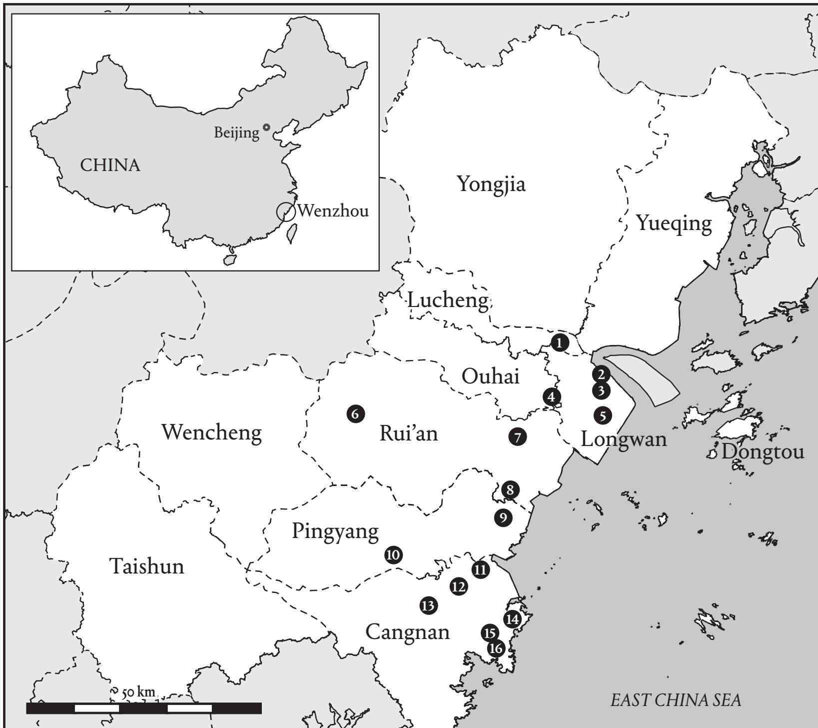

1. Wenzhou City
2. Yongzhong Township
3. Yongchang Township
4. Nanbaixiang Township
5. Yongxing Township
6. Guifeng Township
7. Xianyan Township
8. Rui'an City
9. Kunyang Township
10. Shuitou Township
11. Longgang Township
12. Qiangcang Township
13. Linxi Township
14. Bacao Township
15. Qianku Township
16. Jinxiang Township

Figure 1.1. Wenzhou counties and towns visited. Map data © Open Street Map Contributors.

(瑞安市, 樂清市), both of which have large rural populations. One important new urban area is the famous Longgang Town (龍港鎮), known as "China's First Peasant City" because it was spontaneously built up by ordinary rural folk without state investment or planning in the late 1980s.

With rapid urbanization, the labels of "peasant" and "rural household registration" have become less meaningful. As rural villages start constructing roads, electricity grids, running water pipes, and multistory buildings, and more of the population leave agriculture, "peasants" start to live like urban people, while

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largely keeping their peasant culture. I refer to them as "ex-peasants," living in transitional times of rapid urbanization and industrialization.

Most native residents speak Wenzhounese, also called "Ou language" (溫州話, 甌語), a branch of the Wu language family (吴語). Although both Shanghainese and Hangzhounese also belong to the Wu language family, these speakers cannot understand Wenzhounese, which is unintelligible to other people in Zhejiang Province and the rest of China.

Due to historical waves of in-migration from Fujian Province in times of war, famine, and natural disasters, the religious culture in Wenzhou shares many similarities (and deities) with Fujian and Taiwan. The two most intensive waves of in-migration from Fujian occurred, first, during the social unrest at the end of the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE) and Five dynasties (907–960 CE), and, second, during the chaos at the end of the Ming dynasty and beginning of the Qing. In both Cangnan and Pingyang Counties today, a remarkable *one-half* of the population still speaks a hybrid language, a mixture of Wenzhounese and Minnanese, which originates in southern Fujian (Lin S. 2007: 130, 133). At the end of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127 CE), with the invasion of northern China by the Jurchens, the center of Chinese cultural and political gravity shifted to the south, and Wenzhou received many migrants and refugees from northern China.

Cangnan County also harbors two smaller languages: Jinxiang language (金鄉話) and the so-called barbarian language (蠻話) spoken near the coastal area by one-fourth of the county's population (Sheng 2004: 38–40). Jinxiang Township was first established as a fortress town at the beginning of the Ming dynasty with troops brought from across the Chinese empire for coastal defense against marauding pirates. The blending of different languages from across China produced the unique Jinxiang language. The designation "barbarian language," with its "insect" radical (蠻), is definitely pejorative; however, its speakers themselves still use this term today. Chinese linguists do not agree on the origin(s) of "barbarian language," but many believe that this language is very old and indigenous, perhaps even older than Wenzhounese, which is the product of Wu people descending into the Wenzhou area from northern Zhejiang. Thus, "barbarian language" may be the indigenous language of the original Ou people, who managed to preserve it from mixing with other invading languages whenever they fled into the mountains or out into the East China Sea in troubled times (Lin S. 2007: 135). In December 2016, I heard that Longgang Town was now being "overrun" by "barbarian language" speakers, who are the latest wave of rural people to settle into this town.

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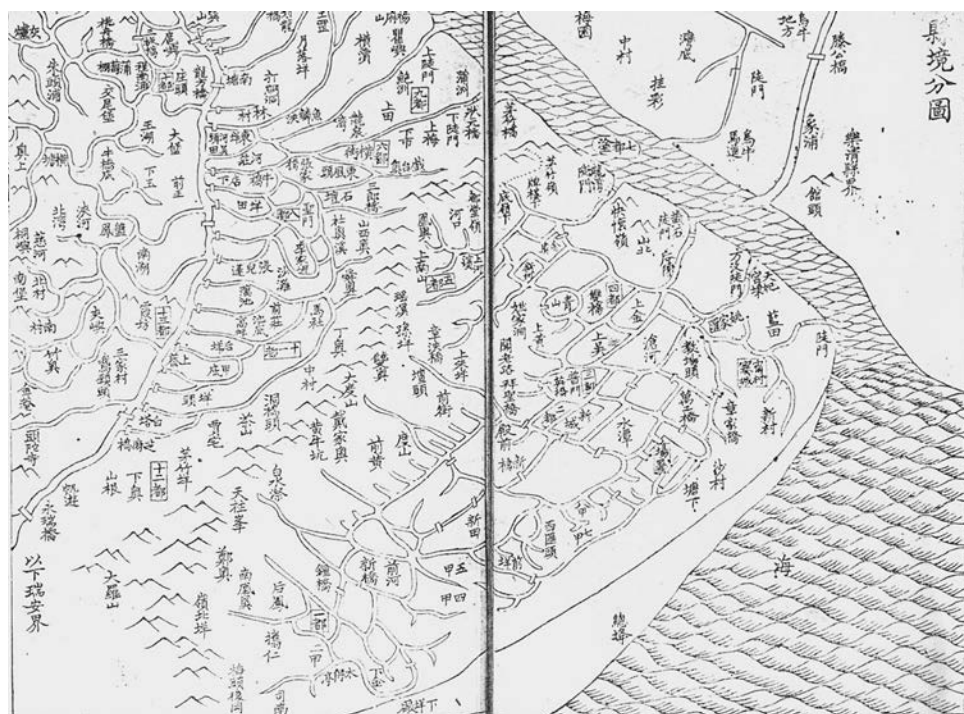

Figure 1.2. Qing dynasty map of Longwan District in Wenzhou; facsimile of original, 《永嘉縣志》 (*Yongjia Gazetteer*, Zhejiang Province, 1879).

In the modern era, Wenzhou's insular geography and its unique languages were key to the protection of its religious culture from the ravages of modernity elsewhere in twentieth-century China. The dense mountains in the northeast, west, and southwest made land travel into Wenzhou difficult. The Wenzhou Airport opened for domestic flights in 1990, but only the wealthy few could afford air travel at that time, and there was no railroad line into Wenzhou until 1998. Before train and air travel, the only ways into Wenzhou were a nauseating thirteen-hour bus ride through the mountains from Hangzhou or sailing by ship. Although Wenzhou has had a port since the commercial Song dynasty (960–1279 CE), it was not deep enough for modern ocean vessels, limiting its ability to bring in large numbers of goods and people. In addition to geographical and language barriers, a third reason for Wenzhou's stronger links with its religious past is its location on the "frontline" of possible war with Taiwan. This meant that Wenzhou received few modern state investments, requiring

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Figure 1.3. Satellite image of Longwan District, Wenzhou, taken by Ikonos satellite on January 27, 2001. Satellite image © 2018 DigitalGlobe, a Maxar Company.

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local people to be more self-sufficient and thus less beholden to provincial and central governments.

Wenzhou's economic and industrial development since 1978 can only be described as an "economic miracle." Wenzhounese people have since at least the Song dynasty taken to handicrafts industries, trade, and commerce. Moving into modern times, Wenzhou's strong entrepreneurial culture made it ill-suited to the Maoist collectivized agricultural life of militaristic and hierarchical discipline. In the 1970s, it was one of the poorest rural areas of China until the floodgates of economic reforms opened in 1979, lifting millions out of poverty. When I first started fieldwork in the early 1990s in what is now called Longwan District, rice paddies and water buffalo stretched to the horizon, and chickens, ducks, and pigs ran underfoot in villages and small towns. The area was crisscrossed by a dense network of water transport canals dating back to the Song-Yuan and Ming-Qing dynasties of middle and late imperial China. The favored mode of transportation around small towns was riding the cheap and efficient pedicabs. Over the next twenty-eight years, most rural families rapidly transitioned into commercialized agriculture, light industries, or commerce. They established family enterprises of cash crops or maritime resources and manufactured such products as shoes, clothing, porcelain tiles, industrial and medical instruments, small appliances, paper products, metal piping, and valve switches. They also engaged in private businesses such as retail shops, restaurants, hotels, kindergartens, pharmacies and clinics, teahouses, and even underground banks. Since then, most of the canals were filled in, paved over, and made into roads, and a private trucking industry developed to transport Wenzhou's commodities to the rest of China and the world. In 2016, almost half of urban Wenzhou families owned cars.

WENZHOU IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN "PURIFYING" DISCOURSES OF SCIENTISM, REVOLUTION, AND NATION-STATE

Elsewhere, I have written about the cultural humiliation and collective loss of confidence in traditional Chinese culture that began in China's semicolonial era, when a Eurocentric unilinear social evolutionism was accepted by Chinese elites as "science" (M. Yang 1996, 2008b, 2011). This social evolutionist "colonization of consciousness" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997b) subordinated the world's religious cultures into a universal system of "backward" and "advanced" religions, with the Protestant and secularizing modern West as the most developed civilization. Western social evolutionism introduced a paradigmatic

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shift in elite Chinese cosmological thought and senses of temporality. A linear, teleological understanding of human history developing from primitive society to "modern industrial civilization" came to supplant an ancient, spiraling sense of historical time based on dynastic units of temporality and emperor reign periods (Duara 1991, 1995).

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century and its castigation of "idolatry," excessive ritualism, "magic," "superstition," exorcism, and miracles was originally leveled at the Roman Catholics (Thomas 1971). Later, Protestant diatribes against "idolatry" and "superstition" found their way from European into modern Chinese discourse, where they targeted the polytheistic deity worship of Chinese popular religion and informed elite Chinese nationalists' attitudes toward native religiosities (M. Yang 2008b). Many in the new generation of Chinese secular nationalists in Republican China were educated by Protestant Western missionaries in China. Beginning with the May Fourth Movement (1919–1929) of liberal modernism, popular religion was seen as the ignorance of the peasant masses and an obstacle to China's modernization, and groups of educated youths would go into rural temples to smash "idols" (偶像). The modern Chinese state would later take up this effort more systematically.

In late imperial China, local educated gentry wrote local gazetteers from inside a religious universe, for they did not question the existence of gods or demons, but criticized what were regarded as excessive worship, wasteful practices, or the immoral mixing of men and women in public ritual spaces. From the beginning of the twentieth century, many educated Chinese absorbed the Protestant distinction between legitimate "religions" (宗教) and backward "superstitions" (迷信) (Goossaert and Palmer 2011: 50–53; Nedostup 2010; M. Yang 2008b). "Religion" was measured against the standard of Protestant Christianity, with its own clergy, scriptural tradition, and institutional edifices. What C. K. Yang (1961) called "diffused" religiosity such as popular religion, with its scanty scriptural texts, lack of ordained clergy, elaborate pantheons of deities, "magical" and "occult" practices, and flexible organization, came to be associated with "superstition." This new label helped to justify multiple modern attempts to eradicate a whole way of life for rural communities.

Despite the overt anti-imperialist and propeasant stance of the Chinese Communist Party, these Protestant outlooks quietly made their way into Party attitudes and social policies. In the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress of 1979, which inaugurated a momentous policy shift away from the Soviet-style centralized command economy, we find that this distinction persists, favoring "religion" over "superstition":

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By religion, we chiefly mean worldwide religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and the like. They have scriptures, creeds, religious ceremonies, organizations, and so on. These religions have histories of thousands of years. . . . Religious freedom, first of all, refers to these religions.

By superstition we generally mean activities conducted by shamans and sorcerers, such as magic medicine, magic water, divination, fortune telling, avoiding disasters, praying for rain, praying for pregnancy, exorcising demons, telling fortunes by physiognomy, locating house or tomb sites by geomancy, and so forth. These [activities] are all absurd and ridiculous. . . . They must be suppressed. We must criticize and educate the shamans and sorcerers, dealing sternly and striking resolutely in such cases. They are absolutely forbidden to carry out superstitious activities on the pretext of religious freedom. (MacInnis 1989: 33–34)

Although Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution protects the religious freedom of the Chinese people, "superstitions" are not considered "religion"; therefore, popular religious practices were considered illegal and dealt with by the public security organs or the police. This was the situation during my fieldwork in the 1990s. Many newly erected temples were torn down or forcibly closed by local authorities, practices that continued in the new millennium, as evidenced by the Wenzhou City government's campaign to close unregistered deity temples in 2000 (M. Yang 2004), and a similar campaign launched that year by neighboring Taizhou City (台州市) (Ye T. 2009: 286). More recently there was the "Three Reforms and One Demolition" (三改一拆) campaign of 2013–2016 across Zhejiang Province, but especially in Wenzhou (Yueqingshi 2013; Zhonggong Shamenzhen Weiyuanhui 2013). This campaign targeted for demolition unregistered deity temples and churches, or those whose construction had overstepped permissible size limits.

My fieldwork throughout the 1990s faced acute difficulties as a result of strong hostility toward popular religion from local officials and intellectuals. However, as a Chinese academic in 2014 and a Buddhist monk in 2016 both said to me, as Chinese people increasingly encounter other cultures due to China's globalization, the Chinese are asking themselves, "Who are we, and what makes us Chinese?" This question often leads them back to traditional Chinese culture, festivals, and religiosities, so recent years have brought a softening of harsh antitradition attitudes. The Chinese government itself now promotes "National Learning" (國學), traditional values such as filial piety, and lunar festivals. "National Learning" is the study of the classical texts of the Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist, and Legalist traditions. Through their publications

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and meetings with officials of the State Administration for Religious Affairs in the State Council, Jin Ze (2008), a scholar at the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and others are credited with helping to soften state attitudes toward popular religion in the new millennium. Jin Ze argued that popular religion cannot be regarded as mere "cultural remnants" of the past, for it has "life force" and dynamism and is constantly adapting to the modern present. Nevertheless, state wariness and the resultant restrictions continue.

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS BOTH SAVIOR AND PROBLEM

In the new millennium, popular religion in Wenzhou was saved from further official persecution by the sudden interest across China in the UNESCO project of identifying "Intangible Cultural Heritage" (ICH; 非物質文化遺產) items around the globe that should be preserved for human posterity (Wu Z. 2009). "Intangible Heritage" refers to traditional customs, folksongs, arts and crafts, and so forth that are indigenous to a culture and have a long history. Professor Huang, a folklore scholar at Wenzhou University, told me the history of ICH in China. In 2005, South Korea mounted a campaign with UNESCO to get its Gangneung Dano Festival (端午祭) recognized as Korean cultural heritage. "This was the 'ignition device' [導火器] that ignited the return to tradition in China!," declared Huang. Korea's campaign prompted dismay and anger across China because people felt that this traditional lunar festival "belonged" to the Chinese. Although the Korean festival is quite different from the Chinese version, the fact that the Korean name was the same as the Chinese one and that the festival also took place at the same time of year, in mid-April to early May, was enough to raise nationalistic hackles in China. In the internet age, popular online outrage exerted great pressure on the Chinese government to pay more attention to China's own cultural heritage. China's State Council promulgated the "Communiqué on Strengthening the Protection of Cultural Heritage" (Guowuyuan 2005), calling on officials at all levels to protect Chinese cultural heritage. Officials were encouraged to nominate local ICH for inclusion in China's own ICH lists compiled every few years at the county, municipality, provincial, and national levels. UNESCO accepted Korea's festival bid in 2006, but in 2009 it also accepted China's bid. The Chinese government declared in 2007 that traditional lunar festivals would become new national holidays with paid time off from work. Thus, it was nationalism that decimated religious cultures in modern China, and nationalism is still required in order to rehabilitate and revive them.

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Intangible Cultural Heritage Preservation Centers were established in Wenzhou City and in each of Wenzhou's counties and some prefectures (Wenzhoushi Feiwuzhi Wenhua Yichan Baohu Zhongxin 2009). The irony of these efforts in Wenzhou was palpable for me. Throughout the 1990s, local officials actively discouraged or prohibited local temples and lineages from launching public rituals; now they were competing with each other to nominate local rituals and festivals for inclusion as an Intangible Cultural Heritage! Whereas in the 1990s local officials were embarrassed, telling me not to pay attention to "old things" (舊東西), now they were talking about "salvage projects" (搶救工程)[3] to save Chinese indigenous traditions that they had had a hand in endangering. In nineteenth-century North America, Western colonial authorities and Christian missionaries decimated Native American cultures, and then "salvage anthropology" emerged to save the pieces and put them in museums. Similarly, after a century of officially supported cultural and religious destruction, local officials in Wenzhou finally awakened to the fact that some of this traditional culture had value and was rapidly disappearing.

Although Intangible Cultural Heritage designations are formulated from a secular point of view, they have allowed religious practices to hide under certain categories of ICH. For example, Ning Village's religious procession honoring a Ming dynasty military general–turned–god, Tang He, was classified under the category "Folk Belief Customs" (民間信俗). Legends of gods, ancestors, and Daoist immortals can also fall under the category of "folk literature." Religious rituals, operas, and deity processions can be categorized as "folk music." Back in 1993, I was not allowed to witness the Yingqiao Wang lineage's ancestor sacrifice, but now the ancestor rites of two influential lineages in Wenzhou history, the Zhang Lineage and the Yingqiao Wang Lineage of Longwan District, have been recognized as ICH. However, in the rush to get their rituals accepted as ICH, communities unwittingly enter into a new state secularization project, which continues to render religious discourse less audible.

FIELDWORK STRUGGLES: DIFFICULTIES AND INSPIRATIONS

Due to my teaching responsibilities and the difficulties of getting long-term visas, I made repeated visits during summer vacations, sabbaticals, or funded research leaves. Each visit lasted anywhere from two weeks to two months, and I made a total of thirteen trips to Wenzhou in 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, and 2016. Added together, the total

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amount of time that I spent in Wenzhou was forty-two weeks, or ten and a half months of fieldwork. What I sacrificed in terms of in-depth, continuous research in one location was perhaps compensated for by my long span of time observing Wenzhou undergoing tremendous changes in social, religious, and economic development, and the many areas within the Wenzhou region that I visited.

In the early 1990s, I conducted fieldwork in an area just east of Wenzhou City, at that time a very rural part of coastal Ouhai County, but now swallowed up by the expanding city of Wenzhou and redesignated as Longwan District. This area includes the newly built Wenzhou Airport, and the townships of Yongchang, Yongzhong, Yongxing, and Shacheng (永昌鎮，永中鎮，永興鎮，沙城鎮), later relabeled "street committees." The local people, however, still often prefer the older pre-Communist administrative name, Yongqiang Prefecture (永强區).

I also interviewed people in nearby Yaoxi, Chashan, Wutian, and Nan Baixiang Townships (瑤溪鎮， 茶山鎮，梧田鎮，南白象鎮).Beginning in the late 1990s, I started conducting fieldwork in Rui'an, Pingyang, and Cangnan Counties. In Rui'an, I visited Rui'an City, Xianyan Township (仙岩鎮), and Guifeng Rural Township (桂峰鄉) in the Southern Yandang Mountains. In Pingyang County, I visited Kunyang Town and Shuitou Town (昆陽鎮，水頭鎮). In Cangnan County, I visited the famous town of Longgang (龍港鎮), as well as Lingxi Town (靈溪鎮), and the townships of Jinxiang (金鄉鎮), Qianku (錢庫鎮), Dayu (大魚鎮), and Bacao (舥艚鎮) on the coast. I also visited Gutian Township (古田鎮) in the mountains of northern Fujian Province, where the most popular goddess in Wenzhou, Mother Chen the Fourteenth, died and ascended to Heaven.

Getting to the Field: Putting One's Foot in the Door

Many scholars know the difficulties of doing fieldwork in China, even for Chinese nationals. There are all sorts of political sensitivities, and one must work hard to reassure a nervous local government and to overcome the local people's guardedness toward strangers. My interest in popular religion made the situation worse, since religion was perceived as a threat to official "ideology" (意識形態) (M. Yang 2013). Instead, local officials wanted to show me the great strides in local economic development, and they were always asking whether I had business contacts in the United States who could invest in Wenzhou's economy.

Not having any relatives or academic contacts in Wenzhou, I was thinking of quitting Wenzhou research when an opportunity dropped into my lap. I was

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invited to help as an interpreter for a delegation of the mayor of Wenzhou, Chen Wenxian (陳文憲), who was visiting Los Angeles in 1992 (Anonymous 1992; Xu Q. 1992). Many Wenzhounese have settled in the New York City and Los Angeles areas, and there are three Wenzhou native-place associations (溫州同鄉會) in Los Angeles. I accompanied the mayor's delegation on their tour of local industries, water-processing plants, Chinese American associations, and Chinese restaurants. We also videotaped a session at the Chinese-language North America Satellite Television Corporation station, where they had a public dialogue on Wenzhou-US trade with March Fong Eu (余江月桂), a Chinese American woman who was then the secretary of state for California. On the basis of my good *guanxi* (關係), or social connection, with the Wenzhou mayor's office, they agreed to arrange two months of fieldwork for me in rural Ouhai County in 1993. That year, one staff person from the mayor's office accompanied me wherever I went. Although I made friends with my "minders," I longed for a more natural and unsupervised fieldwork experience.

Many local people advised me not to reveal my American provenance, and I found that I could easily pass as a scholar or journalist from northern China come down to "collect local customs" (採風). I decided to enter Wenzhou on my own, protected by my Chinese features and near-native fluency in Mandarin. Going incognito would ensure that no one would be responsible for me or my actions or have to face any guilt by association. On the other hand, being a foreign scholar elevated my social status, and some people sought to be seen with me to bolster their own status. One man even posted a photo of himself seated next to me as his profile image on his account with WeChat (微信), the popular and ubiquitous Chinese messaging and social media app started by Tencent in 2011.

I am forever grateful to the generosity of local people who supported my research, spent time talking with me, took me to local temples and ancestor halls, and opened their homes to me. I also stayed in two Buddhist monasteries. Fortunately, the market economy and its profit motive also made staying in small private hotels much easier, as hotel owners did not mind my US passport and wanted my business. I often wandered the streets and back lanes of rural villages and small towns by myself, approaching strangers to interview, which sometimes got me into trouble. Once, construction work on a residential street diverted me into a cul-de-sac of private homes, each with its own vicious guard dog. A hairy experience ensued: I was chased for three blocks by a pack of four snarling dogs.

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Language Difficulties

A major limitation of my fieldwork was the local Wenzhounese language, which was so different from Mandarin Chinese that I was never able to pick it up, as I did with Sichuanese, Shandong, or Jiangxi, languages spoken in my father's hometown. In 1990s rural Wenzhou, most people had little formal schooling, and Mandarin was seldom heard except on television. The language problem meant that I was not able to chat with women above their thirties except through a Mandarin interpreter, which disrupted the flow of conversation. More men could speak Mandarin Chinese: some had learned it while serving in the army, and men tended to have junior high schooling, whereas rural women only went to school one to three years. The language problem also prevented me from eavesdropping on casual conversations around me, a method which had been valuable in my earlier fieldwork in Beijing. This meant that I had to work twice as hard to gather ethnographic information.

In the 1990s, a common strategy for upward social mobility among rural well-to-do families was to donate money to an elementary school in Wenzhou City and pay a teacher to house and raise their child, who was sent there to be educated in Mandarin. In turn, wealthy Wenzhou City families would donate money to a school in Hangzhou or Shanghai so that their child could gain entry to that school. Less educated Wenzhou people had a clear understanding of education's value. As local family enterprises became increasingly connected with supply sources and markets across China and even overseas, husbands and sons ventured out of Wenzhou to do business, while their wives stayed behind to manage the family factory or retail shop at home. Adult women increasingly felt the need to learn Mandarin so that they could communicate with their employees, migrant laborers from China's poorer provinces, and non-Wenzhounese customers. I visited an evening Mandarin class run by Zhennan Village in Yongzhong Township, where the thirty students were mainly women in their thirties and forties. Today the language problem in Wenzhou is less acute, due to higher educational levels in the younger generation and exposure to television. By 2016, a growing proportion of youths in Wenzhou City no longer spoke Wenzhounese.

Police Surveillance and Entanglements

China is still something of a police state; nothing can remain unknown to the local public security forces for long. One Daoist priest told me that after one of my interviews, the police paid him a visit to ask about me and warned

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him not to talk to me anymore. In order to protect him, I had to stop my visits. Similar police warnings were given to others who dealt with me. In 1993, shooting a documentary film with my Sony Hi8 Handycam video camera, I took the precaution of shooting interviews on the rooftops of people's private multistory homes, always with a fast-beating heart (see my film *Public and Private Realms in Wenzhou, China* [M. Yang 1994b]). In 2001, my Sony CCD-VX1 Handycam video camera broke down, so I hired a local videographer to videotape an ancestor sacrificial ritual for me. His sister later told me that "four men in black" came to their studio and asked who I was. She got rid of them by saying that I was their relative from northern China, who was just curious about local customs.

One terrifying night in 2004 at three in the morning, while staying at a cheap private hotel, I was rudely awakened by a loud pounding on my door and a male voice yelling for me to open the door immediately. Confused and frightened, I opened the door in my nightgown. Three policemen burst into the room, ordering me to show my identity card (身份証). Not wishing to reveal my US passport, I told them that I did not have the identity card. Outraged, they yelled, "Of course you have one! Pull it out right now!" Not waiting for me to find it, they started rifling through my suitcase, tossing my clothing around and pulling out my fieldnotes. They found my small business card folder, which contained the cards of local businessmen, officials, and ritual specialists. Flipping through the cards, they abruptly paused when they came to the cards of a former Wenzhou mayor and other top Wenzhou officials. Their facial expressions turned from self-righteous authority to creeping nervousness. Finally, they asked, more subdued now, "Who are you?" I showed them my US passport, explaining that I was an American scholar doing research on local customs. With a great sigh of relief, one of them asked in a gentler voice, "Why didn't you tell us that at the beginning? You would have saved yourself a lot of grief!" Then they told me that they were part of a local "Sweeping Away Yellow" campaign (掃黃運動). "Yellow" is a code name for illicit sexual culture, whether pornography or prostitution. This culture had grown dramatically in the past decade, leading the police to conduct periodic surprise raids of hotels. I suddenly remembered those young women who milled around the hotel: they were prostitutes who did their business inside the hotel! What worried these policemen when they came across my business cards of important Wenzhou officials was the thought that I might be a high-class prostitute who had done "business" with these officials! They were anxious that my powerful connections might get them into hot water for disturbing me. They

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reassured me that, now that they knew I was not a prostitute, they were no longer interested.

Early the following morning, I went downstairs and asked the hotel owner whether he had heard the commotion. He at first pretended not to know what I was talking about but later sheepishly acknowledged that he knew what had transpired:

> We knew the police were going to conduct a raid here. We have a connection [*guanxi*] inside the Public Security Bureau, who gives us early warnings of raids. We warned all the girls not to show their faces here last night. Since we thought you are "as white and pure as the snow," we did not see the need to warn you. We never imagined that the police would think you are a prostitute! Probably because you were the only single woman living here.

The next day another group of police, this time from the Border Protection Office instead of the vice squad, came to ask me to show up at the Public Security Office to answer questions. With great trepidation, I dutifully made my way there. Shaking their heads as they examined my passport, the police told me I was not permitted to conduct research on a tourist visa. After two hours of questioning, they said that they would let me off lightly with a modest fine. However, I still had to go through the unique Chinese police ritual of writing a confession and showing contrition for my mistake. Under their guidance, I composed a written acknowledgment of my wrongdoing, made a formal apology, and promised never to repeat my mistake. Ever since, I have taken care to conduct research only on an "M" business visa, with an invitation letter from a Chinese educational institution.

In September 2014, I arrived in Wenzhou to carry out more fieldwork with an official invitation letter. Just as I was sitting down with my local hosts for lunch, my host received a phone call warning him against allowing me out of Wenzhou City to do fieldwork in the countryside. Evidently, if one flies into Wenzhou City Airport, the authorities immediately know of any foreign national's arrival from the airplane passenger list. After being forced to stay five days in Wenzhou City, I was finally allowed to leave the city, accompanied by two scholars to ensure that I would not get into trouble. Later, I learned that the police I was dealing with was *not* the local Public Security Bureau, but the national Ministry of Security (Guojia Anquan Bu), the equivalent of the FBI and CIA rolled into one. That year, in the wake of the controversial state destruction of the giant Protestant cathedral at Sanjiang in April 2014, they were concerned that I had come to do an exposé of Wenzhou Christian protest and anger (I. Johnson 2014). My past fieldwork in Wenzhou should have

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shown them that my research interests are on Chinese popular religion, not Christianity.

RE-EMBARKING ON INDIGENOUS "LINES OF FLIGHT"

In their unique philosophical exploration of the movements of power across geological, biological, and historical time, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987) write about "arborescent" structures of thought and social system, which organize movements into circular repetitions, always referring back to the center, like the rings in the wood of tree trunks, and tree branches, which are always dependent on the main trunk. A prime example of these circular self-referential signifying regimes are what they call "state apparatuses of capture," which have increasingly taken hold of human life since the invention of archaic states. States have the desire not only to capture and increase territories, but also to put their own stamp and instill their own mode of organizing the captured space. Thus, states continuously *deterritorialize* the spatial organization of tribal societies, clans, and multiple other social and political formations they capture, and *reterritorialize* them into spaces for easier state administration and control. These processes have only intensified in modernity; Foucault (1979) has shown how modern social-scientific and technical knowledges have arranged new compartmentalized spaces of discipline and panoptic control, launching what James C. Scott calls modern "state projects of legibility" (1998: 2–3, 183–184) to increase state knowledge of the population and resources.

Under certain historical conditions, however, certain movements may elude or partially escape state capture. New conditions may introduce a break in the mechanisms that assured the reproduction of the system, thus enabling a significant new movement: "[The] line of flight [is what] the signifying regime cannot tolerate, in other words, an absolute deterritorialization; the regime must block a line of this kind or define it in an entirely negative fashion precisely because it exceeds the degree of deterritorialization of the signifying sign" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 116). No matter how flexible and deterritorializing the modern globalizing state-capitalist complex has become, it still cannot stomach certain kinds of movements. In the age of the powerful discourses of industrial productivism, progress, and nation-state, something as archaic as traditional religiosities, gods, and ancestors exceeds the permitted deterritorialization and must be negated, captured, and tamed.

In the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter, Deleuze and Guattari turn to a major discursive theme in Judeo-Christian civilization, the flight of

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Jewish slaves from the arborescent formation of ancient Egypt in search of the Promised Land. In this ancient "line of flight," the Jews were able to flee and establish a separate alternative community far from the pharaoh's territory. When considering China, we will need to change the Judeo-Christian religious background when examining the resurgence of religiosity in rural and small-town Wenzhou today as a "line of flight."

In ancient China, two Daoist religious movements emerged in the waning years of the Han dynasty (second century CE): the Celestial Masters (天師道) in Sichuan and the Way of Great Peace or Yellow Turbans Rebellion (太平道，黃巾起義) in Shandong. These are the ancient religious "lines of flight" that elude or retreat from the arborescent state order in the Chinese cultural zone. With a sacred written edict from the god Lord Lao delivered to their religious leader Zhang Daoling (張道陵), the Celestial Masters in Sichuan took advantage of the weakening Han imperial state to quietly form an alternative religious community of ritual healing and repentance for sins (Kleeman 2016; Kohn 2009: 86; Wang K. 1999: 16–18). The Yellow Turbans were also propelled by a divine text, the *Scripture of the Great Peace* (太平經), which harked back to an era of "Great Peace" when rulers knew how to govern through "nonaction" (無為), they consulted the common people, and there was social and material equality (Hendrischke 2006; Wang K. 1999: 14–16). However, the Yellow Turbans were more millenarian and overtly rebellious, aiming to overthrow the "blue skies" of the Han dynasty and replace it with their "yellow skies."[4] The Celestial Masters lived on and prospered in medieval Chinese history, especially the Song dynasty, and persisted into modernity as the Daoist Orthodox Unity Sect.[5] The Yellow Turban rebels, however, were exterminated by Han imperial troops. Unlike rebellions or revolutions, most "lines of flight" seek not to overturn the "despotic signifying regime" or arborescent order but merely to open up escape routes that lead to alternative ways of life. This difference between lines of flight and revolutions, and the likelihood of success for the former, are important insights to hold on to, given modern China's own experiences with two revolutions. It would seem that revolutions or rebellions tend to reproduce or strengthen and expand the state. Thus, ironically, lines of flight, in the form of modest shifts such as the repetition of ritual actions in the *longue durée*, seem to have more promise for making a real difference than sudden totalizing transformations like revolutions, as Deleuze suggested in *Difference and Repetition* (1994).

The resurgence of religiosities in Wenzhou after a century of antireligious discourse and state-building represents a nonrevolutionary "line of flight." It avoids confronting and tackling the state head-on; it has no desire

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for rebellion or revolution. It is a line of flight that establishes alternative communities *in situ*, without having to leave the territory, although many Wenzhounese have indeed ventured far and wide across China and the globe. This line of flight *reterritorializes* state administrative space and *recodes* state legal and social codes to form new spaces of communities defined by deity cults, cultivation of religious transcendence, scriptural study, ritual practices, and lineage affiliations.

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